# THE BENEFITS OF COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (C.A.L.L.) TO TERTIARY EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

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**ABSTRACT** There are many methods applied by educators in teaching languages in the world. Some of them believe that traditional classroom method is considered the best, while others prefer to implement new way of teaching, using computers to assist students in learning a language. This new method is known as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). However, not all students who are good in using computers succeed to do self-study. Such students failed to enjoy *Life on the Screen*, it is not about computer, it is about people and the relationships into which they enter with machines and, first of all, with themselves through computer-mediation (Debski ,1997, p. 29). To review and consolidate ideas and conditions that can be the obstacles and drawbacks to the CALL application; Debski and Gruba did a project-oriented computer assisted language learning (PrOCALL) at the University of Melbourne in two second semesters (12 weeks each) over the years 1998 –1999, involving many languages (Chinese, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Russian, and English as Second Language (ESL)). The result of their ProCALL project is that CALL is proven to be beneficial to tertiary education at the University of Melbourne, this success takes place both within the group of students who have both advanced and low computer skill. Australia, for example, starts to insert CALL in the curriculum, although it is limited to year 12 students only. It is a good start. Australia's policy proofs that CALL is beneficial in schools, it means that CALL is not only beneficial for tertiary education at the University of Melbourne, but also in Victoria. This paper will also discuss about crucial matters like integrating this sophisticated technology to suit the curriculum and the importance to attract the interest of big softwares companies to invest money in CALL projects.

**Key words**: CALL, ProCALL, Australia, The University of Melbourne

There are many methods applied by educators in teaching languages in the world. Some of them believe that traditional classroom method is considered the best, which is by face-to-face teaching method and using books as its media, while others prefer to implement new way of teaching, using computers to assist students in learning a language. This new method is known as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). In reality, most of the languages learning activities are done by using traditional classroom method. It is quite surprising that many countries, which can afford to facilitate computers in teaching languages, still tend to apply that traditional language teaching. Why computer, which has already been part of some of the people's daily activities, is not used to assist teachers while teaching languages. This essay will present arguments that CALL method is effective for teaching languages. It is not easy to do this as although there are many project-oriented computer assisted language learning (PrOCALL) has been done globally, reports about the benefit of CALL are not many (Etsuko Toyoda, 2001). Based on a university-wide based survey done by Debski and Gruba, I believe the benefits of Computer Assisted Language Learning (C.A.L.L.) to tertiary education at the University of Melbourne are able to be seen.

Debski and Gruba did a ProCALL project at the University of Melbourne in two second semesters (12 weeks each) over the years 1998–1999, involving many languages (Chinese, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Russian, and English as Second Language (ESL)) and over 250 students with different language levels and 10 teachers from distinct cultural backgrounds. In starting their project, Debski and Gruba in the first session negotiate timetable and assessments with the participant

students, then groups are formed and each group decided a certain topic. Next, from the second session, the students browsed various Web sites that were relevant to their topic, and dealing with other sources outside of the class. In some classes, students had e-mail correspondence and wrote messages on an electronic bulletin. The results gathered within 5 to 6 weeks then enable the students to write their own text, towards the end of the course there is a peer review moment, they exchange feedbacks to each other, the teachers also give their feedbacks. Based on those feedbacks the texts are revised, the final ones are submitted to the teachers at the end of the semester. (Debski & Gruba (1999) in Toyoda, 2001).

In discussing about the benefits of CALL to tertiary education at the University of Melbourne, there will be no discussion about statistical data. I suggest that dealing with the conditions that can support the function of CALL is more valuable. By doing this, how CALL can really play a beneficial role in assisting language learners can become obvious.

The success of CALL in helping language learners is apparently found among students with high computer skill. Technology, computer, can have a valuable impact on learners when broad familiarity with technology is attained (Toyoda, 2001). The reason is that these students are confident in their computer literacy upon meeting a technical problem; they enjoy the challenge of something not immediately functioning and learn the way to make their learning become more efficient. Such students show that they are able to apply learner autonomy, the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Wenden, 1998 in Toyoda, 2001). Therefore, in trying to apply CALL in teaching languages, students'

familiarity with the tool, computer, should be paid more attention.

Not all students who are good in using computers succeed to do self-study, but this is only 2 out of the 9 technologically advanced students. The cause is that they prefer to have direct communication in the classroom, they do not like to be given freedom in class. Such students failed to enjoy *Life on the Screen*, it is not about computer, it is about people and the relationships into which they enter with machines and, first of all, with themselves through computer-mediation (Debski ,1997, p. 29). Students are better to be more independent, they are better to consider teachers in the following point of view. Teachers are not the main source in learning languages, they are viewed as a coordinator, a force maintaining productive levels of motivation in students, facilitating their social contacts and access to resources (e.g. in cyberspace) (Debski ,1997, p. 27).

For students whose computer skill is not adequate, Debski and Gruba also find that CALL is successful in helping students to learn languages. This success is as the result of how students can suppress their negative beliefs in technology-incorporated learning, a fear of failure, by this then they are able to encourage themselves to use the tools. To overcome those negative beliefs, the help of their group partner play a vital role. The students who seemed most successful were those who had good technological skills and could use their skills to help other students (Toyoda, 2001). Therefore it is worthwhile to make technologically less-advanced students become the members of a group which has good insight about computers, this will give a lot of help.

It can be said to be astonishing that students, with low familiarity in dealing with computers, are not all fail to enjoy

the help of CALL in their language learning activities. Only 3 out of the 8 students with low computer literacy are struggling to use CALL. For them, internet searching is time-consuming, they feel exhausted browsing seemingly endless pages (Toyoda, 2001). They need an instructor to guide them in the right direction. They feel that they are pulled much towards technology, instead of studying the language itself. In my view, such fact like this can be avoided, if before people are so confused how to use computer program, by the help of "windows" which is created by Microsoft, it is now become easier to operate the computer. Roland Sussex (1996, p. 2) notes that "it is easy, surrounded by increasingly user-friendly computer-based courseware, to forget the extent to which older and more modest technology has a viable place and role in language learning". This means that the computer software can give step-by-step guidance to the users who are not familiar and still confused with computer. "Today's CALL is about how language learners can establish optimal relationships between themselves and learning resources via computer-supported media in order to pursue real communicative tasks. Computers are becoming increasingly transparent in their use and less obtrusive in their physical presence" (Debski, 1997, p. 29). CALL experts are serious in creating software that can really help language learners to do language learning, these experts can be said are concentrating in helping users with low computer skill. If these groups of users can be really given good care, then problems relating with the use of CALL can be solved partially. Now, I am afraid the obstacles in using CALL can not be said to be totally solved. However, Peter White (1994) identifies that there is an increasing need for software that can facilitate CALL from a variety of

schools: primary and secondary schools, TAFE colleges, universities, and private language schools. And, following the growing usage of computers in educational institutions, the use of products relating with CALL will also increase too. It is clear that some schools pay more attention in implementing CALL in language teaching activities.

Although there is an increasing trend in using CALL and outstanding development of interactive technologies in multimedia, many language instructors still find that it is difficult to integrate such sophisticated technology in their curriculum, the main reason is lack of courseware which is suitable. Many ready-made products are not optimised to satisfy each school in achieving its instructional targets. (Sasaki, 1999). Therefore, more projects in improving CALL softwares are needed. By the growing interest in CALL, more CALL softwares are required by many institutions. The software creators should try to approach big software companies to fulfil the increasing demand of CALL software.

Teaching by using CALL can be interpreted as online tutorial, teaching by browsing websites. Smith & Salam (2000, p. 1) notes "a recent newspaper article in the Melbourne newspaper, The Age (7 Aug. 1999) entitled 'Teaching by the minute', outlined an initiative by the Australian State Government of Victoria to provide online tutorial support for year 12 students in a range of subjects. Victoria's Education Department has entered into an agreement with a private company to set up a website that links students to a range of teachers, each accessible by email, and each ready to provide one-to-one online support for students needing help with their assessment tasks. (The url for this company is http://www.Worldschool.com/).

This, can be as an additional evidence that there is an rising concern given to CALL. In dealing with websites, Sussex (1998b) cited in Sussex (1999) suggests that "teachers approaching Web-enhanced CALL need to be able to see the software from the inside, and this breakdown of learning goals and strategies to handle them provides an insightful bridge to the kinds of issues which apply to non-IT language teaching. They also need to know that the software has been competently designed and delivered. Most Web texts are authentic in the sense of being real language in a real environment, although their usefulness, truthfulness and competence are anything but assured by their occurring on the Web".

In conclusion, from the survey done by Debski and Gruba, computer, in this case CALL is proven to be beneficial to tertiary education at the University of Melbourne. The percentage of the students who are successful outweigh the ones who are failed, this success takes place both within the group of students who have both advanced and low computer skill. Toyoda (2001) suggests that to ensure PrOCALL to be really beneficial to language learners, there are at least three conditions that are necessary to be given more consideration. First, technology should be readily used and really play its role. Second, there should be adequate skill attained by students, some fundamental computer skill is a must to enjoy the high-tech atmosphere. Third, this is considered to be the most important, interaction and good support from classmates. The first requirement has currently been accomplished; many CALL softwares have been launched to the market, however, many teachers are still not happy with those available softwares. Therefore, I suggest that in the future more projects dealing with the creation of CALL softwares should be

conducted. Researchers have to be able to attract the interest of big softwares companies to invest money in CALL projects. Australia, for example, starts to insert CALL in the curriculum, although it is limited to year 12 students only. It is a good start. Australia's policy proofs that CALL is beneficial in schools, it means that CALL is not only beneficial for tertiary education at the University of Melbourne, but also in Victoria

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