Does Familiarization with CALL[1] Improve Students´Attitudes towards CALL?

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ABSTRACT: This paper reports a survey of the attitudes of a group of University students towards using computers to study English. The focus of this research is to determine whether familiarization with computers for language learning can improve students´attitudes towards CALL. In particular, it was found that, after having used computers one semester, the students in this survey showed more positive attitudes towards CALL than students who had never used them before.
Evidence suggests that we should start seriously thinking about the importance of familiarizing our students with computers for language learning from their first learning stages.
Key words: Attitude, motivation, adult learning, human-computer interface, improving classroom teaching, media in education, pedagogical issues.

RESUMEN: Deberíamos asumir el hecho de que incluso en la era de los ordenadores existen muchos adultos que no están familiarizados con su uso.
Este artículo examina los resultados de un trabajo de campo llevado a cabo en la Universidad de Vigo (España) sobre las actitudes del alumnado hacia el aprendizaje de lenguas asistido por ordenador. El objetivo de esta investigación es determinar si la familiaridad y uso real de los ordenadores para el aprendizaje de una lengua puede mejorar las actitudes del alumnado. Si esto es así, deberíamos empezar a plantearnos la importancia de familiarizar a nuestros alumnos con los ordenadores para el aprendizaje de lenguas desde las primeras etapas de su formación.
Palabras clave: Actitud, motivación, aprendizaje de adultos, mejorar la enseñanza en el aula, tecnología en la educación

1. INTRODUCTION

Even though the field of CALL is relatively new (1960s-1970s), we already have a large body of literature dealing with the motivating aspects of CALL (Ruipérez, 1990; Brett, 1996; Pennington, 1996a,b; Warschauer, 1996a; Warschauer & Healey, 1998; among others), as well as numerous research studies which have analysed students´ attitudes towards CALL (Stevens; 1991; Brett, 1996; Warschauer, 1996b; Gunn & Brussino, 1997; Klassen & Milton, 1999; Kenyon & Malabonga, 2001; Trinder, 2002; Fernández, 2003; among others).

[1] Computer Assisted Language Learning.

In this article we will focus on the attitudes of 50 Spanish Business English (BE) students after having used computers to study English for an entire semester and we will be comparing these results with the ones reported in a field study (Fernández, 2003) on the attitudes of 176 Spanish EFL students who, at the time of the survey (the same survey was used in both studies), had never used computers for language learning before.

Research findings demonstrate that familiarization with computers for language learning does actually improve students´attitudes towards CALL.

2. SUBJECTS

The study surveyed 50 Spanish BE students at the University of Vigo (Spain). At the time of the survey, every student had experienced computer assisted language learning for one hour a week for an entire semester. This was the first time students were learning a language with the help of a computer.

3. THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

To elicit an answer to our main question ("Does Familiarization with CALL Improve Students´Attitudes towards CALL?"), an anonymous survey in Spanish was administered to students. This survey was totally based on the items selected by Daud (1995) to measure teachers´attitudes towards CALL. Basic changes were introduced to adapt it to students (appendix I).

4. PROCEDURE

Students were distributed the survey during class time the day before completing their BE Language Course (one semester). They were allowed 15 minutes to answer it.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Items were answered on a five-point Likert scale, with the high scores (4, 5) representing a positive response (agree, strongly agree) and the low scores (2, 1) representing a negative response (disagree, strongly disagree). The mid-point (3) represented respondents who were undecided. Four questions were reverse coded (5, 8, 17, 18) to minimize the possibility of students giving the answers they believed were expected of them.

The highest rated items, in a hierarchical order, were:

Item number	Item	Score
10	*Using a computer makes language lessons more interesting to the students*	4.36
7	*Computers bring more advantages than disadvantages to language students*	4.22
11	*Language learning is better with the use of computers*	4.2
14	*Students are more active in computer aided language lessons*	4.18
20	*The use of computers helps motivate the students to learn*	4.18

The lowest rated items, in a hierarchical order, were:

Item number	Item	Score
3	*Computers will increase the amount of student-teacher interaction in the classroom*	3.32
15	*Using a computer makes language lessons more interesting to the teachers*	3.56

The results of the field study show that subjects have, in general, a very positive attitude towards the use of computers for language learning, with all items being rated more than 3.

According to Daud´s (1995: 361) analysis parameters, a score above the 75th percentile would indicate a very positive attitude towards CALL. A score between the 50th and the 75th percentile would indicate a marginally positive attitude towards CALL. A score between the 25th and the 50th percentile would indicate a marginally negative attitude towards CALL, and a score that is lower than the 25th percentile would indicate a very negative attitude towads CALL.

The results, given in a hierarchical order, would be as follows:

Very positive attitude (75%-100%)	More or less positive attitude (50%-75%)	More or less negative attitude (25%-50%)	Very negative attitude (0%-25%)
10(94%)	1(74%)	3(44%)	
14(92%)	4(74%)	15(48%)	
7(88%)	6(74%)		
20(88%)	12(72%)		
11(82%)	19(72%)		
17(82%)	2(66%)		
9(78%)	16(66%)		
8(76%)	18(66%)		
21(76%)	5(58%)		
	13(56%)		

After reviewing all data, we can say that, on a five-point Likert scale, the mean motivation score is very high (3,92), significantly higher than the one obtained in Fernández´s study with subjects who had never used computers for language learning before (3.30).

We can also state that individual subject motivation scores are quite similar, ranging from 2.81 to 4.86, and point out that there were only two subjects (subjects 13 and 39) who scored less than 3 (neutral score). If we compare the individual results obtained in this study with those obtained in Fernández´s, we can observe that the range was not so narrow in this last study (from 1.86 to 4.48) and that, in this case, a great number of subjects scored less than three (see Fernández, 2003).

If we compare the results of both studies we can also notice that the highest rated item in this study was item 10 (*Using a computer makes language lessons more interesting to the students*), which was rated 4.36 and which clearly reflects the high motivational power of using computers. However, the highest rated item in Fernández´s study, showing an instrumental motivation, was item 19 (*The skills taught in computer assisted classes are applicable outside the classroom*), which was rated just 3.75.

On the other hand, the lowest rated item in both studies was item 3 (*Computers will increase the amount of student-teacher interaction in the classroom*), rated 3.32 in this study and 2.78 in Fernández´s.

The fact that the lowest rated item in both studies has been the one that deals with the lack of interaction between student and teacher reminds us irremediably of the concept of "dehumanizing teaching". This fact shoul lead us to think more about the importance for the students to feel that the teacher is "there", not as part of the furniture in the classroom, but as a human being they can interact with (see Haddon et al., 1995; Felix, 1996; Trinder, 2002).

If we look at the results calculated according to Daud´s analysis parameters, we can see how in this study we are not able to find any rated item which shows a very negative attitude, as opposed to two rated items which show a very negative attitude in Fernandez´s study. Furthermore, there would be only two rated items which show a more or less negative attitude, as opposed to eleven in Fernández´s study. On the other hand, the rates for nine of the items show a very positive attitude in this study, whereas none of the rates for the items in Fernández´s study do reflect a very positive attitude towards CALL (appendix II).

After comparing the results of both studies it could be said that this study supports other findings that previous contact with computers for language learning do actually improve attitudes towards CALL (Stevens, 1991; Warschauer, 1996b; Gunn & Brussino, 1997).

6. CONCLUSION

All participants in this study had already experimented with computers for language learning before, as opposed to the subjects of the other study we have been referring to in this paper.

The fact that the mean motivation score of the group which had previous experience with computers for language learning was notably higher than the mean motivation score of the group that had not, demonstrates the importance of the actual use of computers for language learning for students to become familiar with them and also to become fully aware

of computers´ motivational power. So we could argue that familiarization with computers for language learning is one of the variables which influence students´attitudes towards CALL.

On the other hand, we should not obviate the importance of the teacher´s presence in the CALL class, but not, as said before, "as part of the furniture of the classroom", but as someone who moves around the class, addressing student needs and allowing students to address him/her.

This field study showed the great potential of familiarization with CALL regarding the attitudinal factor, but it also suggested the importance of human interaction within the CALL class.

7. Implications for further research

This study tried to assess students´attitudes towards CALL. Our intention was to find out what they had actually liked about using computers for language learning and what they had not. Then, we compared the results with those belonging to another study whose subjects had had no experience with computers before. We were able to find out how familiarization with computers for language learning was one of the variables which had an important influence on students´attitudes.

We consider it would be very interesting to research whether other individual or personal characteristics, apart from actual contact with computers for language learning, may affect attitudes towards CALL and in which way.

Appendix I

The following table is totally based on Daud´s items selected to measure teachers´attitudes towards CALL (Daud, 1995), but adapted to students.

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1. In the classroom computers are as important to language students as textbooks.
2. A computer training programme should be compulsory for every language student.
3. Computers will increase the amount of student-teacher interaction in the classroom.
4. I look forward to a time when computers are more widely used in language learning.
5. Language students can manage without computers, so computers are not really necessary. (*)
6. The use of computers can help improve language students´communication skills
7. Computers bring more advantages than disadvantages to language students
8. Using computers in the language classroom will not improve students´attitudes towards language learning. (*)
9. Learning language with the aid of computers would make learning easier for all the students.
10. Using a computer makes language lessons more interesting to the students.
11. Language learning is better with the use of computers.
12. Computers can enhance students´learning of the four language skills.

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13. Computers will increase the amount of student-student interaction in the class.
14. Students are more active in computer aided language lessons.
15. Using a computer makes language lessons more interesting to the teachers.
16. Computers can be used as a private tutor.
17. Computers have little application to language learning. (*)
18. The use of the computers is unrelated to the needs of the school. (*)
19. The skills taught in computer assisted classes are applicable outside the classroom.
20. The use of computers helps motivate the students to learn
21. Learning language with the aid of computers would make learning easier.

(*) Items for which the scoring was reversed

APPENDIX II

Very positive attitude (75%-100%)	More or less positive attitude (50%-75%)	More or less negative attitude (25%-50%)	Very negative attitude (0%-25%)
	20 (65%)	17 (49%)	3 (20%)
	10 (61%)	21 (47%)	13 (24%)
	19 (60%)	16 (46%)	
	2 (59%)	9 (43%)	
	18 (59%)	5 (41%)	
	12 (56%)	8 (41%)	
	11 (54%)	4 (39%)	
	7 (52%)	6 (39%)	
		1 (38%)	
		14 (37%)	
		15 (27%)	

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