

Challenges to Computer Assisted Language Teaching at University Level

Farhana Yasmin¹

Abstract

The present case study explores the challenges to Computer Assisted Language Teaching in LGU to teach English as a communicative language in the perspective of incompetence of university students' communication skills. The study is an effort to groom university students as global individuals, acknowledging the status of English as a lingua franca. The study fills the gap in ELT studies to incorporate modern technology into language pedagogy to improve CLT in Pakistani universities. The main research question focuses on issues faced by English language teachers while teaching the module Communication skills in BS (Hons) classes without modern technology. The research tools are observations for the students and interviews for the English language teachers of LGU. The findings of research suggest that English language needs to be taught as a living language instead of a bookish language by establishing state of the art English language classrooms or language labs to integrate four skills of English language for an interactive process of teaching and learning. It is recommended to HEC and stakeholders to revise policies to assess students' written and oral skills for qualifying English subject. It may improve university students' communication skills to face the contemporary challenges in the global village.

Keywords: Challenges, CALT, incompetence in English language, four skills of language

Introduction

Being a global language, English is exploited for communication indiscriminately all over the world. It is considered indispensable for a successful survival in the ever changing world. Almost all the fields of life, economic, social, political, technological, pedagogical etc. are greatly influenced by this factor.

Realizing the significance of communicative competence in English language, most of the developed countries of the world have shifted from traditional to modern pedagogical practices by incorporating latest technology. Pakistan as a developing country in South Asia needs to accelerate its pace in all the fields peculiarly in education to be an operational part of global village. An inevitable aspect of this requirement is English language competence of the individuals to manipulate all the resources skilfully. It is evident that implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach in the educational institutes of Pakistan can resolve the problem to improve students' communication skills. The key function of language use is communication and its primary goal for learners is to develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1972, Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Ying, 2010). Hence, it is evident that Communicative Language Teaching Approach can be implemented in educational institutes by incorporating modern technology to meet the challenges of twenty first century in the perspective that English is taught as a core and elective subject at all levels- from pre-school to university.

Significance of the study

The study explores challenges to computer Assisted language Teaching in Lahore Garrison University, Lahore Pakistan to improve students' English communication skills for their success as professionals in their fields. The study is an effort to groom university students as global individuals, acknowledging the status of English as a lingua franca.

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English Language & Literature, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Pakistan
E-mail: farhanayasmin069@gmail.com

Gap in the study

The study is an effort to incorporate modern technology into language pedagogy to improve CLT in Pakistani universities. It may fill the gap regarding Computer-Assisted Language Teaching in the field of ELT in Pakistani educational institutes.

Limitations of the Study

Though present research is a contribution in the field of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in Pakistan, however it has some limitations. The population size is limited, so the findings of the study may not be generalized beyond this institute. It is restricted in nature due to time constraints as well. However, the use of teachers' interviews to explore the issues, students' classroom observations and course content analysis as tools may be the strengths of the study to ensure validity and reliability of the tools.

Research Question

1. What challenges are faced by the language teachers while teaching Communication Skills course to BS (Hons) without technological resources?

Literature Review

Levy (1997) defined Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (p. 1). Computer technology comprising multimedia, tutor, videos, simulations, guided drills and practices, World Wide Web, e-mail, chat etc., is playing a significant role in supporting and promoting the process of teaching and learning. Torat (2000) mentioned that Computers can provide a meaning-focused, communicative learning environment, which serves the purposes of communicative language teaching.

Literature review of the historical developments of CALL over the last forty years reveals significant contributions of technology in the field of education. Computer assisted communication has been introduced since 1960's but it was available to common masses since early 1990's. Warchauer (1996) divided CALL into distinct phases of development i.e. Behavioristic CALL, Communicative CALL, Integrative CALL (Multimedia CD-ROM), and Integrative CALL (Internet). These phases overlap sometimes as "the old is subsumed within the new." Moreover, every phase is employed according to its relevance, without any preferences (Warchauer, 1996).

Torat (2000) categorized CALL in two forms: asynchronous (such as email and forums) and synchronous (such as text and voice chat). A review of pedagogical implications of CALL divides it as: (1) Computer as Drill and Practice, (2) Computer as Tutor (3) Computer as Simulation / Problem Solving, (4) Computer as Game, (5) Computer as Tool for ELT teachers and learners, and (6) Applications of Internet for ELT.

Computers can do some of the work of the teacher and provide great assistance to the learner even without the presence of the teacher (Pennington and Steven, 1992). English Language Teachers may employ CALL software available commercially, however it is better to select the content and adapt it to the learners needs. In this case, the teacher has to become an author, or a teacher-programmer (Levy, 1997). ELT pedagogues may exploit selected content and activities to the students' needs by using authoring software like Author ware (Macromedia) and Toolbook (Asymetrix Corporation). In this perspective, internet has a very significant role to support and promote CAL teaching and learning by offering e-mail, File Transfer Protocol (FTP) and World Wide Web (WWW).

CALL has a significant role in integrating four skills of language to improve learners' communicative competence by developing oral communication skills- listening and speaking in particular whereas written communication skills- reading and writing in general.

Acknowledging the role of modern technology in pedagogy, it is important to incorporate technology in English language teaching intensively. This aspect is termed as 'normalization' by Bax (2003) who perceives it as a stage when a technology is invisible, hardly even recognized as a technology, taken for granted in everyday life. Bax (2003) pointed out some elements to achieve this stage:

CALL will reach this state when computers ... are used every day by language students and teachers as an integral part of every lesson, like a pen or a book. Teachers and students will use them without fear or inhibition, and equally without an exaggerated respect for what they can do.

They will not be the centre of any lesson, but they will play a part in almost all. They will be completely integrated into all other aspects of classroom life, alongside course books, teachers and notepads. They will go almost unnoticed. (p.23)

While comparing pedagogy with technology, Mukhtar, Sahrir and Hassan(2013) emphasized that pedagogy is the key factor for teaching a language whereas technology is only a tool to be used appropriately for the application of concepts. In this regard, he points out two main issues: First issue is related to the appropriate use of technology as a tool; Second issue is concerned with the development of such tools that can better incorporate communicative, student- centred teaching by using new software.

Research Methodology

This research has a Qualitative paradigm and it is a case study with limited scope to study the graduate students at Lahore Garrison University, Lahore Pakistan. The purpose of this research is exploratory as it explores the challenges to Computer Assisted Language Teaching and learning in LGU to teach English as a communicative language to BS (Hons) students. The study has a deductive approach as it attempts to find the answer of the main research question. For this purpose, two qualitative research tools were deployed i.e. observation and interviews for the triangulation of data. BS (Hons) second semester Students' class room observations while taking Communication Skills class were made through purposive sampling, after seeking permission from English language instructors. Another tool, structured interviews of English language instructors, teaching Communication Skills to BS (Hons) second semester were conducted through purposive sampling to elicit responses for the main research question. Moreover, document analysis of the course content of Communication Skills was reviewed to analyze its relevance and worth for improving students' communication skills.

Presently, English language is taught as a core subject at graduate level in 10 departments for first, second and third (fourth semester- optional) semesters in the morning programmes at LGU Lahore. The department of English Language and Literature provides centralized services to maintain uniformity in teaching the relevant syllabi.

Data Analysis

The data was collected through structured interviews of English language instructors, teaching Communication Skills to BS (Hons) second semester and their classroom observations from five departments through random sampling- Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Geography and Mass Communication at Lahore Garrison University Lahore, Pakistan. **Classroom Observations**

Five classroom observations (Appendix 1) have been included in the present case study as a qualitative research tool to substantiate the basic research question. For observation, five classes were selected from the departments of Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Geography and Mass Communication at Lahore Garrison University Lahore, Pakistan. The students were studying HEC approved syllabus for the course Communication Skills in the second semester. The profiles of the students signify that 40% students were males whereas 60 % students were females. Their ages were 18-22 years. The strength in classes varied from 30 to 45 students per class. They were taking three classes per week of one hour duration each.

Observation 1

The first class observation was on Essay Writing. It was conducted at Biology department on 4th April, 2016 for fifty minutes.

As the observation started, the teacher was teaching in "talk and chalk" style to teach essay writing. The teacher defined and explained the essay writing. She elaborated the format and content of essay writing. The available resources were white board and hand outs. There were no AV Aids, multimedia etc. to illustrate the topic. The students were engaged in "pen and paper" style of learning. The teacher asked the students to solve the exercise in the given handouts to identify the parts of an essay within ten minutes. The teacher discussed the answers after the feedback of the students for corrections. The purpose of essay writing was to improve written communication skill of the students. The students were passive and listening to the lecture quietly. They were not interactive in the class. They were giving responses from time to time only when asked some questions or terms by the teacher. It seemed to be a teacher centred classroom with very less opportunity for students to participate actively in the process of learning and practising English as a language.

The course content was suitable for teaching written communication skill as its content and exercises could improve only written expression which is assessed and evaluated for promotion in the term exams. The art of essay writing may assist the students to write articles or compositions on their own. It improves their written expression for success in academic and professional life. Lack of multimedia in the classroom is a challenge as the teacher is unable to expose students to a variety of written expressions for a more effective practice on the topic.

Observation 2

The second observation was based on CV and Job Application writing. It was conducted at Chemistry department on 12th April, 2016 for fifty minutes.

As the observation started, the teacher was teaching CV writing. She defined the term CV as Curriculum Vitae and explained it with examples. She elaborated content and format of CV with different styles. She illustrated the formats on the board. The teacher used white board to explain the concepts with examples. There was no use of multimedia technology to show various formats and styles of CVs to accelerate the process of teaching and learning. However, the hand-outs were provided by the teacher as a resource material to go through the content for understanding and learning it for exams. The teacher asked the students to prepare their CVs on the notebooks as a class activity. The activity was based on writing skill to improve students' written expression.

The students exhibited an average interest level in the topic under discussion. They asked a few questions from the teacher while preparing their CVs to clear the confusions regarding mentioning their respective bio data. The classroom was teacher centred and the teacher was teaching English language in the traditional style without resources. The course content was relevant to improve written expression. It was suitable for the practice of writing skill. The knowledge imparted by the teacher has significance in sociolinguistic context as the students need to write and update their CVs time to time for starting and pursuing their professional career. Lack of technological resources was a hurdle in imparting the practical aspect of the theory.

Observation 3

The third observation was based on Academic Skills- Letter/memo writing, minutes of meetings, use of library and internet. It was conducted at Geography department on 16th May, 2016 for fifty minutes.

It was observed that the teacher was teaching Formal letter writing to the students. The teacher defined and explained formal letter, its format, standard parts, optional parts and content to be written in the body. The teacher provided some hand-outs on the topic as a resource material. She used white board to illustrate the parts of formal letter. The students showed interest in understanding the concepts. They asked a few questions to distinguish between the parts of formal letter. Later on, they wrote a formal letter for practice. Most of the students were keen to learn formal letter writing. They practised letter writing with interest as it is important from examination point of view. The classroom was teacher centred as she was actively imparting knowledge whereas students were comparatively passive. Academic Skills as a course content of Communication Skills was relevant to improve written communication skills only.

Formal letter writing is very important for academic and professional life of the students. The students need to have a command on this element of Academic skills not only for getting good scores in exams but also for its practical utility. Lack of multimedia technology is a great challenge. Without technology, there is least interaction in the class which hampers Communicative Language Teaching Approach. **Observation 4**

The fourth observation was on Study Skills including Skimming and scanning, intensive, extensive, and speed reading, summary and précis writing and comprehension. It was conducted at Physics department on 1st June, 2016 for fifty minutes.

As the observation started, the teacher announced the topic of the day- Comprehension. The teacher asked the students to go through the given text silently within ten to fifteen minutes and underline difficult words. After fifteen minutes, the teacher asked the students to write the answers of the questions. Then the students discussed the answers with the teacher. The teacher discussed the mistakes for corrections. The teacher used whiteboard to write the meanings of difficult words and phrases. The students were provided with the hand outs (text and exercises) to read and write. The text was an excerpt from a foreign edition text to give them an exposure of native English language in written form.

Most of the students were interested to read, discuss and write during the class. They were told by the teacher that an unseen comprehension is a part of the paper so they were keen to learn and practice it. The teacher was guiding and helping the students to learn and improve comprehension skill. There was a positive interaction between the teacher and the students, however the classroom was teacher centred. The course content was relevant to improve written communication skills (reading and writing).

Comprehension skill is a very substantial element as the students are engaged in reading and writing in the academic and professional life extensively. The command on reading and writing skill enables them to comprehend and perform satisfactorily in other subjects as well. Lack of resource material and unavailability of multimedia were challenges faced by the English teacher in the class.

Observation 5

The fifth observation was on Presentation Skills. It was conducted at Mass Communication department on 6th June, 2016 for fifty five minutes. Its objective was personality development of the students by improving their presentation skills so that they are groomed as competent individuals in their fields at national or international level.

As the observation started, the teacher asked the students to take out their hand outs on the topic. She defined and explained presentation skills. She elaborated its types- formal and informal presentation with examples in detail. She divided the students in groups and asked them to select the topics of their choices according to their interests and prepare power point presentation to present in the next week classes. The teacher imparted theoretical knowledge of the topic using hand outs as a resource material. The teacher elaborated the use of AV Aids and multimedia in the presentation skills without any AV Aid or multimedia. The students discussed in groups to select the topic with mutual consent. They preferred to discuss in their mother tongue instead of target language (English) despite teacher's instructions to discuss in English.

Topper students were motivated and they participated in the discussion and preparation wholeheartedly whereas below average students were confused and anxious due to incompetence to speak and deliver in English. The classroom was teacher centred, however its environment was congenial. The students were interacting with the teacher and each other to prepare presentation on the selected topics. The course content was very relevant to improve oral communication skills.

The knowledge and practice gained in the class can be exploited in the academic and real life situations. The university students need to prepare and deliver presentations for all the subjects in English. Learning presentation skills help the students to perform confidently wherever they are required to give presentation. The technology based resources- AV Aids, multimedia etc. are unavailable. They are mandatory to implement Communicative Language Teaching Approach in educational institutes.

Instructors' Interviews

The data was collected from five English language instructors, teaching Communication Skills Course, by structured interviews (Appendix 2). The profiles of the teachers signify that 20 % teachers were males whereas 80 % teachers were females. Their ages were 27- 45 years. The strength in their classes was 30 to 45 students. Their qualification was either MPhil English linguistics or MPhil Literature. Most of them (80%) were experienced. They were teaching 14- 15 classes per week. The interview was conducted at the department of English language and literature LGU, Lahore Pakistan.

The findings of the research emphasize that Communication Skills Module in BS(Hons) improves the students' written communication skills better than their oral communication skills. Very limited resources including white board, multimedia (on demand) are used during the lecture in the class to elaborate the textual content. The teachers require technological resources including Internet connection, laptops and headphones, Mobile phones or tablets, Overhead projector, TV, CD or DVD player, tape player etc. during the lecture in the class to teach communication skills more effectively. The role of modern technology in improving students' communication skills is very crucial as it exposes sociolinguistic context of native language to the students which enhance their understanding of the language and culture to speak it confidently. Computer Assisted Language Teaching and Learning integrates four language skills to improve students' communicative competence. It improves written communication (reading and writing) and oral communication (listening and speaking) simultaneously instead of focussing on the written communication solely for the sake of exams preparation.

The teachers are not aware of computer based teacher tools- [Authoring programs](#) which can be adapted and designed to enhance students' communication skills. English Language programme 'Communication Skills' needs revision and redesigning according to our students' needs by incorporating modern technology based content for practising the language.

The main issues in the implementation of computer assisted language teaching and learning in (LGU) context include irrelevant and out dated syllabus, emphasis on written communication and lack of oral communication based content and unavailability of modern technology. Language teachers can play the role of facilitators, guides and advisors instead of orthodox teachers in Computer Assisted Language Teaching and Learning. Language teachers need refresher courses, trainings, workshops, online courses etc. to update themselves in the rapidly changing world of technology. Trained language teachers have the ability to face the challenges and resolve the issues due to their competence. Language teachers suggested the provision of facilities and resources by the administration to teach the module Communication Skills in the real sense so that students develop communicative competence.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the challenges to Computer Assisted Language Teaching in LGU include lack of Multimedia technology in the classrooms, teachers' training, teachers' hectic schedule, course content based on written communication, students' promotion criteria based on written communication, exam oriented classroom practices, negligence of oral communication in theory and practice and teacher- centred classrooms. It is evident that teaching English as a communicative language needs to be catered with technology to improve the communicative competence of university students. English language needs to be taught as a living language instead of a bookish language by establishing state of the art English language classrooms or language labs to integrate four skills of English language for an interactive process of teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Higher Education Commission and stakeholders are recommended to revise present Education policy so that students' written and oral skills are simultaneously assessed and evaluated for qualifying English subject. The course content needs to be balanced to cater the students' need of communicative competence. It may improve university students' communication skills to face the contemporary challenges in the global village.

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Appendix 1

Classroom Observations

1. Use of any AV-Aids (tape-recorder, multi-media etc.) to give an exposure of native English language in real-life situations to your students
2. Students' involvement in various activities to improve written and oral communication in the classroom
3. Students motivation/ interest level and interaction in classroom
4. Student centred Classroom or Teacher centred Classroom
5. Relevance of Course content of Communication Skills to improve communication skills
6. Application of the knowledge in sociolinguistic context
7. The challenges and hurdles in the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching Approach

Appendix 2

Teacher's Questionnaire for Interview

1. Introduce yourself.
2. What is your qualification?
3. What is your professional experience?
4. What is the strength of your class?
5. Does Communication Skills Module in BS (Hons) improve students' communications skills?
6. What resources are used during the lecture in the class to elaborate the text?
7. Do you require any technological resources during the lecture in the class to teach communication skills more effectively?
8. What is the role of modern technology in improving students' communication skills?
9. Do you think that Computer Assisted Teaching and Learning integrate language skills to improve students' communicative competence?
10. Are you aware of some already available computer based teacher tools to enhance students' communication skills?
11. Do you think that we need to redesign our Language course 'Communication Skills' according to our students' needs
12. What are main issues in the implementation of Computer Assisted Language Teaching and Learning in your (LGU) context?
13. What is the impact of language teachers' roles in Computer Assisted Language Teaching and Learning?
14. How is language teachers' training inevitable to achieve the desired outcome in CALL?
15. Any suggestions to face the challenges and resolve the issues related to Computer Assisted Language Teaching in LGU Lahore Pakistan.

Appendix 3

HEC approved Course Content of Communication Skills BS (Hons)

Objectives: Enable the students to meet their real life communication needs.

Course Contents

- **Paragraph writing**
Practice in writing a good, unified and coherent paragraph
- **Essay writing**
Introduction
- **CV and job application**
- **Translation skills**
Urdu to English
- **Study skills**
Skimming and scanning, intensive and extensive, and speed reading, summary and précis writing and comprehension
- **Academic skills**
Letter/memo writing, minutes of meetings, use of library and internet
- **Presentation skills**
Personality development (emphasis on content, style and pronunciation)
- *Note: documentaries to be shown for discussion and review*

Recommended Books:

a) Grammar

1. Practical English Grammar by A.J. Thomson and A.V. Martinet. Exercises 2.Thirdedition.Oxford University Press 1986.ISBN 0 19 431350 6.

b) Writing

1. Writing. Intermediate by Marie-Christine Boutin, Suzanne Brin and and Francoise Grellet. Oxford Supplementary Skills. Fourth Impression 1993.ISBN 019 435405 7 Pages 45-53 (note taking).

2. Writing. Upper-Intermediate by Rob Nolasco. Oxford Supplementary Skills. Fourth Impression 1992.ISBN 0 19 435406 5 (particularly good for writing memos, introduction to presentations, descriptive and argumentative writing).

c) Reading

1. Reading. Advanced. Brian Tomlinson and Rod Ellis.Oxford Supplementary Skills.Third Impression 1991.ISBN 0 19 453403 0.

2. Reading and Study Skills by John Langan

3. Study Skills by Riachard Yorky.

Scheme of Studies Spring 2016 BS II Communication Skills			
Dept: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Geography and Mass Communication			
Time period	Syllabus Content	crhrs	Events of Week
14-03-2016 to 18 -03-2016	Paragraph Writing-Topic Sentence, Supporting Details, Conclusion, Descriptive Paragraphs	3	Spring Festival
21-03-2016 to 25 -03-2016	Narrative, Argumentative paragraphs	3	Pakistan Resolution Day
28-03-2016 to 01 -04-2016	Essay Writing-Descriptive, Narrative	3	
04-04-2016 to 08 -04-2016	Essay Writing-Argumentative Essays	3	
11-04-2016 to 15 -04-2016	Writing CV, Writing Job Application	3	Quiz
18-04-2016 to 22 -04-2016	Writing a Job Application, Translation-Urdu to English	3	Seminar & Quiz on Iqba Day
25-04-2016 to 29 -04-2016	Translation Urdu to English	3	Mid Term Exam
02-05-2016 to 06 -05-2016	Mid Term Exams		
09-05-2016 to 13 -05-2016	Letter writing-Formal letters	3	
16-05-2016 to 20 -05-2016	Memo Writing, Minutes of meeting, Use of library & Internet resources	3	Quiz
23-05-2016 to 27 -05-2016	Comprehension, PrécisWriting	3	
30-05-2016 to 03 -06-2016	Reading Skills-Skimming, Scanning, Intensive & Extensive reading (practice through selected texts)	3	
06-06-2016 to 10 -06-2016	Presentations skills-Personality development	3	
13-06-2016 to 17 -06-2016	Presentations	3	
20-06-2016 to 24 -06-2016	Exams	3	Final Term Exams
27-06-2016 to 01 -07-2016	Final Term Exam		
Total credit hours for Semester:40			
Designed by			
Ms.FarhanaYasmin			