Chapter 83
Attitudes of Adult EFL Learners Towards Preparing for a Language Test via CALL

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the attitudes of adult language learners towards an Internet-based computer program designed to prepare the users for a language test. The participants were the attendees of a YDS (National Foreign Language Examination offered by the Turkish Council of Higher Education) preparation course which was conducted at a state university in Turkey. Sixty participants contributed to the study. Their attitudes towards Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) were measured via two different instruments: a questionnaire and an interview. The results indicated that lower level learners had significantly better attitudes towards CALL compared to higher level learners. In general, the participants found computers to be more interesting, motivating and encouraging but did not consider the traditional classroom teaching substitutable with CALL. The findings revealed no significant changes pertaining to the participants' attitudes towards CALL after their language learning experience with computers for four months.

INTRODUCTION

Considering the current use of computers and the Internet in education, it is possible to state that Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) activities are irrevocable. In fact, the abundance of computer programs that aim to teach languages indicate that computers can already be considered as indispensable for language learners. Language test preparations are no exceptions and a large number of programs have recently been launched to help learners in their test preparations. The present study is an attempt

to address the issue of using a computer program for the preparation of a language test. The attitudes of adult learners towards CALL have been examined before and after a learning period, which included both traditional classroom learning and individual study with CALL.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Human beings have come to an age when there can be no teaching and learning processes without the assistance of computers (Küçük, 2009). The use of these brilliant devices has brought significant changes and facilities to almost every aspect of life including language learning. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is now used by many people in the field of language teaching. CALL is defined as 'any process in which a learner uses a computer and improves his/her language' (Beatty, 2012; p.7). In the field of CALL, the question of whether computers were viable in language learning and teaching in 1980s changed into the inquiry of why to integrate computers into language classes in 1990s, and recently the general issue in this regard is how to implement them in language teaching (Rahimi & Hosseini, 2011).

The activities employed by the teachers to improve the language skills have tended to utilize the amenities that have been brought by computers and the use of the Internet. Benefits of using computers in language learning include the increase of motivation probably because of having animated objects on the screen, and providing practice activities which incorporate challenges, curiosity and a context (Dörnyei, 2001). Another advantage of CALL is that the students control the pace of their learning by choosing what and how to learn, which makes them feel more competent in their learning (Mutlu & Eröz-Tuga, 2013).

One of the main goals of language teaching is to help learners improve their reading skills. Many EFL students rarely experience a situation where they have to speak English on a daily basis, but they might need to read in English quite often in order to benefit from various pieces of information, most of which is recorded in English (Eskey, 1996). This may be one of the reasons why academic language tests in Turkey mainly focus on reading.

In order to teach reading in a foreign language, conventional methods and techniques have been prevalent so far. In a traditional reading class, during the whole course of the lesson, the teacher is at the forefront and s/he is dominant in all activities including reading the text, explaining the content and unknown words or asking and answering the comprehension questions, which are generally based on printed materials. Incorporating computers in reading instruction may relieve teachers from some of the burden and give the students more opportunities to learn independently (Sung, Chang, & Huang, 2007). On the other hand, students are provided with immediate individual feedback according to their own learning modes since learning with computers allows them to control the pace of their learning.

Reading comprehension has always been an important focus of research within the field of education (Mendi, 2009). Being an important language skill, reading and the processes involved in reading have been commonly explored in both L1 and L2 contexts (Uzunçakmak, 2005). Although there have been a good number of studies devoted to the role of computers in teaching reading, few studies have been conducted on the attitudes of students towards Internet-based computer programs on improving reading comprehension. By examining attitudes towards these programs, greater insights can be obtained into the effectiveness of web-sites that have a claim of improving language proficiency.

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