

What Factors Affect the Integration of Arabic CALL into a Syllabus?

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During this era of ever developing technological advances we need to use the computer in our classrooms so our students benefit from the most up-to-date teaching aids. There are factors encouraging us to use Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in class; our student's positive attitude to the novelty and fun of the new software programs is a major one. That we are encouraging student independence is another. Equally, however, there are factors working against the use of CALL, and these include budget restrictions, the university authority's attitude towards supporting the teacher to use such technology (as in allowing re-training opportunities), the teacher's fear when faced with something new and unknown. This paper looks at the issues surrounding the use of CALL in language teaching and makes some suggestions, which if implemented, would assist the integration of CALL in the classroom.

I. INTRODUCTION

We begin with a description of the various steps needed and the challenges faced when a teacher integrates CALL technology into the classroom. Many factors need to be considered such as the student's needs, the facilities available and the institution authority's attitude towards the incorporation of language software and computers into the teaching environment.

Having reached the stage of actually using CALL in the classroom another set of challenges, arising from the available software, face the teacher. A study was made that highlights these and this will be described.

II. THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY ARE TO

- (i) investigate that factors and the problems which forbid the integration of CALL into class
- (ii) provide solutions which might recover the above factors
- (iii) provide a new Arabic language teaching methodology based on the result.

III. CHALLENGES IN INTEGRATING ARABIC CALL SOFTWARE INTO THE CLASSROOM

1. Authorities

The first step to integrating Arabic CALL in the classroom is to discuss the issue with the relevant authorities, such as the head of the department or the Dean of the faculty. In many institutions there is already adequate provision of computers and Internet access points in the classroom as well as in libraries and other facilities. In the faculty of Medicine in Kuantan there was already a computer lab located in the library which is open even on holidays. A recognition of the importance of computers in learning was already present which eased the process of integrating CALL software into the classroom experience. Without such recognition on the part of the authority, a teacher would face an almost insurmountable obstacle or, at least, a huge challenge.

2. Budget Requirements

Even if authorities have already accepted the importance of computers, they still need to approve an increased budget for the purchase of more computers perhaps, certainly for buying software. There may be other costs involved which might include hiring a technician or buying subscriptions to international journals such as *Computer Assisted Journal, Language Learning and Technology, EJ CALL*. Budget requirements must also anticipate adequate maintenance costs. If money is not made available for repairs and replacements then the work involved in setting up a CALL program will be wasted as computers lie broken and idle.

3. Teacher's Skills

Ahmed (2002b) makes the important point, that can be overlooked, that we are still

only in the early stages of making CALL an integral part of classroom teaching and that not all teachers, especially those who trained before the advent of CALL, are sufficiently computer literate to cope. A teacher needs to be familiar with computers, the available Arabic language software and the problems faced. Many teachers are pioneering the use of this new technology and face challenges alone.

The role of the teacher during this era of rapid technological advance is changing. Teachers may need to be encouraged to implement the new technology in class, which may require re training. A teacher may need to learn the very basics such as how to switch on or off a computer, how to install programs, how to type, save files etc.. Often teachers are left to develop these skills themselves. Equally, the teacher is often left alone to find which software is available and suitable to match his student's needs. He also has to assess whether his choices really meet the needs of the students and whether to continue with the chosen software or not.

If a teacher has met all these challenges to his professional development he then has to motivate and train his students to enable them to gain from the new technology. He has to monitor the student's achievements and advise them as much as he can.

4. Goals and Objectives

Teachers and the relevant authorities should clarify their goals before implementing Arabic CALL into class. Are our goals to enhance our student's language skills in listening, writing, reading and speaking or is the emphasis on other aspects such as Arabic grammar or composition. The teacher needs to consult with the curriculum designers so that a correct balance of all skills is maintained.

5. Students

Students need to be computer literate before they are introduced to CALL. Students at the Faculty of Medicine in Kuantan take an introductory course in computers at a nearby facility before they join. But even after such training we find that some students still are less than confident, and we try to help them and encourage them to use the computers happily and independently. The student's attitudes towards the use of CALL and computers is a significant variable that effects implementation.

6. The Language Computer Lab

The Faculty of Medicine in Kuantan was lucky to have a language lab which is

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open to students to work at any time. If authorities are serious about maximizing the benefits of CALL they should offer such facilities. Once the students are familiar with the software they need to have access to it as often as they like to gain the maximum benefits. CALL software will never replace the teacher entirely but its greatest benefit is in allowing learning and practice outside classroom hours and this should be encouraged and provided for.

7. Arabic CALL Software

There are many technical factors that need considering. It may be that the normal English Windows platform is not suitable or that the 2000 Multilanguage interface is used. We need to have compatibility between the CALL software and our Windows platform. We should test or run the program before presenting it to the students. Krajka (2002) claims " [Arabic] Language software should be evaluated for different points of view in various stages by both teacher and students. There are a number of guidelines to help in the evaluation of software. The present author has found the "Hawaii" criteria plus the "North Carolina" criteria to cover all the essential aspects. (See reference section)

If consultation with curriculum developers and heads of departments was done before the introduction of CALL software then a decision should have already been made as to whether the programs are to be used as core or supplementary material. Such factors affect the choice of program chosen.

In our project we made agreement with a local computer shop to borrow the available Arabic language software. Around five days was required to for a preliminary assessment. Based on this investigation our library bought copies of five programs. A much more extensive evaluation followed over the period of one year, using all five programs in the classroom. Only one of these is focused on in this paper, namely "Learn Arabic". This was selected for several reasons. Firstly, of all five tried this program proved the most helpful to the students and best met their objectives. Secondly, the language level (vocabulary content) of this program was the most suited to the student's level. Thirdly, the grammar content was clear. Lastly, the students were motivated and stimulated by this program as it improved their language performance noticeably.

8. Suitability

Language software programs use multimedia presentation and various fun game

activities to stimulate the students and motivate them. Not all the activities were suitable for the students. The existing programs are developed by commercial companies with a "general public" market in mind. Because of this the designers of Arabic language software have not always had the use in classrooms of Muslim students in mind. In choosing appropriate software the teacher may have to consider the age and sex of his students and whether the content is both suitable and respectful of the student's religion. Some of the commercially produced software seem to have been developed from a general language base and then translated into specific languages. These showed many insensitive attitudes towards Arabic culture.

9. Technician

We may need a technician to assist in the smooth running of a CALL project. The technical aspects of computer maintenance and repair are normally incompatible with a busy teaching schedule. Another important reason for employing a technician is to assist students in the computer lab when the teacher is otherwise engaged. In our project the technician was an essential element in the success of the project.

IV. THE STUDY:

1. Why the Integration of CAL?

The present researcher selected this Arabic site as a supplementary tool, which he feels that are suitable for the students need. The researcher feels this Arabic language site may fill a gap in the teaching / learning experiences and it would fit into Arabic language curriculum (Lee ,2001)

To integrate the Arabic language software into Arabic language class. Many factors have to be considered such as:

- (i) Similarity: there is similarity of the contents of both Arabic language software as well as the Arabic language subject (the book). The content of the software and book emphasizes the language skills as well as vocabulary and phrases.
- (ii) Accuracy, the information is very clear in both as well as understandable.
- (iii) Graded steps: in both the units are designed to be studied in sequence from the easiest to the most difficult ones.

Standard Arabic: both of them use standard Arabic language, there is no dialect being used.

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2. Participants

The study group for the research was taken from the student body at the Faculty of Medicine at the International Islamic University Malaysia in Kuantan, Pahang. All the 2nd year students were from the LQ 2020 level. This level was chosen as the most appropriate, based on the researcher's previous experience of using CD ROMs in the classroom and on the basis of feedback received from the former students.

This student group were all of the same age and level of ability and come from similar backgrounds. Most importantly they had the same background knowledge of Arabic.

There were 20 students at LQ 2020 when this study was conducted. The group was not the entire population of 1st year students. Some local students were exempted from Arabic language studies because they had studied Arabic at Islamic schools in Malaysia. Others excluded were Arabs or those who had formerly studied in Arabic speaking countries. All the subject students were beginners in Arabic and most of them had not studied Arabic before joining IIUM.

The study was conducted during the regular class hours for teaching Arabic. The CD ROMs were used in addition to other classrooms activities. The evaluation of the CDs from the student's point of view was based on qualitative data collection procedures, which involved the use of a questionnaire .

V. DATA COLLECTION

The researcher used a pre-test/post test assessment, a questionnaire and direct observation to collect the data for this study.

1. Using Power Point:

From the using the postcard the researcher learns that students are very keen for picture, then the researcher design 40 slides. These slides are designed as integration of additional Arabic material into Arabic class.

The Integration of slides and the Arabic subject

The researcher downloaded from the web site beautiful and attractive picture.

Then he wrote the title of the picture along the sides with few questions. The researcher carefully designed these slide in order to help his students.

1) In the Class:

The researcher showed the students the slides which starts with the world (globe).He used the red pointer and asked the students about the location of the countries , definitely started with Malaysia followed by its neighbors. The researcher emphasized on Arab countries as the culture of Arabic language.

2) Model of the Slides

Again the researcher chooses one picture and "Animal Zoo" and spoke about it with the assistance of the students. This is to guide students in their future communication and talking.

3) Large students group

The researcher divided students into six groups, each group of three students and asked them again to talk with each other about the slide and in this step he asked them to point out the singular and plural and verb. The researcher encouraged the students to ask about any new word. The students did so. The researcher wrote down the new word with the singular/ plural. The researcher laid emphasis in using the new word in a new context.

4) Small Students group

In this step the each group comprised of two students. There are nine groups each group member are two students. The researcher comes with different activities such as fill the gap/ name the name of the part of the bird. Students talk together and communicate.

5) One student:

At the end of the day in order to encourage the students the researcher gave each student to come with beautiful picture and talk about it and the students asked him many question and he intend of to get the answer.

2. The Interview:

The interview has taken place after using the postcard and power point and Internet. In order to know students opinions four questions have been design as below:

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Q1 - Power point based teaching of Arabic is very useful

| The usefulness of Teaching base on Power point | No of stu | Per |
|--|-----------|------|
| Strongly agree | 18 | 90% |
| agree | 02 | 10% |
| Strongly disagree | - | |
| disagree | - | |
| Total | 20 | 100% |

From the above table we learn that most of the students agreed that the power point is useful for teaching Arabic language and communication and talking.

Q2-- The integration of PowerPoint into class enhances Arabic language learning

| The enhancement of Arabic based on PowerPoint/web | No of stu | Per |
|---|-----------|------|
| Strongly agree | 16 | 80% |
| agree | 02 | 10% |
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 05 |
| disagree | 1 | 05 |
| Total | 20 | 100% |

This table reveals that student feel that the PowerPoint as well as the Web site enhanced their Arabic language skills

VI. FINDINGS

- Students control Arabic CALL computer.
- Student's gains ~~get~~ benefit from using computer in Arabic language
- Many students have good knowledge of computer skills.
- Student's computer skills help them in running the Arabic language software.
- Student's attitudes towards computer will motivate them and enhance their learning.
- Arabic language CALL fit into Arabic syllabus.
- Student's need fulfill by putting more consideration on selecting the Arabic language software.
- Students have appositve attitudes towards the use of Arabic language software.
- Arabic language software compatible with Arabic syllabus.
- Authorities and teacher attitudes towards computer help the students

- All previous factors related to each other, if we miss one of them, the Arabic CALL would be affected negatively.

The Power Point:

- It is an attractive and useful feature .
- It motivate us for talking and communication in Arabic language
- We learn new Arabic vocabulary
- It enhances our Arabic language skills
- We may use it at many times as we need and we can revise.
- Co-operative learning is something great for us, we do not feel isolated

VII. DISCUSSION

The pre-test/post-test dictation exercise provided a way to judge their progress. The questionnaire gave more insight into their personal responses to computer learning.

There are some factors which block learning such as age, attitudes, ability as Nauanan (1999). The ability to adopt and develop a foreign pronunciation has been linked to the extent to which the learner wants to identify with the target culture. Hence motivation plays an important role in learning Arabic (Warschauner 1996) as it does with any foreign language. As the subject students were all Muslims who have a deep identification with Arabic as the language of Islam, motivation is generally high amongst this group. However, as medical students their time commitment is mainly to the subjects for whom they gain credits and even though they might feel a wish to spend more time on Arabic they are de-motivated from doing so as it does not count towards their degree.

Students recognize that computers can help them learn better and more independently and reduce the time for learning Arabic as Newby, Stepich, Lehman and Russell (1996) point out. For teachers the computer has the potential to reduce the time required to design, produce, and reproduce instructional materials. For the student the ability to work when they want is more important.

However, teaching methodologies have to be taken into consideration when we use CALL as Vincent and Hah (1996). As the quality of much software is not of the highest possible standard the teacher needs to monitor and supplement with other classroom work. Materials play an important role in learning. Vincent and Hah (1996) stress that "it is vital the development of CALL materials match students' language learning strategies".

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The role of the teacher is very significant as Krajka (2000) states. It is essential that he/she should be extremely well prepared before the lesson, with every detail planned carefully in advance. The teacher needs to be thoroughly familiar with the software to be used, needs to know the content of any sites that the students are going to view. There are a thousand questions, which need answering BEFORE the lesson begins; how long does it take a program to load and run? Is the language appropriate and how much support does the student need?

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

- Authorities have to have positive attitudes towards the use of Arabic CALL in class.
- Our goals for the implementation of Arabic software should be very clear.
- Authorities should provide sufficient budget for Computer lab as well as the Arabic language software to enable the students to learn successfully.
- Teachers should motivate the students to enable the students to be very close to computer.
- Teachers should know how to select the suitable software for their students, which is compatible with Arabic language syllabus.
- Teachers should have extensive experience with computer, to enable them to deal with Arabic language software and with computer itself effectively.
- Teachers should attend a computer training to develop them, because technology (hardware and software) is advance rapidly.
- Authorities and teacher should design their own Arabic language software, which match their objectives and their student's need.

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APPENDIX

The Interview

Q 1 - Power point based teaching of Arabic is very useful

(A) - strongly agree (B) agree (C) strongly disagree (D) disagree

Q 2- The integration of PowerPoint into class enhance Arabic language learning

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(A) – strongly agree (B) agree (C) strongly disagree (D) disagree

Q 3- Power point based teaching of Arabic motivated students for learning

(A) – strongly agree (B) agree (C) strongly disagree (D) disagree

Q 4- Power point based teaching of Arabic encourages students for learning

(A) – strongly agree (B) agree (C) strongly disagree (D) disagree

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