The Challenges of Teacher-Mediated vs Computer-Mediated ESL Instruction

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Abstract
Technology is changing at an unprecedented rate, and without the proper machinery in place, one stands the risk of being left behind. Previously called computer-assisted language learning, it has been replaced with the familiar terms such as e-learning and the learning management system (LMS). To what extent do ESL teachers need to be involved in technology to accomplish our classroom goals? How can we design a program with instructional materials and activities that make learning goals achievable by individuals with a wide range of speaking abilities? This paper presents the benefits and challenges that face both teacher-assisted language learning (TALL) and technology-assisted language learning (tall). It will demonstrate the effectiveness of teacher-assisted instruction through the use of mind mapping. Mind mapping requires direct conversation patterns for active and meaningful student participation. The role of the teacher is to promote active student engagement – to make class fun, enjoyable and meaningful. E-learning, on the other hand, involves use of network technologies to create, foster, deliver and facilitate learning anytime and anywhere. Several virtual learning environments have been created to deliver partial or full online instruction. The presenter will demonstrate an e-learning technique that has been found to accomplish this goal. Are TALL and tall separate and distinct entities? How do they facilitate exchanges between student-teacher & student-student? How can these modes of instruction be combined to facilitate active and meaningful student participation. Can we meaningfully integrate both modes of instruction to design a truly effective and challenging program for communicative competence?

Keywords: mind mapping, computer-assisted language learning, technology-assisted language learning

Introduction

This paper presents the benefits and challenges that face both teacher-assisted language learning and technology-assisted language learning also called e-learning. It will demonstrate the effectiveness of the use of different types of mind maps as a useful teaching strategy in the teacher-assisted language learning. Contrary to what some believe, mind mapping is not just an alternative teaching tool that can be used when the teacher runs out of teaching strategies. Rather, it requires direct teacher involvement and essential conversation patterns for active and meaningful student participation. The strategy assumes that the role of the teacher is to promote active student engagement by making the class fun, enjoyable and meaningful. E-learning, on the other hand, involves use of network technologies to create, foster, deliver and facilitate learning anytime and anywhere. Several virtual learning environments have been created to deliver partial or full online instruction with students left alone for individual study.

First, the author attempts to summarize the large amount of language learning materials available online. The author then reviews some theories in relation to the different stages of ESL instruction arguing that there are some points in language instruction when students are ready for computer assisted learning and there are some points when teacher presence is irreplaceable. The goal is to avoid the excitement that leads to "indiscriminate" use of technology in instruction. Finally, different types of mind maps are introduced to show the effectiveness of teacher presence to promote effective language learning. The task is not to argue whether computer-assisted classroom is better than teacher- only classroom (Beatty, Ken, 2008) or vice-versa. The presenter will demonstrate how computer assisted learning can help accomplish the goals ESL instruction when used the right way at the right time.

An overview of the existing online materials

Allow me to make an assumption, that we have used technology, or computer to say the least, at one point in our teaching career. The explosion of ESL software and programs in the market, and technology for that matter, seems to have made language teaching "easier". At the same time, on a different ground, however, this has made the choices more difficult and has challenged the teachers' discriminating ability. This section will prove this point. A survey of existing materials and resources reveals that there are three major types of learning support available for ESL learning online. The first group consists of ESL teaching and learning websites. The other group consists of both free and commercial software and programs and applications. The third group consists of packages that come with e-learning communities. These are summarized in Fig. 1 and will be briefly described below.

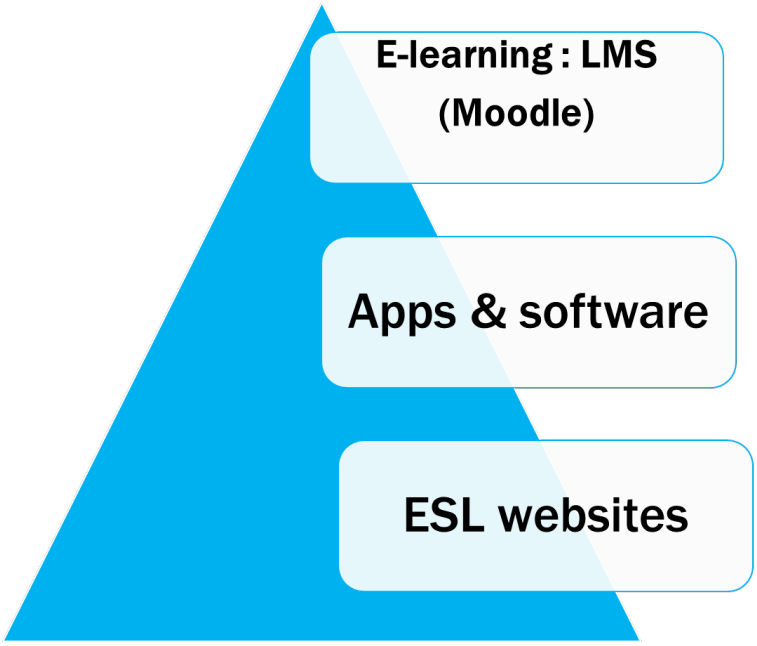

Figure 1: A Summary of technology-supported ESL materials

The first group, and probably the oldest form of online support for ESL learners, comes in the form of ESL websites and online Courses.
The most common and probably one of the oldest existing online support for ESL students are the ESL websites and online courses. One of the oldest and most popular site is the Dave's ESL Café : http://www.eslcafe.com/students/ Several ESL websites have been created in different countries, both free and paid, and have provided easy access for ESL learners. ESL websites are found in almost all countries where English is taught as a second or foreign language. In the UK for instance, the following site has been evaluated as http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/
A survey of the Seven Great ESL websites are found in http://www.i-studentglobal.com/learning-english/7-great-esl-websites-for-english-learners
Some interesting features of ESL websites are: they are free and they include several activities to help improve discrete skills of vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and pronunciation. Li's study (2014) investigated the role of ESL websites as a means to practice the interactive-based language learning in-class instruction. Data collected revealed the students had an overall positive attitude to using the websites. For the teacher, ESL websites are loaded with great teaching materials, fresh and exciting new ESL strategies. On first glance, the availability of ESL websites has made teaching a lot easier. But has it really done so? Are students ready for the tasks demanded of them at the online courses? At what point of ESL instruction can teachers justifiably allow students to explore the contents of the ESL websites? Is there a systematic way to use these as instruments for a more effective learning?

The second largest group of online support comes in the form of software, programs and applications.
Thousands of CALL programs have been published and used based on the behaviorist and constructivist approaches to learning. On the whole, ESL software programs and applications are available in the market for all the four language skills covering different learning levels. For instance, pronunciation software provide exercises from simple voice recognition to production of long sentences. An example of an ESL

Software for beginners can be found in
http://www.toptenreviews.com/software/education/best-learn-english-software/
Drill and practice programs provide greater opportunities for language learners to master content area vocabulary while others have been developed to assist in vocabulary building and spelling. Likewise, grammar exercises come in different forms like basic word formation, grammar multiple choice and sentence construction. Some of these programs are interactive while most are intended for individualized learning and are normally scored automatically. Self-assessment quizzes or analogous devices, normally scored automatically.
ESL applications as well as interactive videos have recently been developed for teachers use. An example is found inhttp://www.fluentu.com/english/

The third form of online support for English learning, and the most recent ones, comes in the form of community-based blogs.
Online learning courses have constantly been re-designed to better supplement class learning and enrich regular classroom activities.
Specifically, ESL learners can access to can make use of the web links to search more information relative with their language courses. Both audio and video materials can be accessed online easily.
They can login the chat room of the platform and conduct group learning. The Moodle is one of the original platforms that made possible the ESL learners to exchange learning
materials and experiences. When the concept of e-learning was popularized, the term Learning Management System (LMS) became a trend wherein educators are given access to create effective learning communities. In the beginning online learning was described as more individual-centered, but with the advent of creative learning communities such as community blogs, ESL students can freely explore the infinite online world to communicate with other learners.

Stages in Scaffolding Language Instruction

The introduction of new technologies and constant and broader adoption of existing ones is a compelling invitation to the realm of the unknown. For teachers, not just researchers, this creates an excitement in the refining of the edges and poses a challenge in defining details that constantly change in relation to existing ones. Does this mean that machines and technology can replace teachers' role in instruction at any time? The answer is NO, or at least definitely NOT YET. Then, at which point of instruction is CALL needed to provide a more effective learning? How is this possible, and why? The complexity of the teacher's job has created the need for support in terms of physical resources and environment very imperative. Likewise, limitation of physical availability of the teacher dictates the need for tools that manage and promote learning. This section reviews the different stages of ESL instruction and examines at what point of language instruction can CALL truly assist the teacher and promote learning, in order to avoid the excitement that leads to "indiscriminate" use of technology in instruction. My task is not to argue whether computer assisted classroom VS teacher only classroom (Beatty, Ken, 2008) but to show that online activities can best be used as supplement to classroom teaching at some stages of ESL instruction.

In a nutshell, the stages of ESL instruction come in five stages: the Readiness stage,

the Input stage, the Collaboration stage, the Transfer stage and the Expansion stage. This is summarized in the Fig 2 below. It is best that teachers are always aware of what students are capable of at the different stages in order to maximize the use of software and technology to promote learning.

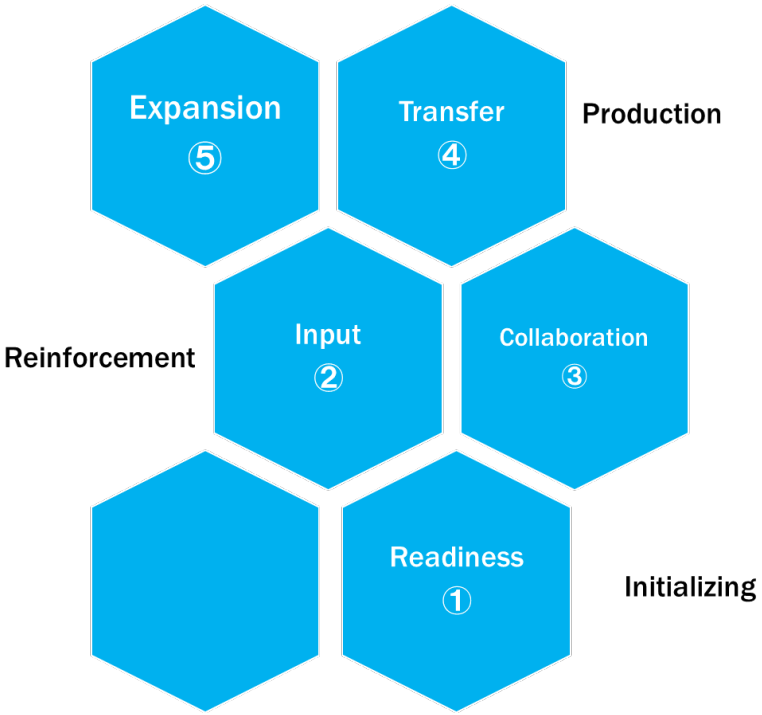

Figure 2: Stages of ESL Instruction

1. The Readiness Stage

Before instruction takes place, readiness for learning has to be established. How much is the brain ready to cope with instruction? What kind of instruction is suitable? Instruction has to be able to gauge the specific level to match delivery of content and teaching approach. At this point, schools determine the specific levels and groups thru evaluation and placement tests. With reading comes motivation, the extent of personal engagement in learning. It is not wise to leave the students to computers and online at this period of language study.

2. The Input Stage

This stage is also called the Presentation stage wherein the teacher builds foundational knowledge and skills. This stage is translated into the everyday tasks called the lesson proper. The teacher is called to deliver content of instruction and divide learning tasks in chunks. It is therefore imperative that the teacher decides specific teaching strategies taking into consideration the following: the students' various learning style, individual differences in terms of language level, motivation, interest, learning needs. Since provision of good models and examples is necessary, the teacher cannot leave the students to work the computers at this

stage. A lot of teacher-student interaction is essential to develop the foundation skills and knowledge desired. Through interaction and repetitive drills and exercises, skills and knowledge are reinforced. Teacher presents language activities in various context in which it takes place. Thus we see diverse contexts of the language such as shopping, transportation, restaurants, hospital, immigration, as well as asking and giving directions. The students can repeat and capable of short utterances, but learning is mostly directed. It is thematically determined and guided by the teacher. Mind mapping plays an important role at this stage of language development. Since the human mind remembers greatly through by forming associations, mind maps provide multiple opportunities for students to remember basic vocabulary and structure. Fig. 3 below is an example of how students can easily remember the months of the year, by associating them with seasons of the year as well. This can also provide basic practice for basic expressions like birthdates. Similarly, students can remember faster the various means of transportation by grouping the items according to land, air and water, as shown in Fig. 4.

Figure 3: Sample of Mind Map (1) for low beginners

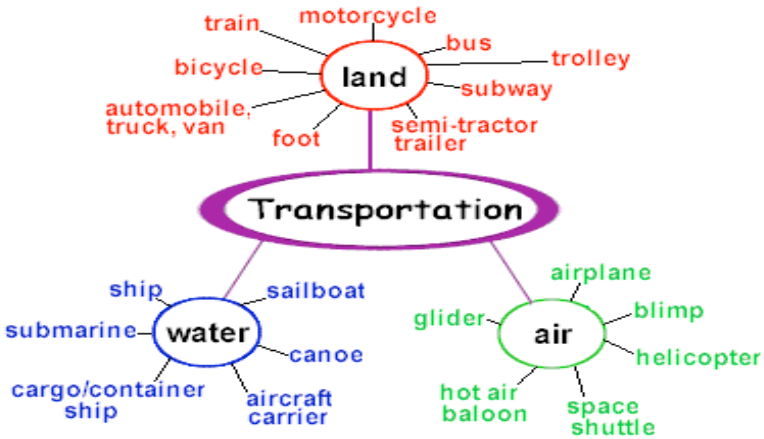

Figure 4: Sample of Mind Map (2) for low beginners

3. The Collaboration Stage

At this stage, students can use language for grammatical competence, word formation, greater spelling competence and sentence construction skills .The end goal is grammatical competence. Since students can use the language as expressions of inner world, the teacher is called to employ instructional tasks that facilitate language interaction. Students are capable of interaction with other students, with teacher, with the computer, and community. By this time, students can be slowly introduced to online communication. Stevens (1992) however differentiated between conversation between learner and peers, conversation between learner and teacher, and conversation and exchanges that take place when learners interact with the computer. The computer, as described by Ellis (1998) does not take active part in discourse, but respond intelligently to learner inquiries. Since students have gained more vocabulary and stronger grammatical awareness, mind maps can be useful in remembering nuisances in grammar and basic idioms of the language. Fig. 5 is an example. More importantly, mind maps can be re-cycled and re-developed to suit the concept and level of students. For example, the teacher can expand mind maps on seasons of the year in order to include more concepts that relate to their experiences, giving much more practice on communication. The mind map showing for months of the year, as in the above, is developed further by challenging students to talk of experiences using language structures learned at this level, as shown in Fig. 6 below.

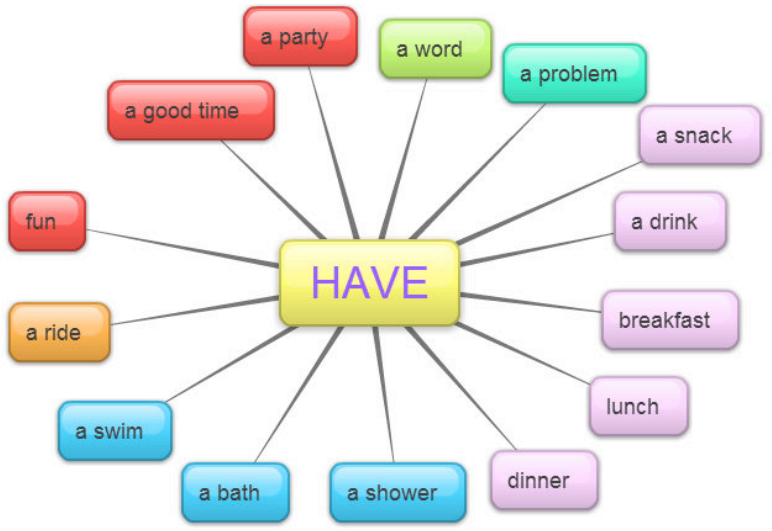

Figure 5: Sample of Mind Map on English Prepositional Idioms for Intermediate Leaners

Figure 6: Sample of Expanded Mind Map on Seasons for Intermediate Learners

4. The Transfer Stage

From grammatical competence, the students move on to sociolinguistic competence as the end goal of learning at this stage. Activities require students not just basic understanding of tasks, but an ability to apply meaning of utterances as well. To the extent that they have developed linguistic competence, students can, and are expected to, start and keep conversations going. Instruction needs to give practice in the various language skills such as descriptive, narrative, and other forms of speech acts. To be able to engage in negotiation of meaning (next stage), students need discourse that provide opportunities for input and encourages output. (Ellis, 1998)

At this stage, the goal of learning is language production. As such, activities that give opportunities to use language to collaborate with a community are necessary. Three types of collaboration are found to be most effective: collaboration with other students, collaboration with the teacher, and collaboration with a community. These three types are different but they present opportunities for negotiation of meaning and second language acquisition as a result of scaffolded instruction. Therefore, this is the best time to introduce the student blogs, the community part of moodle, and other more recent packages that support language learning. When students can rightfully be given freedom to explore the internet for their language competence, what remains the task of the teacher? The teachers can never be replaced by technology even in a highly technologically invaded learning environment. As Ellis said “The computer does not converse with the student. It simple responds intelligently.” And mechanically, I would say. The human element in the teacher-student interaction will always be needed. For instance, the best collaboration in the advanced and highly advanced stages of ESL learning can best take place when students collaborate with peers and teachers. To do this, the teacher can use the infinite possibilities of mind mapping at this stage rather than simply providing topics for discussion. Students discuss, compare, and argue on the benefits of city life and country life, the role of women in society, health

benefits of spending time indoors and outdoors, and many others. We see an example in Fig 7 below.

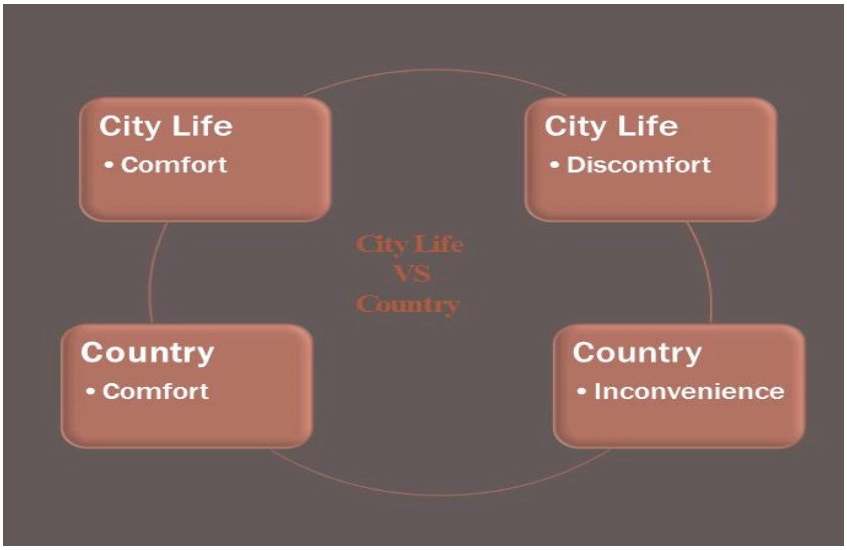

Figure 7: A Mind Map for Discussion: High Intermediate Learners

5. The Assimilation & Application Stage

At this stage, students can manipulate situations to create a wide range of meanings. They are not only ready to engage in a series and a variety of exchanges. Likewise, with language competence comes critical thinking. Language comes with thought. Students have become comfortable in thinking and producing the language. The end goal of collaboration with other learners, with the teacher, and with the community at large is beyond simple grammatical practice. The goal of communication is negotiation of meaning. Technology can now occupy a larger part in language learning. Students can move beyond the confines of teacher-made exercises and explore the online community. The end goal of instruction is discourse competence, giving students freedom to explore the language.

Summary and Conclusions

The debate on the issues of technology use in the ESL classroom continues. On one side are those who argue that technology provides all the answers to the questions. It seems pretty attractive and easy to jump into the bandwagon and let technology do the teaching. That makes teaching “easier”. On the other side of the debate are those who emphasize the importance of traditional teachers. They are often criticized as not able to notice how unrealistic it is to provide high-quality teachers at scale in the “current monolithic model of classroom-based instruction”. They are also accused of overlooking “the breadth and complexity of the job of good teaching” makes it nearly impossible for most teachers to do all of the critical aspects of their job exceptionally well. “Technology will not improve our education system if we marginalize or eliminate teachers. Likewise, our education system will not meet modern needs at scale until we innovate beyond the factory-model classroom. Innovation may lead us to classroom setups and teacher roles

> that look very different from today, but a human element will always be an essential part of the equation. By framing the debate as technology vs. teachers, we create a false dichotomy. Instead, our conversations should focus on finding ways to let technology do what it does best so that we can leverage teachers to do what they do best."
>
> Technology adds another dimension to classroom. New educational technologies have the ability to energize students and educators alike, but newfound access and capability mean nothing without an engaged leader who can pull these tools together in a practical and meaningful way. That means the role of the teacher remains ever-important in the high technology learning environment. But there is one key difference. Perhaps in this new environment, the teacher's role is becoming less traditional – shifting from that of "orator," or the sole source for information, to more of a "facilitator/ mediator."

Research on the use of technology has been decades now, but is still comparatively young. It still suffers from fragmentation and firm documentation. Furthermore, research on CALL is associated more with several other areas, rather than ESL theories. For instance, the relation between computer use in the classroom and learner autonomy, and computer learning and cooperative learning are some of the areas of interest in the field. "Many researchers have pursued individual agendas that are often tied to soon-obsolescent software." (Beatty, 2003). Language teachers are CALL consumers, and as CALL consumers, we are obliged to follow an enlightened path: integration of ESL instruction and CALL. Technology and computer are meant to supplement face-to-face language instruction, not replace it.

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