CALL ADVANTAGES

The foremost advantage of Computer Assisted Language Learning is that it facilitates the process of developing the above mentioned skills. Students like to use it and feel motivated. Research on the relationship between CALL and student attitudes has been made and the results show that Computer Assisted Language Learning is something worth trying.

Questionnaire results typically indicate favourable attitudes towards CALL as well.
The same was of my students. The first time they entered the computer lab, they were a little confused; not all of them had previous contact with computers before. But as soon as the ice was broken, they couldn't wait the next lesson with computers. Asked "Why?", they gave diverse explanations, but the most typical one was: "It is extremely interesting and it makes me like English as I learn and have a good time simultaneously."

The next reason why computers should be used in teaching writing and reading is that the computer as instructor has several useful qualities. These include:

- patience
- accessibility
- individualized attention (each individual student works directly with the computer at his or her own pace).
- interactivity (students can control the path of material)

Other CALL advantages in testing and teaching those skills are:

- answer judging (computer can judge a student's input and either mark it up or give specific diagnostics on its accuracy)
- timing (The computer is capable of presenting textual and graphic material as a function of time. The display rate of text may be varied on CALL and also the text may be "paused" and revealed in segments. This feature is not available in traditional texts.)
- authoring (authoring facilities are invaluable in customizing learning materials)
As for advantages influencing teachers, I would like to quote C. Davidson and A. Tomic:

"A lab can invigorate teaching practices, inspire creative assignment development and even bring inveterate computer-resisters into the community of enlightened practitioners of the new technology."

CALL DISADVANTAGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Opponents of using computers in teaching languages present different reasons for their stand. Some of them are:

1. no "free expression" (CALL answer judging presently can handle a word, a phrase and a sentence, but very long and very complex sentences, especially if they are "free form", are impossible to judge given the present limitations of hardware and software)

2. high implementation costs (CALL requires that several computers be made available)

3. perceiving most of the available material as being "trivial question and answer drills"

4. reluctance, technophobia and on a part of teachers a fear of loosing face by having less technological expertise than students

How to respond to the criticism? Short answers to the particular charges mentioned above are:

1. The choice of CALL activities and their procedure depend on the teacher, so if students are writing "free forms" impossible to be checked by
the computer, the teacher may find alternative ways of evaluating their writing, ie. peer correction.

2. Implementation costs are very high, however, "there are benefits to having two or three students use a computer together; they tend to teach and help each other."

3. Nowadays there is a variety of educational software and it allows the teacher to choose the most suitable program. Besides, the authoring programs enable teachers to prepare their own exercises.

4. Some teachers' negative attitudes are often the result of negligence, not of having a bias. The issue of technophobia is also quite problematic. One way out is to find a student who is interested in computers and make him/her a student computer expert. "Instructors who are willing to relinquish control to the extent of working closely with a student computer expert can use the machines as a teaching tool without having to be technological experts or even fluent on them. . . . The computer has to be recognized as a teaching tool rather than a technological threat."