This article explores the current state of CALL in EFL instruction at four government-funded universities in Saudi Arabia. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 91 EFL faculty members and departmental chairmen at the four universities, and from interviews with 13 EFL faculty members who agreed to be interviewed for this study. Purposeful sampling techniques were also used to select three participants for the case studies: one assistant professor and two instructors who were clearly using CALL for EFL instruction more than their colleagues. Obtained data were used to address the primary research question: What is the current state of Computer Assisted Language Learning in EFL instruction at four government-funded Saudi universities? Supplemental data was collected via interviews with departmental chairmen, a dean, CALL coordinators, and campus computing directors, and from an analysis of CALL-related documents. The general research question was addressed by researching the following areas:

1. Access to computer resources.
2. CALL practices.
3. The impact of social factors on CALL usage.

**Findings on Instructional Equipment Access**

From my observations of computer and language laboratory activities and interviews with departmental chairmen, I learned that much of the instructional equipment still in use at the four universities (e.g., language lab stations, VCRs, audiotape players, slide projectors, and printers) is old and obsolete. With few exceptions, EFL faculty at the four universities do not have access to such modern
equipment as desktop video cameras, audio/video editing facilities, scanners, video projectors, computer LCD panels, and DVD players).

The quality of language and computer labs among the four universities varied widely. KFUPM faculty and students have access to three CALL labs located in a nearby building. KSU EFL faculty in that school’s College of Language and Translation (CLT) have access to a computer lab in their own building, but the English department in the KSU College of Arts (COA) does not. At the time of my research visit, the EFL departments at IMIU and KKU were in the process of installing new computer laboratories. Until the IMIU facility is completed, EFL faculty at that school must use a lab managed by the university’s Computer Science Department in a separate building.

**Findings On Computer Access at Home and Work**

The data compiled from the 91 completed questionnaires show that a) 80% of the respondents had access to at least one computer at home; b) only 33% had access to a computer in their departments; c) the computers at their universities are at least one generation behind their home computers; d) KFUPM EFL faculty had greater access to university computing facilities than EFL faculty at the other three universities; e) KFUPM faculty had greater access to departmental computers than EFL faculty at the other three institutions; and f) more departmental computers were located in laboratories than in offices or individual classrooms.

**Findings on Instructional and General-purpose Software Access**

According to the collected data: a) 69% of the respondents did not have access to instructional software programs; b) 43% did not have access to general-purpose software programs; c) of the respondents who stated that they had access to instructional software programs, 27.5% said that the programs were of the drill-and-
practice variety, 16.5% mentioned tutorials, 4.4% mentioned multimedia applications, 3.3% mentioned simulation and games, and only 2.2% mentioned that problem solving programs were available for their use in EFL instruction; and d) in the category of general-purpose software programs, 58.3% of the respondents said they had access to word processing programs, 14.3% mentioned record keeping software, 13.2% mentioned graphics/painting/drawing programs, 11.1% identified spreadsheet programs, and 6.6% had access to database software.

Findings on Internet Access at Home and Work

According to the compiled data: a) 52% of the respondents had access to the Internet through their home computers; b) only 19.1% had access to the Internet through departmental computers; c) three of the four universities were connected to the Internet, with KKU being the only exception; and d) the CALL labs at KFUPM were the only ones to have Internet access for students.

Findings On Student Computing Facilities

The two primary findings in this area were: a) 58.2% of the respondents stated that no on-campus computing facilities are available for EFL student use after class; and b) word processing centers were ranked first in terms of computing facilities made available for after-class student use (mentioned by 27.5% of the respondents), followed by language labs (9.9%) and centers for Internet and e-mail access (7.7%).

Findings On Technical Support

The data collected on this topic indicate that a) 46.2% of the respondents did not receive technical support from their universities or departments on the use of CALL in EFL instruction, 23.1% said they received moderate support, 22% slight support, 5.5% checked “cannot decide,” and 3.3% said they received a high level of
support; and b) KFUPM was the only institution to give what might be considered sufficient technical support, as reported by 54.5% of that school’s EFL instructors.

Findings on Financial Support

The data compiled from the completed questionnaires show that a) 52.7% of the respondents said they did not receive financial support from universities or departments to use CALL as part of their EFL instruction methods, 14.3% stated that they received slight support, 13.2% said moderate support, 9.9% a high level of support, and 9.9% chose “cannot decide”; and b) 68.2% of the respondents at KFUPM said that they received slight to moderate financial support in the form of extra pay when they developed their own CALL materials.

Findings on Training Support

The compiled data show that a) 45.1% of the respondents did not receive any training in the use of CALL in EFL instruction from their universities or departments, that 25.3% received slight training support, 14.3% received moderate training support, another 14.3% chose “cannot decide,” and only 1.1% stated that they received a high level of training support in this area; and b) 95.4% of the respondents described themselves as self-taught in terms of computer skills, and 45.3% received support from their colleagues and shared their knowledge with other colleagues.

Findings on Current Level of CALL Experience

According to the data collected via the survey questionnaire, a) 50.5% of the respondents indicated that they had no CALL experience at all, 23.1% five years or less, 1.1% ten years, and 5.5% eight to twelve years; b) 71.3% had never taken a course on CALL, and 57.1% had never attended a CALL-related seminar, workshop, or conference; and c) 75.8% had never developed their own CALL materials using authoring programs.
Findings on CALL Practices at the Four Universities

Data obtained from three case studies, questionnaire surveys, and from interviews with EFL faculty members show that a) CALL is not used at all in the English department at KSU/COA or in the English Language and Translation Institute at KKU, with the exception of a few teachers who occasionally assign their students a task requiring the use of a computer; b) at IMIU, word processing programs are used to help students overcome their fear of technology, to teach students how to open, type, and save a document, and to help with peer response class sessions; c) computers at KSU/CLT are used to teach students basic computer literacy skills and to show them the importance of computers and computer applications in the field of translation, but the only application actually used in class is word processing; and d) word processing is used as part of KFUPM’s 001 and 002 Writing in its Preparatory Year Program, as well as to teach OEP students basic computer literacy skills that are reinforced with drill-and-practice and typing tutorial programs on a self-access basis.

Findings on the Impact of Social Factors on the Use of CALL for EFL Instruction

Based on faculty interviews and my observations of how computers were used for EFL instruction at the four universities, the primary finding on this topic is that the cultural, social, and religious attitudes held by faculty, administrators, and students exert a strong influence on how CALL is used. The chief concerns expressed during formal and informal discussions were: a) many CALL programs contain material that is viewed as being “morally offensive” by Saudi students, including discussions of such taboo subjects as drinking alcohol and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, or depictions of women wearing inappropriate clothing such as short-sleeved dresses, swimsuits, etc.; b) the Internet contains a large amount of material that conflicts with Saudi students’ religious and cultural beliefs; c) the fear of foreign
influences taking over local cultural beliefs causes some students to question the use of CALL technology even when its content is considered culturally acceptable; and d) professional competition among faculty members based on their cultural and social backgrounds can negatively impact the use of CALL for EFL instruction.

Conclusion

The central conclusion of this study is that the use of computer resources by EFL faculty at the four government-funded universities in Saudi Arabia is both minimal and superficial. Apart from the use of drill-and-practice software programs at KFUPM, few teachers at any of the four institutions use CALL to teach English. The computing and networking facilities that are currently available at the four universities are insufficient for supporting state-of-the-art CALL software; including communicative and integrative CALL programs.

While I was very disappointed by the low level of CALL utilization that I observed, I nevertheless gained great insight to the overt and covert socio-cultural factors contributing to the current CALL situation in Saudi Arabia, especially at government-funded universities. It is my hope that the information in this dissertation will help university administrators in their attempts to make improvements in this area.
References


