CHAPTER V:

INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

To shed light on how CALL is being employed and practiced in EFL instruction, a description of cases studied precedes the discussion of results.

Each case is presented in five parts: 1) a description of each teacher’s use of computers both personally and academically, 2) a description of each teacher’s context and computer lab environment, 3) Advantages/Disadvantages of CALL as perceived by each faculty member, 4) a description of each teacher’s beliefs about CALL teaching and learning, and 5) a description of issues limiting CALL use in EFL instruction based on observation and as conceptualized by each teacher.

Purposeful sampling was employed to select three participants, an assistant professor and two full-time lecturers, who were using computers in teaching English during the first semester of the Saudi school calendar corresponding to the US School calendar of Fall, 2000. All teachers’ names are pseudonyms. These three participants were selected from three of the four participating universities. KKU was not included in the case for it was difficult to find a faculty member who was using CALL on a regular basis during the time of the study.
Context of the Case Studies

ESL at IMSIU

IMSIU is a medium Islamic university located in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. The university is devoted to Arabic and Islamic studies and awards undergraduate and graduate degrees in these fields. The College of Arabic language houses the Department of Languages and Translation. The program was given this name as there were plans to offer programs in languages other than English. At the present time, the only available program is one that leads to a B. A. in English. According to Al-Zahrani (1998) students are required to complete a total of 195 credit hours in eight-level/semesters. Of these credit hours, 145 credit hours are in language skills, English literature, and translation and 50 elective hours are Arabic and Islamic studies.
The case study subject at IMSIU, Professor Mohammed, taught ESSY Writing level 6. This writing course is the only language skill that students take from levels 1-8. Professor Mohammed believes in a process approach to EFL writing. Hence, he used word processing in teaching writing to help students with the editing/revision process.

EFL at KFUPM

KFUPM is a mid-size university in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Because English is the medium of instruction at KFUPM, new students begin with the Preparatory Year Program (PYP). This one-year program prepares students for studies in the freshman and later years at KFUPM. The program includes an Orientation English Program (OEP), which is responsible for preparing students to develop the English proficiency necessary for entering undergraduate studies at the university. There are several aims for the PYP, as stated in the program document:

The first aim is to make the students better at English, so that they will be able to understand the lectures, books, and other reading materials when they go to the freshman year. Secondly, the PYP reviews and adds to the students’ knowledge of math, and introduces them to math lessons in English.
Thirdly, students learn useful new subjects, like graphics and workshop skills and fourthly, physical education (P.E.) lessons improve the students’ health and fitness. Finally, the PYP teaches the students about the importance for university study of attending classes regularly and punctually (i.e. at the correct time), of paying attention in class and of studying hard outside of classes. Students must pass each 001 course (by getting a C grade or better) before they can go on to the next PYP course. At the end of the Preparatory Year students can go on to the freshmen year if they have a GPA of 2.00 or more... or if they have passed all the PYP courses.

The EFL instructor I observed, Aftab, taught 011 and 002 writing courses. Aftab used to teach word-processing lessons for each section of his two writing classes. Aftab’s main goal when using computers was to motivate his students and reinforce what had been learned in the classroom. He used the CALL lab as a means for motivating students and as a break from the regular classroom. He also took his students regularly to practice and reinforce materials studied in the regular classroom. Students, at the two sections had to take a word-processing exam near the end of each semester. The Word-processing exam was worth only 2% of the final grade.
EFL at KSU/CLT

The main campus in Riyadh has the College of Language and Translation (CLT), which consists of four major departments. One of these departments is European Languages and Translation, which offers instruction in English and some other European languages. English is taught for academic purposes in this department and the objective of EFL instruction is mainly for reading comprehension and writing. The department offers three intensive English courses for students enrolled in the colleges of medicine, pharmacy, and science where students learn how to read and write medical and laboratory reports as well as other ESP courses. Some reports are written in Arabic and have to be translated and reported to the professor in English. The department also teaches university and colleges English requirements such as Eng. 101, Eng. 102, Eng. 103, and Eng. 104.

The EFL instructor I observed, Salem, taught an undergraduate course called “computer application to translation”. Salem was a strong believer of CALL use in EFL instruction. In his class he introduced his students to computer literacy but emphasized computer application in the field of translation.

To further his goals, Salem used different CALL programs as well as some translation programs including Word processors with thesaurus systems. Students had
translation quizzes where they had to apply what was learned in the theoretical part of the course. For instance, they had to translate passages into English, and then submit them on diskettes for grading.

Case Study One: Professor Mohammed

Mohammed is a pleasant professor in his late 30’s at the time of his first interview in October of 2000. He speaks excellent English due to English being his major. His interest in teaching English is evident in his manner of speaking thoughtfully about the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). After college graduation, he was granted a full scholarship from the Saudi government to pursue a graduate degree in the field of Applied Linguistics. In 1998, he completed a Ph.D. in English from an American university. Following his graduation, he has been employed as an English professor at a Saudi university in Riyadh and began to apply the skills he had learned from the United States to help his department accomplish its goals.
Personal and Academic Computer Use

Professor Mohammed Started using computers for personal use as far back as 1987 when he first bought his 20 MG Macintosh computer for the purpose of typing his Master’s thesis. Later on, he changed to an IBM computer when he found that IBM computer software seemed to be available, accessible, and less expensive in Saudi Arabia. Professor Mohammed now has a computer in his office to serve his administrative and academic purposes. He also has a laptop and desktop computers at home. While his family uses the desktop computer for fun, he heavily uses the laptop to log on to the Internet, for word processing, and to prepare materials for his students.

Even though Professor Mohammed does not have specific software for teaching writing, he takes his writing class to the computer lab once a week. His initial goal was to introduce them to the computers in order to break the fear and anxiety they had about computers. He was amazed to find, however, that 13 out of 17 of his students knew how to handle computers:

Thinking that my students did not have any idea about computers, I tried to break the barrier of the technology and took my students to the computer lab just to introduce them to the machines, but found out that most of them knew something about
computers. They may range on how much they know about computers but most of them knew exactly how to open a document, type, and save a document. Some of them sent me their assignments via email. I was really happy to see that.

As a result, Professor Mohammed started to ask his students to type their writing assignments. Because students have no access to computers at school after class time, Professor Mohammed stresses typing assignments but does not make it a requirement. Perhaps because they want to appear sophisticated, his students turn in their assignments typed. He also thinks that his students are able to type their assignments because he only asks them to write short assignments (three to four paragraphs maximum). He thinks that lengthy assignments would put students off and make them hate the typing process.

Professor Mohammed says he believes in peer response and in teaching writing as a process. He uses word processing in teaching writing as a way to escape the typical teacher’s authority. Believing in process, he considers peer response as a fundamental part of the editing/revision process. Because students at his school have a tendency to take feedback from teachers rather than peers, it was hard for them at the beginning to understand this way of teaching. It took them quite some
time to understand the difference between responding and evaluating as they were responding to their peers’ writing. In fact, Professor Mohammed was one of the pioneering professors in his department to use this approach and to make it the norm for teaching EFL writing. His class appears very student-centered.

Professor Mohammed distributed a needs analysis questionnaire to all of his students at the beginning of his writing course and found out that none of his students had ever had writing responded to by a peer. In fact, his students said they were usually quite secretive about their writing for they did not want anyone to see their mistakes except for their teachers.

Professor Mohammed in the Computer Lab

The computer lab Professor Mohammed uses had 36 IBM computers with CD ROM capabilities, but with no headphones. There are also 2 laser-jet printers, an LCD projector, and a TV with a large screen. The computers were grouped together along the sides of the room and facing the back of each other in the middle of the room. The computers were on tables at a height standard for users. There were also comfortable chairs, which allowed students to move from one computer to another. All computers were connected to the Internet.

Observation
Professor Mohammed was teaching the sixth level of college writing. There are eight levels for writing instruction. Students should take one level each semester. This is the only language skill that students take for 8 semesters. Despite the time spent, Professor Mohammed says, it remains one of the most challenging courses.

The students were to meet twice a week with Professor Mohammed in a regular classroom, and once a week in the computer lab.

In the computer lab, every student would bring his assignment typed and saved on a diskette and put it up on screen. Then, they would randomly switch computers. Then, they used a feature in Microsoft Word called “Track Changes”. When change tracking is turned on, students are able to use red or black marks to indicate changes they make to their peers’ documents. After the document is reviewed, a student can see the changes made by peers on his document marked with a color. After reviewing his peers’ responses, a student can accept or reject each change. A student can also set Microsoft Word to hide or show the tracked changes on the computer screen or in the printed document. They also can make annotations on the screen instead of changing the document text. Professor Mohammed usually asks his students to show tracked changes both on screen and on the print out so that each
student has two versions of the document. At the end of a session, each student is to print out both documents so they can further discuss them in the regular classroom session.

At the time of my study, Professor Mohammed asserted that this was his first semester to use computers for teaching EFL writing. Taking students to the computer lab was not part of the course syllabus, but having read how rewarding this experience could be, Professor Mohammed took the initiative to be the first professor in his department to use computers for teaching EFL writing. Had this experience not worked, both students and administrators would likely have blamed him. Fortunately, it turned out to be a successful experience as many of his students liked to use the computers and felt motivated to write on them.

As for the Internet, though Professor Mohammed did not use it in his writing class this semester, he does make use of the Internet to collect materials for his students. He mentioned that he prints out idioms from the Internet and gives them to his students on a daily basis. He brings an idiom of the day or what he likes to call “treat of the day” and gives it to his students every class. He also brings them jokes with a linguistics focus which they seem to like very much.
Advantages/Disadvantages of CALL

Professor Mohammed felt that all his students got motivated to write and read in English as a result of using electronic editing/revising. Even those who did not have machines at home were encouraged to go to Internet coffee shops to log on to the Internet and to type their class assignments. He also felt that the computers helped them overcome their bad handwriting and spelling mistakes. The students seemed proud of their writing once it was typed and were more willing to share their writing with their peers. Professor Mohammed himself happens to have bad handwriting and feels relieved every time he uses computers for preparing class materials:

Some of my students hate writing because they hate their handwriting. By using computer, students would get rid of this dilemma, which I myself suffered from. I happen to have a bad handwriting and felt good about my writing every time I used computer.

As for disadvantages, students sometimes lose their work before they even save it or print it out. In many instances, some students bring their diskettes to class for peer response with no assignments on them. He thinks that having students print a hard copy of every work written would eliminate much of this problem. Students’ reliance on the computer to correct their spelling mistakes is another problem. Professor Mohammed thinks
that students would not pay attention to their spellings mistakes as long as they know that the computer will automatically correct them. At some point, their spelling mistakes “would be difficult to eradicate” Professor Mohammed said. He also finds it difficult to keep students on task as they sometimes log on to the Internet or check their email accounts while they are supposed to respond to their peers’ writing. Professor Mohammed, however, said that he does not mind that his students deviate from the subject matter as long as they are still reading and writing in English.

Professor Mohammed’s Beliefs about Computer Assisted Language Teaching and Learning

Like many EFL teachers, Professor Mohammed does not believe at all in the idea that computer technology may replace teachers. He believes that it is human nature to have fear of and reject new inventions:

To me it is a human nature. I knew many pilots who thought that autopilot would replace human pilot. Now, no autopilot can fly an airplane without the presence of a human pilot. Many passengers do not trust autopilot when turned on. They want a human to fly the aircraft. The same was true when the machine translation was invented. Many translators were intimidated thinking that machine translation
programs would replace them and therefore would not have many jobs. Now, they are talking about computers replacing teachers! This is not true. Always there has to be a human power, human flavor that controls machine translation that controls the airplane that controls every technology aspect. We as language teachers should have some self-confidence and think of technology as something invented to help us, not to replace us.

Professor Mohammed believes that computers not only play a great role in our lives in general, but they also are valuable for teaching and learning languages. By using DVDs and other language multimedia programs, EFL learning would be more dynamic and interesting, Professor Mohammed believed. He feels that most EFL learners in Saudi Arabia appear to have close to zero motivation to learn English because of the way English is taught at our institutions. He believes that we can elevate our students’ motivation by integrating more of technology tools (e.g. creative software, graphics, animation, etc.) into EFL instruction.

Beliefs about Issues Limiting CALL Use

Professor Mohammed does not see financial aspects as one of the greatest obstacles that limit CALL use and integration in his department. He believes that in his school and maybe in other Saudi institutions, money is an
obstacle only when administrators are not fully aware of
computer benefits. He asserts that EFL professors and
instructors should enlighten administrators and justify
how CALL can be beneficial in the field of teaching and
learning English as a foreign language. Space and the
number of students in each class are also issues that
make CALL integration impractical:

Number of students is getting high and I don’t think
it is feasible to get enough computers for all
students. Even if you divide them and have them come
in different times, we don’t have a space for that
number of equipments.

Traditional methods of teaching are another problem. Some
EFL teachers still believe in traditional teacher-
centered classrooms. Professor Mohammed believes that
“you cannot have computers in a teacher-centered
classroom”. Professor Mohammed feels that in a
computerized classroom, the teacher facilitates learning
rather than being the ultimate source of knowledge.

Finally, Professor Mohammed cites the problem of teachers
resisting using computers because they may have less
technological expertise than their students.

Case Study Two: Instructor Aftab

Aftab is an English instructor at King Fahad
University in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. He is
a friendly British man of Pakistani descent in his mid thirties. He came to Saudi Arabia in 1998 to teach English in the Preparatory Year Program that prepares students for studies in the freshman and later years at KFUPM. He lives with his wife and three year old daughter in an apartment about 10 minutes away from the university. Born and raised in England, Aftab earned a B.A. in finance & computing from a local college in 1992, and an M.A. in TESOL from the University of London in 1997. Although English is his preferred language, he is also conversant in Urdu.

Personal and Academic Computer Use

Aftab has had a Macintosh computer in his house since he was 13 years old. When he went to college from 1988-1992, he majored in computing and finance which made him even more familiar with computers and their programming. He then studied EFL for another 3 years. During this period of time, he only used computers for personal purposes such as typing and corresponding to email. In 1996, Aftab went overseas to teach English at the British counsel in Damascus, Syria. This was the time when he started to use computers for academic purposes. At that time, there were ten computers but there was no official policy of how to use those computers. Most of the time, Aftab would go to use the computer lab as a classroom and the computers would be ignored. But later,
he used those computers in teaching English as a foreign language. Using a classical text reconstruction program called “Storyboard” published by Wida Software, Aftab would enter text and students would rebuild it by guessing the missing words. The Wida Software (Storyboard) consists of two programs. The first program is called "The Student Program" which is designated for the students' use. The second program is for the teacher to compose the texts. A wide range of skills is involved when using this program. Aftab uses it to improve his students' reading strategies, to build up their vocabulary, and to help them practice prediction and guessing. He also uses it to provide change from the class’s regular activities.

During the summer of 1997, Aftab went back to England to teach English for a group of international students. As part of the program, they offered an introduction to computing course that covered word processing, spreadsheets, PowerPoint, and databases. Aftab had to take these students three times a week to the computer lab. He had to train them on using these computer applications. Aftab also introduced his students to Wida Software just to make it available to them for self-access after class time.

While teaching, Aftab was working on his M.A. thesis at the University of London. In his course work, he took
a class called “Hypermedia” that got him interested in technology. For his M.A. thesis he investigated three different sites for teaching English on the Internet and evaluated them in the light of teaching English as a foreign language theory. Based on his data, he suggested improvements to those sites and made explicit the language theory that his suggestions were based upon.

At King Fahad University of Petroleum and Mineral

Aftab came to teach English at KFUPM in 1998. During the time of the study, he was teaching 001 and 002 Writing. To provide basic computing literacy to students, word-processing was integrated into the 001 and 002 Writing curriculum. It was mandatory that students take at least two word-processing lessons for each section’s writing class. However, Aftab brought his students for additional practice. Near the end of each semester, Aftab would give a word-processing exam for students in the two sections. The Word-processing exam was worth 2% of the final grade.

The ELC CALL Lab at KFUPM

The English Language Center (ELC) CALL Lab has modern computing facilities to serve the Orientation English Program (OEP). According to the Lab’s coordinator, a complete transition was done to the CALL Lab in the summer of 1998. The old DOS-based computers were replaced with modern Windows machines. The CALL Lab was divided
into 3 CALL Labs and a walk-in area containing 93 workstations. Each CALL Lab is equipped with 28 workstations and the walk-in area had 10 workstations. All computers were IBM-PC300PL models with 32 mg RAM, 200mhz, 2gig HD. Ethernet connected all workstations to a main server. All machines were connected to the Internet as of fall semester of 1998-1999 academic year. The CALL Labs also had 1 back-up server, 2 Epson DFX-8000 printers with 2 older 486-printer servers, and 2 LCD projectors. Two of the CALL Labs were always reserved for class meetings. The third CALL Lab was designated for students as a private study CALL Lab. The private study CALL Lab had self-access programs installed on its machines including Mavis Beacon, a program for typing instruction and practice (which is no longer assessed as a separate skill), as well as grammar and vocabulary materials. The CALL coordinator’s office and the room for technicians were just at the entrance of the CALL Lab.

Aftab used the CALL Lab for teaching 002 Writing in multiple ways. One way was giving students a picture of an experiment and asking them to write a report about the picture using sections on: 1) purpose, 2) apparatus, 3) procedure, 4) results, and 5) conclusion.

Another way is giving students a typing exam. Students are given the same experiment for practicing
their typing skills and for exposing them to a “perfect”
model of what they are expected to write in the writing
exams.

A third way is writing an experiment by paper and
pencil in the regular class. On the following day,
students come into the CALL Lab and are given a typed
copy of that experiment which has many spelling and
grammar mistakes. Students are to the find mistakes in
grammar and spelling, correct them, and type a fresh copy
of the report. The main grammatical point students had
to focus on was active and passive verbs. Aftab mentioned
that he tried once to have his students write their
experiment directly on the computer, but he soon
discovered that most of his students preferred to plan or
write initially on paper and not on the computer.

**Observation**

I observed Aftab teaching two sections of 002
Writing for preparatory year program students. As I
mentioned before, word-processing was integrated into
this course and was a mandatory for at least two sessions
during the course. During my observation, Aftab had
already finished the mandatory sessions and was giving
his students additional practice on word-processing. The
materials he used were supplementary exercises to
classroom activities. He gave them a report full of
grammar and spelling mistakes and asked them to find and
correct mistakes while retyping the report. While the main purpose of the word-processing sessions were to provide basic computer literacy to students, Aftab additionally thought of using this medium to enhance his students’ spelling and grammar skills. Though the Word processor 97 took care of most spelling mistakes, students had to work hard to find the grammar mistakes and correct them.

There were 26 Saudi students of similar age group in this writing class. Most of students enrolled in this writing course were quite computer literate. Some of their knowledge was gained through the previous mandatory sessions. There were more than computers and Aftab also had to use the walk-in lab because some computers were out of order. A technician did come and fixed the out of order computers during the break. This showed the importance of having nearby technicians and extra workstations. Using the LCD projection panel, Aftab displayed the correct report sheet for all students at the end of the class time. The text was displayed in a small font that made it difficult for some students at the back of the class to see the displayed information. I also hoped that the teacher would use some of MS Word’s features such as highlighting the statements that had grammatical or spelling mistakes.
For the second section, there were 30 students, which again made it necessary for Aftab to use the extra walk-in CALL Lab. As he did with the first section group, Aftab started his lesson by linking what had been taken in the class with what his students were going to do in the CALL Lab. He gave the students the same worksheet he had given to the previous section and asked them to retype the report and correct the grammatical and spelling mistakes. The only thing that differed from the previous writing section was that some students had to give their answers orally before the correct sheet was displayed. The text display problem was also taken care of this time by increasing the font size. At this point, though, the printer stopped working. The technician was not able to fix it until the class time was over so students had to save their work on diskettes and bring them to the next class for further discussion.

Advantages/Disadvantages of CALL

Aftab believes that one of the main advantages of CALL is that computer-based exercises motivate students to study exercises taken from the book. Aftab mentioned that some of the book exercises are taken and made interactive using the Seminar authorware program. Students answering incorrectly are given responses explaining why the answer was wrong. Before trying again, they can use the hint option to help them think about the
right answer. In this way, students are learning new vocabulary as well as practicing what they have already learned in the classroom. He mentioned that video and audio clips would be even more motivating when combined with the exercises, but are not yet implemented in the EOP.

As for disadvantages, Aftab said unfortunately some teachers, and maybe some students at KFUPM, do not take lessons taught in the CALL lab seriously. Aftab mentioned that there is a belief amongst some students and their teachers that classes taught in the CALL lab are not real classes. Teachers only go there when students are bored with regular classroom activities and do not usually use allotted time efficiently.

Instructor Aftab’s Beliefs about Computer Assisted Language Teaching and Learning

Aftab believes that the objectives of using CALL should be stated first. Administrators and language instructors together should plan CALL teaching objectives. He feels instructors do need to know specific software packages and what their aims are.

He also believes that very little can be accomplished without having highly trained faculty in CALL. He says:

For CALL to be used effectively, we should educate faculty and make them aware of what is available by
holding seminars, workshops, or bringing some CALL experts who could talk about the subject and help faculty realize how CALL can be effective tool in promoting language teaching and learning. This would stimulate interest amongst the faculty and give us less hostility towards computers.

He also believes that CALL should be combined with the language program at his school rather than having them separated from each other.

Aftab’s main goal when using computers was to motivate his students and reinforce what they learned in the classroom. He states:

My aim is using them [computers] as reinforcement for their writing [his students]. We do writing in class and the next day we come with a sheet full of grammatical and spelling mistakes and reinforce them on computers. And also it is something motivating and different from classroom. I usually take students [to CALL lab] when I see them sitting doing nothing. For some students it does motivate, for others it demotivates.

Beliefs about Issues Limiting CALL Use

The existence of a CALL lab at KFUPM helped Aftab to maintain his relation with computer assisted language learning. He and another language teacher wrote a proposal to the administration to give them release time
to write their own software. Their proposal was approved but had to be done within the policies of the administration. They used an authorware program called “Seminar” by Information Transfer, Cambridge England (Figure 6) to author their own CALL software. Aftab and his colleague’s opinions differed from that of the administrators on how materials should be implemented. The administrators wanted to see the materials as exact replications of the course books on computers, while he and his colleague saw computers as different mediums. The full materials should not be controlled on computers as they are on books. Aftab and his colleague were caught between the limitations of the authorware program and administrators who are not CALL specialists and have no idea how CALL software work and what they are capable of doing. Aftab said his university also does not have culture of upgrading computers or updating software. Because administrators at his school have no computing background, they tend to refuse proposals suggesting computer or software upgrades. Once something is purchased, Aftab says it stays without any modification to make it better.

Figure 6:
Seminar Authorware
Aftab believes that a lack of computing background on the part of many EFL instructors is a general problem which limits CALL use and integration. Many of the EFL instructors at his institution fear coming into a situation where students know more about computers than their teachers. He mentioned that his institution tries to help new teachers by holding a seminar for a week at the beginning of the year. The purpose of this seminar is to introduce new language instructors to different skills including computing. Aftab was asked to give a seminar for new teachers on how to use word-processing. Depending on the CALL coordinators, this computing introduction takes from 1-3 sessions of this weeklong seminar. Aftab believes that a basic introduction like this is not sufficient to educate teachers about computers and their applications for language teaching.
Another thing that Aftab believes would limit CALL use and integration is the ineffective use of available technology in language teaching. He mentioned that EFL instructors at his institution use only word-processing to introduce students to basic computer literacy. He believes that word-processing is very basic especially for students with computers at home. These students do not find word-processing interesting or stimulating at all. Aftab believes that if teachers upgrade their word-processing use and make it more complicated by including some of the advanced word-processing functions (e.g. track changes feature) and give it a big chunk of the course, more than 2% of the students’ final grades, it would be more motivating and more effective. Aftab thinks that instructors should change their views about computers from seeing computers as mere game-like machines to ones that see them as effective tools that could promote language teaching and learning. The CALL lab at his school is looked at by many of the EFL instructors as motivation or something different for the students rather than something that could help enhance their language learning.

He also sees technical support as an important element for CALL use and integration. Technicians’ presence would help technophobic teachers overcome their fear since they know someone is ready to assist and fix
the technical difficulties they might encounter. Another idea suggested by Aftab is that the teacher find the best student computer users in his class and nominate him to be an assistant. This would lower the teacher’s anxiety and make the student happy. Aftab believes that his institution needs more technicians since another department took one of the two technicians they had.

Not only did some technicians leave their department after gaining experience, but also some CALL coordinators left. Aftab remembers that when he first came to KFUPM, the CALL coordinator at that time was leaving and they were in the process of finding a new coordinator. He mentioned that this had always been a problem at his institution. New CALL coordinators came with weak backgrounds and left the computer lab after gaining good experience.

Case Study Three: Instructor Salem

Salem had spent the last fourteen years teaching English and translation for undergraduate students at King Saud University. Coming from a low-income country, Salem had to accept the position of instructor (a position usually given to M.A. holders) despite the fact that he holds an educational doctorate (Ed.d) in English from an American university. Though he works in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, Salem flies at the end
of each week to spend the weekend with his family in Jeddah, about 1000 KM. west of Riyadh. Salem is very concerned about living in one place while his family lives in another.

Personal and Academic Computer Use

Salem had one computer at home and another in his office. Both computers were connected to the Internet and used for almost everything including word processing, communication, research, and preparing materials for his students.

For academic use, Salem’s first experience with the computer was at the University of Kansas in the early 1980s. At the Masters’ level, he took some media courses and read theoretically about the use of computers in the classroom. After graduation, he moved to Saudi Arabia to teach at the college of language and translation at King Saud University. At that time, not too many people were aware of the importance of computers in language teaching at his college. Though his colleagues did not like the idea of allowing students to use their computers, he used to take his students to show them how to type their compositions on computers that were allotted for teachers’ use. It was not until the early 1990s that the department got an extra six computers reserved for teachers in his department. In 1992, they transformed their language lab into a computer lab by adding 15
computers. Because they did not have space for a separate computer lab, Salem suggested that they use the language lab by placing a computer in each student booth. Since then, the lab has been used for both listening and computing purposes. The next step Salem took after helping to establish the computer lab was to search for CALL software suitable for his students. After an exhaustive search, Salem was able to find some DOS-based CALL programs made by the Eurocenters from the British Council in Riyadh. He used a cloze program called “Core Text” for reading comprehension and writing where students had to read a text and fill in the blanks. He also used CALL programs such as “Screen Test” and “Cambridge Certificate Course” that provided a variety of grammar and vocabulary exercises in three different levels. Later in 1998, Salem used WinCALIS and Wida authoring suite, CALL programs that allow teachers to produce materials tailored to the specific needs of their students.

Teachers used to send their students to Salem in the computer lab to have them get help with their English. Based on teachers’ recommendations and on what their students needed most, he would choose a program and have the student work on it. Most of the CALL programs he used had 1) learning sessions and 2) testing sessions. Students had to first go through the learning sessions
and would need 6 out of 10 scores to be able to go to the testing sessions. The testing was mostly multiple choice for grammar and vocabulary. According to reading and writing strategies they learned, the students would fill in the missing words if the text was in a normal sequence or put it in correct order if it was in reverse sequence.

Unfortunately, 1997 was the last opportunity Salem had to use CALL and for the computer lab to be operative. Salem explains this abandonment of the work by saying:

We used to have a relatively low student population and I was able to accommodate all the students based on the programs and the computers we had, but later on, we had the registration blow up and we had many students we couldn’t accommodate. On top of that, I was the only teacher using CALL in our department. But he hoped that CALL would be introduced once again as their new second computer lab is now operative:

Hopefully we will be able to introduce this course component again as we have ordered through the college of computer science new programs such as “English for business” and “Small World” from UK, as well as the new Wida authoring suite and many other CALL programs.

Salem in the Computer Lab

The computer lab Salem used had 21 IBM workstations and one printer. There was no teacher workstation or LCD
projector available. The terminals had CD-ROM capabilities, but no microphones or headphones. These terminals had large screens and fairly high memory capacity. None of the workstations were connected to the Internet at the time of the study. Salem’s computers were arranged in a U-shape pattern against the wall on tables at a good height for the students. This shape saved some space but crowded students who worked in the corner.

Observation

I observed Salem teaching a three credit hour course called “computer application to translation”. The goal of this course was to introduce students to basic computer literacy (e.g. word processing, creating tables and charts, installing programs, etc.) in general, and show them the importance of the computer and its applications in the field of translation in particular. The course was divided into two parts: a theoretical part (1 s.h.) taught by a different professor, and an application part (2 s.h.) taught by Salem in the computer lab. The theoretical part was worth 40%, and the application part was worth 60% of the course final grade. It is worth mentioning that this course was a requirement for all European languages and translation students including students majoring in English. Students from the European
languages and translation department were sent to Salem to fulfill this requirement.

Salem’s class started with him taking attendance and then giving his students a passage in Arabic and asking them to translate it and type it in English. In the next class, he gave them another passage in English and asked them to translate it and type it in Arabic. He asked his students to make use of the word processor’s thesaurus and built-in dictionary. These two features were very helpful for students to translate the passages from English to Arabic and vice versa. Every student had a folder saved on the system. Students had to enter their I.D. numbers every time they needed to access their folders. From time to time, Salem monitored his students’ work on computers through the server. For evaluation purposes, Salem was able to access his students’ work and check the time they spent on an assignment by entering their I.D. numbers. During the class I observed, some students rushed through their work to play the solitaire game, others were reading the university newsletter, and a few were reading books on computers.

In one of the classes, Salem quizzed his students by giving them a passage, requiring them to translate it into English, and then handing it out on diskettes for grades. Before giving a final grade, Salem would talk with his students individually about approaches they used
for translating their quiz passages. Salem’s main goal was to make sure they were applying what they learned in the theoretical part of the course. He said:

The most important thing is not the ability to translate a text or a passage, rather the process of that translation. I wanted to know the translation tools they used and if they were making use of what they learned about translation.

By doing so, Salem was trying to introduce his students to word processing and its application in the field of translation. Translation skills, however, seemed to take priority in Salem’s classroom as his emphasis was on translation over any other skill.

Observing students while working, it was quite clear that they were not interested in what they were assigned to do. In an informal discussion, some students expressed their discontent with what was being taught in the course. As the title of the course suggested, students were expecting to learn something about machine translation programs and their applications in the field of translation. Instead, they were required to translate and type passages which computer-literate students found to be very basic.

During my observation, I noticed that the number of computers was always less than the number of students. Due to the insufficient number of student workstations,
Salem had to ask some of the students to hang around until computers became available. When Salem realized that some students were not doing their work, he encouraged them to finish and give a chance to other students waiting outside the computer lab. To overcome this problem, Salem had to divide his class into six sessions. He was not paid any extra money, but liked to do it this way to accommodate the increasing number of students and beat the shortage of workstations.

I also noticed that there was a lack of technical support and a serious scarcity of materials. There was not even one technician to fix inoperative machines. Instructors had the option of either waiting for months for a simple problem to be fixed or fixing it at their own expense and hoping for reimbursement. In addition, there were no materials available for instructors and their students in the computer lab to the extent that Salem had to ask the students to bring their own recordable CDs so that he could download for them electronic dictionaries and some other free materials on the Internet.

Advantages/Disadvantages of CALL

The first thing that Salem noticed when he first used CALL was the fact that he had a plenty of time to move in the class and to check how his students were performing. He thought CALL helped him to monitor his
students better and learn more about their language weaknesses:

By using CALL, I was able to really see the difficulties each student had, I was more able to monitor students’ weaknesses because I was able to stand on their heads and look over their shoulders and see what they were doing. While in a regular classroom, I wasn’t able to know what each student was doing and what their difficulties were since most of the weak students were trying to hide behind the good ones.

Salem also noticed that students in the computer lab were accepting their mistakes more easily whereas they used to get embarrassed about mistakes in the regular classroom. He felt students were able to discover their own mistakes and their own weaknesses as a result of using CALL. Salem said the computer was also a way for students to find their own methods for doing things instead of the teacher dictating his own way.

Salem believed another gain was the fact that many students got interested in technology and decided to buy their own computers as a result of using CALL in his classes. Salem considered this alone to be the main advantage for his students.

Because of Salem’s eagerness to use CALL, he only saw the positive aspects of CALL and said he did not want
to speak about the negative issues that might occur as a result of CALL use. However, he mentioned some disadvantages such as the fact that some students were reluctant to use computers and preferred to learn in a traditional setting. In one or two cases, Salem had students who would completely go blank at the computers even though could answer the same questions orally or using pen and paper.

Another disadvantage Salem considered was the reckless use of the computer lab. Some students had a tendency to use materials and equipments in an irresponsible way. Others would bring diskettes with a lot of viruses, which required formatting the computers and reinstalling the programs all over again.

**Instructor Salem’s Beliefs about Computer Assisted Language Teaching and Learning**

Salem indicated that using computers to assist language learning is something he always wants his students to have. He always encourages his students to use their own assets to study the language instead of the teacher being the sole source for teaching. Also for reinforcement purposes he asks students with computers and Internet access at home to use them as individualized personal learning tools. He believes that CALL might be one of the best educational choices because of the following facts:
• As opposed to traditional classrooms, students feel more privacy when working on computers because of the anonymity computers provide among students.

• The interaction on computer motivates students because of the way interactive programs are set. Salem believes that students would interact more on computers than in traditional settings because of the features some programs have. He also believes that CALL should be part of any language program as a course component or even as an extra curricular activity as it would provide more help and more resources for both teachers and students.

Salem mentioned that their problem at KSU is not with technology as much as it is with people’s attitudes toward technology. He thinks that they need to campaign for CALL and try to work on people’s attitudes to make them accept CALL and use it for the right purposes. Salem believes that once they are done with this problem, they will still be faced with other problems, but this one should be worked on first.

For teacher training, Salem believes that there should be hands-on training sessions for in-service teachers, but CALL should be part of the curriculum before such sessions begin. This way, teachers would be
encouraged to participate in the training sessions. He also believes that the university should only consider hiring new teachers who are able to use CALL. He also suggested that orientation sessions should be made for new teachers on using word processing, installing software in their machines, surfing the net, and creating homepages. Workshops should also be made for more advanced teacher on authoring their own CALL software and digitizing and editing audio and video materials.

With regard to the fact that some teachers fear loosing face by having less technological knowledge than their students, he believes that a normal CALL teacher should be open minded and should face this fact with easiness and be proud of students who are good at using computers. He sees the main goal as to make use of computers in teaching and not to be an expert in the field of computer science.

Finally, Salem believes that teachers including, himself, would be much more motivated to use CALL if two things were available: 1) training and 2) proper support. He believes that very little can be accomplished without highly trained teachers and well maintained equipment.

Beliefs about Issues Limiting CALL Use

Salem believes that traditional decision makers at his university were not in favor of CALL use in teaching and, therefore, constituted much of the problem that
limited CALL use and integration at his school. Most of these administrators were trained abroad in the 1970s and early 1980s in a more traditional way when CALL was not an issue.

Limited funding was another problem that Salem believed hindered CALL use at his school. When we know that decision makers do not see any intrinsic worth of using CALL, we can easily predict their responses on proposals suggesting CALL use and integration. A guerrilla tactic such as that used by Litwicki (2000) to convince “budget controllers” at Cochise College, Arizona, was similar to Salem’s situation at KSU. Litwicki had to bring other disciplines into the project and convince administrators that they, by “having a hand in it, would look good when the whole thing came together successfully”. Similarly, Salem had to preach for CALL and persuade administrators to include CALL as a course component. Because administrators did not approve CALL for inclusion in the course description, he avoided the term “CALL” and listed some of the CALL materials he needed under “listening comprehension materials” to be in correspondence with the university course standards. After it was approved, Salem was able to convert the description again to CALL.

Another problem that limited CALL use and integration in Salem’s opinion were the bureaucratic
features that characterized administrative procedures at some Saudi universities. Salem explained these practices with the following quotes:

When we do a course structure it has to be within the university course titles of course denominations. It has to be approved from way up and way down and go through a lot of places, offices, commissions, and then it finally get approved.

He added:

Courses here [at his school] are designated and prepared and given names and descriptions regardless of the resources we can get. We have some courses here and when we look at the courses descriptions and the way they are taught, they are completely different. For example, the description of this course [computer application to translation] includes the use of machine translation software, laser discs, and the use of the Internet, and none of these is present.

Technical support was seen as a very important issue by Salem. He mentioned that he was the only one taking care of equipment maintenance. If he could not fix a problem, he would then have to fill out a work order and send it by a fax to the computer center to place it in their schedules. This meant it generally took a very long time before a problem would be fixed. Sometimes, Salem
had to go himself and make contracts with private companies to come and fix problems. In these instances, he had to get three different quotations from different companies and send them to the financial office to contact the company and make the payment arrangements.

Fear of the Internet was also one of the issues that limited its use in teaching English at KSU. Salem believes that the Internet in Saudi Arabia has been linked to negative connotations, which do not reflect the benefits of the Internet. Salem tried to convince administrators about the EFL/ESL opportunities that the Internet would provide for students, but his request to have Internet access in the computer lab was refused. The administration did not want students to have access to the Internet for they might access culturally inappropriate content. Salem expected this view to change within the next 2-3 years as the country enters an increasingly digital age.