

A survey on CALL Study in China in Recent Decade

UNE ENQUÊTE SUR L'ÉTUDE DE L'ALAO EN CHINE DURANT LA DERNIÈRE DÉCENNIE

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Abstract: This paper presents the result of a survey based on the previous studies published in journals in China in recent ten years, and discusses the current situation – research interests, research methods and even problems - in CALL research. Finally, this paper lists some of the new tendencies in the study of CALL in order to attract more attention in the future study of CALL in China.

Key words: Survey, CALL Research, recent decade, future study

Résumé: Le présent article présente le résultat d'une enquête basée sur les études précédentes publiées dans les journaux de Chine au cours de la dernière décennie, et discute la situation actuelle – intérêts de recherches, méthode de recherches et même problèmes – des recherches de l'ALAO (Apprentissage des Langues Assisté par Ordinateur). Finalement, l'article cite des tendances nouvelles dans l'étude de l'ALAO afin d'attirer plus d'attention dans la future étude de l'ALAO en Chine.

Mots-Clés: enquête, recherches de l'ALAO, dernière décennie, future étude

The study on Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has been discussed for many years, and many published articles provide us different ways of using computer in language teaching and learning. However, a general review of CALL research is quite necessary. In order to have a global review on the current situation of CALL in China, a survey was made on academic journal articles on CALL in recent decade (1994- 2005).

1. METHOD

Subjects: The articles involved in this study are from 1994 to 2005, during which CALL research is general thought to be active in China and various attempts appear in this field. As a result, the study on the past decade can provide us a good command of some basic information for the academic world. Also the sample articles are from the data bank of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) website, which although cannot cover all CALL-related documents, is still kind of representation of authority, and moreover, the web-based data retrieval system provides a convenient platform to access and search for the right things you want.

Data-collection: Because of the convenient service

provided by the data bank, the author has been trying his best to seek out all articles on CALL in this data base through a optional entrance 'advanced search', and set the search catalogue as 'title/ keywords/ abstract', then enter keywords "multi-media" into the search box; after the first searching, a narrowed-down search, within the results of the first search, is made with keywords "foreign language teaching" or "English teaching" or "language teaching", the result is named as Data 1; then a second search was continued with only a change of the first search keyword from "multi-media" to "computer", the rest is the same as the former one, so this is Data 2. Although the coverage of results from both Data 1 and Data 2 cannot be a whole collection of CALL-related articles, the fact that they can reveal a general distribution of their research paradigm, at least within the coverage of samples in this study.

Since CNKI China Academic Journal has 5,300 periodicals in full text and 1,600 ones only in bibliography, that is, 6 million full-text articles, 5.5 million abstracts and 10 million bibliographies available, and this database is keeping updated even everyday, so the last update data of the survey is at 2:00 pm on February 26, 2005.

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2. DATA-ANALYSIS

There are altogether 1,884 articles in Data 1 and 706 in Data 2 matching the requirement of this survey, and the

review of the title, author and abstract indicates that 301 articles appear both in Data 1 and Data 2, taking these into full consideration, the final result is in the following Table and the features of CALL research in recent decade can be categorized into the followings:

TABLE ARTICLES ON CALL IN CNKI DATABASE (1994-2005)

	1994-1996		1997-1998		1999-2000		2001-2002		2003-2005		Total	
	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F
Theory	.85	68	.73	61	.68	142	.66	283	.70	550	.74	1694
Practice	.013	1	.04	3	.12	26	.16	67	.16	129	.11	252
Software & programming	.062	5	.095	8	.05	10	.06	26	.07	56	.03	69
Others	.075	6	.14	12	.15	31	.12	50	.07	55	.12	274
Total		80		84		209		426		790		2289

Note.

F=frequency, P=percentage

‘Theory’ includes those on CALL introduction (overseas and in China), related theories in applied linguistics, features of CALL, teaching modules, CALL and its teaching, methodologies, etc.

‘Practice’ includes those on real applications of computer in language class.

‘Software & programming’ includes those on how to write software or computer programs related to Computer as a Science.

‘Others’ includes those only lists CALL as one of the keywords but nothing more details on CALL studies.

2.1 Theory rather than practice:

Most of the published articles are much more about theory than practice. From 1994 to 2005, there are 1,694 articles out 2,289 about the discussions on theory (See Table 4.1), and the studies on applied linguistics are filled up with the fashionable linguistic theories; language-teaching methodologies to name a few, while a few people are pioneering and farming in the fields of CALL research. The fact is that the feature of CALL studies are extraordinary linked to practice, as we all know, ‘practice is the sole criterion for testing truth’, consequently, CALL researchers should not be charmed with those theoretical preconceptions only and follow them without any questions; however, they should be more practical and realistic on the basis of the current situation in China, verifying and examining those theories in practice, or even creating a brand-new concept or theory.

2.2 General study rather than specific study

An important feature of the current theoretical study is its focus on general study rather than the specifics, which in fact will leave all the problems alone. On the basis of literature review and author’s analysis, the majority of theoretical introduction are somewhat the summaries of CALL research in different countries and some are just the Chinese version to viewpoints of scholars overseas, and even the flooded repetitions and citations; from which, teachers and readers can hardly benefit as the main reference resources.

2.3 A clear and succinct approach is wanted

In CALL Research, what we need urgently is an easy-to-handle way to all people involved. Since the studies of CALL range differently, which involved a lot of research fields, and as a result, many entry-level teachers/ researchers in this field are frightened to flinch from the confusion and uncertainty. What’s more, the literature search indicates that CALL seems to cross-link with various subjects, such as educational technology, pedagogy, psychology, linguistics, computer science, and statistics to name a few. Since the average researcher cannot be an all-rounder and would never gain a good mastery of all subjects, many of whom get puzzled about what might be the first start while doing CALL research. So the adventure to a clear approach in CALL research seems to be a vital move, which at least provide a clear answer to questions like – In the field of CALL, what can I do? And how?

2.4 The tendency in CALL research is on its road to be more rational

At first, a variety of articles in different journals, periodicals, newspapers etc. focused mainly on the inspiring advantages of the application of computer in language teaching and language learning, and the optimistic viewpoints were the mainstream in CALL literature. Presently, more and more researchers discuss and question CALL in right senses objectively, consequently, the existing problems and current situation in China are taken into consideration. This is a good and reasonable progress and practices play a vital

role in this process. The discovery of those problems of CALL in China, plus the serious consideration of China's economical and educational situation, resulted from the practice of researchers' teaching and studies. So, as a fact, more and more practitioners not theory-chasers are wanted.

2.5 A thirst for a proper research method to CALL

Recently, a variety of viewpoints in China mentioned that quantitative research design should engage Chinese researcher's attention, and many periodicals reveal a tendentiousness to accept articles on quantitative research or a combination of both rather than qualitative ones. As a result, some CALL teachers, especially beginner-practitioners feel that an approach without hypothesis, scientific control on variables, rigorous data-collection and data-analysis, will not be considered as a research, which, as a result will shut the door of their researches. In fact, even though the practice-oriented articles on CALL are not the mainstream in the past decade, it does not mean teachers' involvements in CALL activities are rare, the fact is that many valuable experiences and ideas of those hard-working teachers remain unknown, which, in one way or another, is a heavy loss. So a search for a proper CALL research method is extremely necessary, enabling all practitioners, researchers, and even professionals to express themselves and enrich a more pluralistic CALL research stage – *the research of CALL is a stage, and each must play a part.*

3. FURTHER DISCUSSION: THE FUTURE OF CALL RESEARCH IN CHINA

Many scholars present their understanding of the future study of CALL in China, after reviewing the recent

history of CALL study in China, the following ideas may benefit you somehow.

Ruan (2005) presents an overview of the features in research articles on Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) published in Chinese academic journals in recent decade; and then, combining the drawbacks in the development of CALL with his teaching and research experience, indicates that the approach of Action Research & the Research on Action Research will be the future trend in research on Computer-assisted Language Learning in China. Action Research can involve teacher as the researcher, focusing on the analysis of learners' demands, the awareness of the problems in teaching, and the solution to those problems in taking action. As a whole, the Research on Action Research can orient and improve the research on CALL in China in the process of reformation on Educational Informationization.

After the critical reflections of five year's practice of e-learning management in the Insititute of Beiwai Online Education, Gu (2005) believes in his paper that whatever education it is, it has to deal with two themes: learning and teaching, meanwhile he presents an ecological model of e-learning. So, under the framework of ecological model, there might be a new approach in the study of CALL in China.

Chen (2005) discusses that the functions of computer undergo leapfrogging development with each passing day. Consequently, the computer is moving gradually from assistance to autonomy in foreign language teaching. Computer autonomous language teaching is facilitated with the development of artificial intelligence, digitization and in formation technology. As a future trend, the computer autonomous teaching will make it possible to conduct cooperative, individualized teaching in a virtual situation. Will computer be a dominator in the future? This is a quite new idea and would involve more researchers' contributions.

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