

The Impact of Computer Assisted Language Learning on Iranian EFL Learners' Task-Based Listening Skill and Motivation.

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Abstract

The application of technology in language classrooms has become more commonplace in the last fifty years. Computer and the internet have made foreign language materials easy to access and use. We build on this growing body of research by presenting the findings of a research project that explored the effect of computer assisted language learning (CALL) on improving Iranian EFL learners' task-based listening as a motivating device to enhance formation of positive attitudes. The participants in this quantitative study included 40 EFL learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) at Islamic Azad University – Tabriz Branch. They were taking the two-credit conversation course 2 and formed two intact classes which were randomly assigned as the experimental and the control groups. During the CALL-based treatment each participant in the experimental group had an access to a computer in the English lab. They also received extra task-based listening comprehension materials and activities along with some comprehension questions three times a week through their e-mails. The data analysis of the post-test listening comprehension scores indicated a significant difference between the experimental and control groups; that is to say, the experimental group outperformed the control group and obtained a higher average. The motivation of the experimental group participants was also higher than the control group participants.

Key words: computer, internet, task, listening comprehension, motivation

I. Introduction

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, the rapid growth of technological devices has revolutionized different fields of science. In line with such advancement, the invention and use of computers has had tremendous impact on various aspects of scientific study. "Computers, which were primarily used for mathematical concerns at its birth, have had their unique place in every part of our lives. Soon afterwards they started to be utilized in general education especially in language learning, and the term 'Computer-Assisted Language Learning' (CALL), referring to

the use of computers in the learning and teaching of English, appeared in the literature in early 1970s” (Karakash and Ersoy, 2011, p.40). Since then, the technology has undergone a rapid process of improvement and computers in different sizes and

functions have become available to almost everyone.

Prensky (2000) states that nowadays for students, world without computers, digital media or the Internet is meaningless. Named as digital natives, they observe the world of information and communication technology (ICT) in a different way in comparison with the adults in their life, who in contrast, are viewed digital immigrants. (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005) suggest on average students’ using some type of technology-based media six hours in a day including listening and viewing more than reading and writing.

CALL has played an important role in personalizing education. The recent advances in educational applications of computer hardware and software have provided a rapidly growing resource for language classrooms. The practical applications of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) are growing at such a rapid pace that it is almost impossible for a classroom teacher to keep up with the field. This growth is quite justifiable in terms of educational advantages it offers particularly the availability of rich resources for both learners and teachers and the increased possibility of web-based interaction as a source for further learning. As Roger (1996, cited in Lai, 2006) states, when the computer is used in conjunction with traditional second language classroom study, students can study more independently, leaving the teacher more time to concentrate on those parts of second language teaching that are still hard or impossible by computer. Owing to such pedagogical benefits, computer technology has become more accessible to both individuals and schools and the growing understanding of its potentials has encouraged a shift of emphasis away from computer technology itself to various application of such technology in more practical aspects of teaching and learning.

In the new millennium, multimedia, the internet, especially the World Wide Web, and various forms of distance learning are wide spread tools to reinforce language learning and support language teaching. The dynamic integration of computers and language learning has

enabled language learners to access and process various resources and to internalize information more easily and meaningfully through personal engagement. According to Mayer (2005), the theoretical rationale behind the multimedia principle is that when both words and pictures are presented, learners are able to establish verbal and pictorial mental models and build effective connections between the two.

Generally speaking, the use of technology inside or outside the classroom tends to make the class more interesting. One way a program or activity can promote motivation in students is by personalizing information, for example by integrating the student's name or familiar contexts as part of the program or task.

A. Listening and computer

In learning a foreign language, listening skill plays an important role. In order to communicate well in foreign language students should have enough sources of input for listening to enhance their listening skills. The first thing that a student needs to develop to be able to communicate in a foreign language is his listening comprehension skill. According to Morley (1991), "Listening is the most common communicative activity in daily life: we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write." (p. 82).

Listening as a chief constituent in language learning and teaching first highlighted in the late 1970s with James Asher's (1977, cited in Brown 2001) work on Total Physical Response. The Natural Approach suggested a considerable "silent period" during which learners were permitted the security of listening without having any anxiety of speaking before they were "ready" to do so. Such approaches were an outcome of different research studies that indicated evidence of the significance of input in second language acquisition. Based on Krashen's (1985) suggestion, getting insights from first language acquisition, "stressed the significance of comprehensible input, or the aural reception of language that is just a little beyond the learner's present ability."(p.4)

The significance of listening skill in language learning can scarcely be overvalued. Through reception, we absorb linguistic information which are necessary for producing language. According to Brown (2001), “listening competence is universally larger than speaking competence” (p.247). According to Schmitt(2002), “Listening involves making sense of spoken language, normally accompanied by other sounds and visual input, with the help of our relevant prior knowledge and the context in which we are listening.” (p.1).

Benson and Voller(1997, cited in Carter and Nunan,2002) states that: The widespread availability of audio tape, videotape, CD-Roms, DVDs, educational softwares and internet downloads of sound and video files has vastly increased potential input material for language learning. Consequently, selection of the most appropriate input, chunking the input into manageable and useful segments, developing support material for self access learning and training of learners in the best uses of this input is ever more important.

There are a vast sources of input available to English learners to improve their listening skill which among them we can refer to tapes (have not been used anymore), VCDs, DVDs, Blue rays(new technology of film formats which is getting replaced VCDs and DVDs), Flash memories and especially internet which is put through World Wide Web(WWW). According to Davis (1997),

The emergence of the World Wide Web (now known simply as "the Web") in the early 1990s marked a significant change in the use of communications technology for all computer users. Email and other forms of electronic communication had been in existence for many years, but the launch of Mosaic, the first graphical Web browser, in 1993 brought about a radical change in the ways in which we communicate electronically. The launch of the Web in the public arena immediately began to attract the attention of language teachers. (P.42)

The Web enabled the user to branch to different pages on computers anywhere in the world simply by pointing and clicking at a piece of text or an image. This opened up access to thousands of authentic foreign-language websites to teachers and students that could be used in a variety of ways. Language teachers responded by developing more structured activities and online exercise (Leloup & Ponterio 2003)

The three most popular uses of the Internet for language teaching are electronic mail (email), the World Wide Web, and Multiple-user-domains Object Oriented (MOOs). Numerous programs exist for using electronic mail. Using e-mail, students can receive effective feedback. The teacher is able to respond to requests from students and examine their work in progress. E-mail feedback makes it possible for a teacher to develop ideas, both collectively and individually and ask better questions and at the same time provide examples and offer remarks. There is a large and increasing amount of educational material on the Web provided by universities worldwide to support online courses and degree programs. For autonomous language learners interested in improving their listening comprehension, the Internet now provides a diversity of audio sources comparable to what is available in text. In a guide to using computers in language teaching, Szendeffy (2005) argues that computers provide students and teachers with great access and integration of material than tape recorders or videocassettes. “Having examined the available sources on developing learners’ listening skills in language classes, it is easier to understand why Internet audio has suddenly become popular now” (Kavaliauskienė, 2008)

Technology has significant effect on language learning and above all Technology increases Language Learning (TELL). According to Smith (2004) “computer technology can provide the student with the means to control his or her own learning, to construct meaning and to evaluate and monitor their own performance” (p.1). Bruce (1993) claims that the computer will modify the nature of learning by substituting the control of learning more in the hands of the learner in other words it is more learner-centered.

Teachers can also modify and adopt any CALL learning materials and create relaxed atmosphere for learning, as a result, to suite the learners’ needs and levels of competence.

While using the CALL materials learners have the autonomy to identify and adopt the kind of strategy that would best suit their learning style and choosing such a strategy would also facilitate the learning process.

B. CALL and Motivation

According to Gardner and Lambert (1959) motivation was held to be responsible for second and foreign language learning achievement to a great degree. After the introduction of computers in language teaching, the teaching of English has become more practical and fun for the learners. So the use of computers in the language classes may improve the learners' attitudes and motivation for language learning. The study of motivation is concerned with the energy, direction and exploration of the language learner's behavior, namely, what drives the learner to behave in this way or another way during the language learning process (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Several researchers reported the positive effects of using technology on student motivation. In addition to other benefits of computers, affective sides of CALL like learning style, motivation, personality and other factors have been under question with the use of computers in language classes (Genç & Aydın, 2010). Lumley (1991), for example found that students in traditional classrooms become bored if tasks are too easy and frustrated when they are too difficult. Using technology to diagnose students' strengths and then planning activities to build on those strengths builds a student's motivation to learn and succeed. Technology improves motivation, engagement and interest when students use multimedia programs and software designed to develop skills and knowledge. Using audio and video technologies brings content to life and stimulates learning. Soo (1999 as cited in Nunan and Carter 2002) links motivation and CALL learning style: if a teaching style does not match students' learning style to some degree, instruction may be perceived as boring and incomprehensible, and students are less motivated.

Boster, Meyer, Roberto, and Inge, (2002) cites studies of teacher beliefs that multimedia presentations help increase interest, attention and curiosity. Teachers believed this increased attention led to increased retention and motivation, which ultimately led to better learning and improvement in student grades.

C. Empirical Background to the Study

The recent literature on second language learning has witnessed a growing interest in computer assisted language learning and teaching. Many studies have investigated the role of new technological devices on language learning. For example, Jakobsdottir and Hooper (1995) found that when computers 'read' a text aloud, learners' listening skill and motivation improve.

Recent studies such as (Gruba, 2004 and Smidt & Hegelheimer, 2004) showed that authentic digital video programming is a valuable tool that provides high levels of input and results in improvements in students' output. Good quality videos are widely considered more powerful, more salient, and more comprehensible than other traditional media for second and foreign language students (Gruba, 2004).

Research indicates that computer technology can help support learning and is especially useful in developing the higher-order skills of critical thinking, analysis, and scientific inquiry "by engaging students in authentic, complex tasks within collaborative learning contexts" (Roschelle, Pea, Hoadley, Gordin & Means, 2000). In a recent study conducted by Al-Hammadi (2011) which investigated the effectiveness of using multimedia in developing listening skills, he found that multimedia software could be useful English language tool that raise students' motivation by increasing their confidence, encouraging them and broadening their listening and oral skills.

A report by the US Dept of Education (1995) stated that students felt that the use of technology made them feel smarter and empowered them with knowledge that others didn't have. Students in this study also reported that using computers made them feel special and important. Seventy percent of students surveyed thought that computers "made learning

more fun.” In a study commissioned by the Software and Information Industry Association, Sivin-Kachala and Bialo (2000) reviewed 311 research studies on the effectiveness of technology on student achievement. Their findings revealed positive and consistent patterns when students were engaged in technology-rich environments, including significant gains and achievement in all subject areas, increased achievement in preschool through high school for both regular and special needs students, and improved attitudes toward learning and increased self-esteem.

A less traditional incentive program could give teachers credits for hours spent in professional development; teachers could use these credits to earn technology for their classrooms, loans of hardware and software to be used at home, or reduced prices on personal equipment (Guhlin, 1996). Mini-grants might reward teachers who have innovative ideas for using technology in instruction (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1994).

As a language lab expert, the researcher has observed that EFL learners usually have problems in listening comprehension. Inaccessibility of authentic real-life like materials and sources of input might be considered as one of the major problems which made development of native-like listening proficiency a virtually impossible task for Iranian EFL learners. Such extreme restrictions of authentic listening materials usually have a detrimental effect on learners’ motivation as well. Underdeveloped listening skills gradually demotivated learners and lead not only to negative attitudes toward listening activities but to formation of disbelief in their capabilities as learners. They begin to develop the misconception that they cannot comprehend native speakers. The immeasurable negative impact of such negative beliefs on the development of learners’ communicative oral proficiency need not be mentioned.

Advances and increased availability of computers have altered and expanded the field of second/foreign language education. Computers can now be used in language laboratories where the main end is improving students’ speaking and listening comprehension. From this perspective, CALL can be seen as an approach to teaching and learning foreign languages whereby the computer and computer-based recourses such as the internet are used to present reinforce and assess material to be learned through providing learners with various sources of

listening comprehension texts and tasks and involving them in such activities. Inspired by this belief, the present study set to investigate the effect of CALL on enhancing Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension skill. The second purpose of this research project was to see whether the use of computers would motivate the learners in their language learning process or not.

II. Method

In this study, the following research questions were formulated.

- 1- Does computer-assisted language learning have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?
- 2- Does computer-assisted language learning enhance Iranian EFL learners' motivation toward language learning?

A. Participants

The participants in this study were selected from the population of 90 male and female EFL university students at Islamic Azad University-Tabriz branch, with an age range of 19 to 25. They had registered in four classes and were taking Conversation and Lab Course 2, which is an obligatory four-credit course for EFL sophomores. They came from a bilingual background, Turkish and Persian. Since the participants formed intact groups, a preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to all students to assess their general proficiency and 40 test takers who obtained a score range of 60-70 were selected to form the research participants. The participants were further randomly assigned as the control group who were taught using traditional methods of teaching with no multimedia laboratory and the experimental group who attended multimedia language laboratory where a personal computer was available for each participant. The participants in the experimental group received further listening activities through internet as will be explained in the procedure section.

B. Instruments

To obtain the research data, the researcher made use of the proficiency PET test, the Listening Pre-test, the Listening Post-test, and the Motivation Questionnaire. In addition the other instruments used in this project were the computer hard ware, computer software, the internet and supplementary listening tasks.

C. Procedure

This quasi-experimental study was conducted in an English Lab with two intact classes which formed the control and experimental groups who participated in proficiency pre-test to verify groups' initial homogeneity and compensate for lack of random sampling.

Having assessed the groups' initial homogeneity, the researcher assigned them randomly as the experimental and control groups. The program was a twenty four- session course, each session lasting for 90 minutes. Each session proceeded in the following way:

1. Warm-up
2. Topic discussion
3. Unheard and heard listening comprehension
4. Reviewing new vocabulary
5. Brief explanation of grammatical points

The syllabus was the same for two groups and used the same instrument which is usual in language laboratories, except that control group did not use computer. The experimental group participants were sent extra listening comprehension files through their emails and could have more listening activities. They had to write down the answers and sent them back to the teacher through an e-mail. For twelve weeks, the participants in the experimental group received twenty listening comprehension tasks. They were required to return their answers within a one day interval recorded by the researcher in feedback report sheet which were designed by the researcher to record the students' answers. The tasks were chosen from Top Notch series assessment exam software according to the levels of students. The text and audio parts of the tasks were compiled by Word 2003, 2007 as Word files and were sent to the participants

At the end of these activities the listening comprehension post-test was administered to both groups in order to observe the probable impact of CALL on the participants' listening comprehension skill. The researcher also distributed a motivation questionnaire after the post-test and at the end of research procedure to evaluate participants' motivation when using computer in teaching / learning process.

III. Data analysis

To answer the research questions, the researcher used the following statistical tests:

First an independent- samples t-test was used to assess the homogeneity of the groups in terms of their general proficiency as measured by the Preliminary English Test (PET). The results of this test is shown in the table 1 below.

TABLE 1.

Descriptive Statistics and Independent t-test for the Proficiency Mean Scores

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
	F	Sig.	T	Df				
Equal variances assumed	2.60	.115	1.02	38	.314	4.30	-4.23	12.83
Equal variances not assumed			1.02	34.98	.315	4.30	-4.26	12.86

As the results of the independent t-test in Table 1 Indicate, there was no significant difference between the two groups' general proficiency as measured by the PET test (**t (38)**

=1.02, P=.314). That is to say, the two groups were approximately at the same level of proficiency.

A. Research Question One

The first research question investigated the effect of using computer on improving Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension. To answer this question, the researcher conducted an ANCOVA analysis of the groups scores from the pre-test and the post-test. One of the requirements of this test is the normality of the score distribution. Thus, it was necessary to conduct a One-Sample Kolmogorov- Smirnov test. Based on the results of this test, as reflected in Table 2 the normal distribution assumption seems to hold.

TABLE 2.
 One-Sample Kolmogorov- Smirnov Test of Normality

Group	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest 1.00	.178	20	.096	.888	20	.025
2.00	.189	20	.059	.950	20	.369
post2 1.00	.132	20	.200*	.958	20	.501
2.00	.151	20	.200*	.946	20	.317

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

After the normality of the distribution was confirmed, the researcher estimated the statistical descriptive of the scores as shown in Table 3.

TABLE.3
 Descriptive Statistics of the Scores from Listening Post-test

group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	8.95	1.70	20
Control	6.00	1.91	20
Total	7.47	2.33	40

As the descriptive statistics show in Table 3, the mean score of the experimental group was **8.95**, but the mean score of the control group was **6.0**. In order to see whether this difference was statistically significant, the researcher conducted an ANCOVA analysis, the results of which is presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4.

ANCOVA Analysis of the Listening Comprehension Pre/Post-Test Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	118.21 ^a	2	59.10	23.32	.000
Intercept	86.34	1	86.34	34.07	.000
Pretest	31.19	1	31.19	12.30	.001
Group	70.30	1	70.30	27.74	.000
Error	93.76	37	2.53		
Total	2447.00	40			
Corrected Total	211.97	39			

As it is indicated in Table 4, there is a statistically significant difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups, ($F(1,37) = 27.75, P = .000$). Since P value is lower than .05, the first null hypothesis of the study is rejected and the positive influence of CALL on the participants' listening comprehension skill was confirmed. This difference can be seen clearly in the figure 1 below.

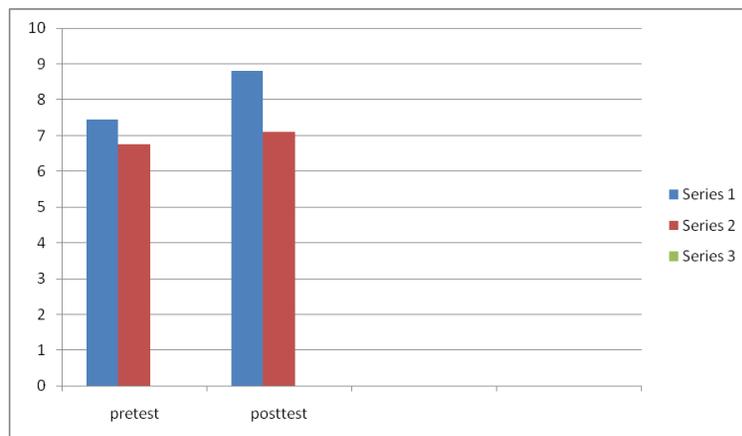


Figure 1. Listening comprehension mean scores of the two groups

B. Research Question Two

The second research question investigated the effect of using computer on motivating EFL learners. To answer this question, the researcher modified the motivation questionnaire which was originally developed by Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, Mckeachie (1993). The revised questionnaire was piloted prior to the main study. The reliability of the questionnaire, as shown in Table 5, was **.89** which was acceptably high enough. Thus, it could be concluded that the questions had the optimal level of reliability.

TABLE 5.

The Reliability Estimate of the Motivation Questions measured in the Pilot Study

	N	Mean	Variance	Covariance	Efficiency	(alpha)
Reliability of the questionnaire questions	46	4.62	3.05	0.46	0.15	0.89

After reducing the number of the motivation questions and deleting the ones which had a lower level of reliability, the researcher distributed the final form of the questionnaire to both groups at the end of the term. Again the reliability of the new form was calculated as indicated in table 6 below.

TABLE 6.

The Reliability Estimate of the Motivation Questions measured in the Main Study

	N	Mean	Variance	Covariance	Correlation	α (alpha)
Reliability of the motivation questionnaire	50	5.24	2.71	0.46	0.17	0.91

As it is indicated in table 6 Cronbach's α (alpha) coefficient of reliability for motivation questions was $\alpha=0.91$. The Cronbach's α (alpha) coefficient of reliability is between **0** and **1**. As the coefficient was near to **1** and was above **0.6**, the questions in this research had enough reliability and internal consistency to test the participants' motivation.

The researcher, further, run an independent samples t-test on the data obtained from this questionnaire to compare the mean scores of the two groups. Table 7 below presents the descriptive statistics of the groups.

TABLE 7.
 Descriptive Statistics of the Groups' Responses to the Motivation Questionnaire

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	21	78.28	10.90	2.37
Control	17	69.07	11.24	2.72

As the results of the independent samples t-test in table 8 indicates, the difference between the two groups reached significance level ($t_{(36)} = 2.55, p = .015$).

Table 8.
 . Independent Samples t-test of the Groups' Responses to the Motivation Questionnaire

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper

Motivate	Equal variances assumed	.044	.835	2.553	36	.015	9.20728	3.60696	1.89202	16.52254
	Equal variances not assumed			2.544	33.902	.016	9.20728	3.61920	1.85140	16.56317

IV. Discussion

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of using computer and internet on improving EFL learners' listening comprehension skill and motivation. The findings of the study indicated that the use of computer had a significant role on the improvement of EFL learners' listening comprehension. The findings emerging from the present study are in line with the suggestion of Pederson (1988 cited in Levy 1997) who has claimed that CALL can encourage the development of language learning skills and result in more learning. The findings of this research also support those of Holliday (1993, 1995, 1998, and 1999 as cited in Carter and Nunan 2002) who has suggested that the repetitive nature of input through internet assists learners in understandings linguistics cues.

The results are also consistent with the findings of John and Torrez (2001) who have emphasized the possibilities for second language learning offered by new technological devices. The findings are also in line with the findings of Sivin-Kachala and Bialo (2000) whose research findings revealed positive and consistent patterns of effectiveness of technology when students were engaged in teaching environments.

As for the impact of CALL on the participants' motivation, the findings from this study revealed a meaningful increase in the experimental group's motivation level as compared to that of the control group. They might have been highly motivated because of the use of computer and internet and it can be related to the attractiveness of technological devices to language learners in developing countries.

The findings might be explained in terms of Krashen's input hypothesis (1985), the significance of authentic teaching materials and activities (Guariento & Morely, 2001), the attractiveness of task-based activities for the learners (Oxford, 2006), and the importance of interaction in the target language (Taylor, cited in Chastain, 1988). According to Krashen (1985), language learners improve and progress along the 'natural order when their received second language 'input' that is one step beyond their current stage of linguistic competence. The improvement in the listening skill of the participants in the experimental group might be attributable to the supplementary input they received which was carefully selected to be just beyond their proficiency level and thus comprehensible.

The effectiveness of the treatment could be pertinent to the authenticity of the materials used as supplementary listening texts. Guariento and Morely (2001) have underscored the role of authentic materials in maintaining and increasing learners' motivation on the ground that they give the learner the feeling that he/she is learning the real language. Oxford (2006) has also suggested that using authentic tasks can increase the learners' motivation for taking part in classroom activities and participate in different task-based activities. Moreover, Tasks can increase learners' ability in real communication. According to Taylor (as cited in Chastain, 1988), communication in real language situations can be very helpful. For real communication to take place, students need to be interacting with someone else, whether teachers or other peoples.

The use of supplementary listening texts could be regarded a task-based activity which engaged the learners to a great extend. Particularly since such tasks were assigned and e-mailed to the participants and the completion of tasks entailed some authentic activity, e.g. using computers, they could have involved learners' more deeply in real context activities that have improved their listening skill and increased their motivation.

Computers can be a very important source for providing input. Computers and language learning are closely inter-related and integration of both can enable students to organize and process at the touch of keyboard button. In this study the researcher used different and authentic sources of input with the help of computer technology and internet. Such devices made it

possible to get immediate feedback from the participants and enabled the researcher to modify further input accordingly.

V. Conclusion

Two essential conclusions might be drawn from the present study. Firstly, it might be concluded that Computers and language learning are closely inter-related and integration of both can enable students to organize and process at the touch of keyboard button. Computers can be a very important source for providing input which is authentic. According to Guariento and Morely (2001), authentic materials maintain and increase learners' motivation because they give learners the feeling that they are learning the real language.

Secondly, CALL can be effectively used as a device to enhance the motivation of EFL learners. This facilitative effect might be attributed to the immediate feedback the researcher could gain from the participants' and to the subsequent modifications of the input based on the views of the participants. It seems that this process made the tasks more compatible with the needs and interests of those who received them. That is to say, as Oxford (2006) has suggested using authentic tasks can increase the learners' motivation for taking part in classroom activities and participate in different task-based activities. In the present study, personalizing activities based on the feedback received was, in fact, an attempt to make them more needs-based and authentic.

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