

# **An Investigation of EFL Learners' Perceptions towards Establishing a Digital Language Laboratory in a Saudi College**

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## **Abstract**

*The present research aims at presenting the positive aspects of establishing a digital language laboratory and validates its impact on the target students' achievement in English. Learning a foreign language is a tedious task demanding practice and attention. The language laboratory offers attractive digital milieu besides practice and exposure to the target language to the students pursuing English as Foreign Language (EFL). The audio-video aids in the language labs promote self-regulated and the computer generated tests would make them ready for many entrance exams for the higher education abroad. Hence, the researcher proposes a lively teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) ambience with the assistance of computers. The study plans to explore the attitudes of EFL students towards traditional and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). The participants are the girl students from English department, College of Arts & Sciences for Girls at Wadi Addawasir in Saudi Arabia. The methodology adopted in the present study is both qualitative and quantitative method of survey through questionnaire and semi-interviews among the participants. The findings of the study would assert the need of introducing Language Laboratory in English program*  
**Keywords:** CALL, EFL, Language Laboratory, Quantitative and Qualitative Survey.

## **1. Introduction**

The current generation is highly receptive to technology and regards traditional mode of language learning in the classrooms as boring. The same applies to educational sectors in Saudi Arabia too equipped with smart boards, blackboard learning, collaborative sessions, and virtual classes. Yet, the EFL learners are passive receivers since the instructor demonstrates the theoretical aspects of the target language forms. They require both oral and written practice intensively excluding the regular college schedule. The researcher has noticed that the schedule allotted for the EFL course is insufficient. The language laboratory offers attractive digital milieu besides practice and exposure to the target language to the students pursuing English as Foreign Language (EFL). The aim of EFL course is not just receiving a degree, but honing their communicative competency. It can be achieved only through a digital language laboratory. The students in contrast to traditional classroom atmosphere actively participate and perform several target language learning exercises individually. The teachers can observe, control and guide the activities of the students through a console, an important aspect available in the language laboratories simultaneously. The audio-video aids in the language labs promote self-regulated and the computer generated tests would make them ready for many entrance exams for the higher education abroad.

## **2. Literature Review**

The Saudi vision 2030 envisages employing modern technologies in education system to raise the efficiency of performance among the Saudi learners. Consequently, technology assisted is adopted by all the academic institutions globally including Saudi education sectors. Several researches have been conducted and proved successful with implementation of CALL in their academic institutions. Mahdi (2013) states, several educational institutions are being provided with computers and networking for CALL by the Saudi government. The main reason is to get the Saudi youth tailor-ready for the trade market at international level that in turn require proficiency in English. Previous research throws light on the significance of CALL and the attitudes of students are explored largely. Alrazeq Saeed (2018) investigated the attitudes of Jordanian language learners towards using CALL and found that it assists in motivating them to improve their language skills besides communication skills. Robert Ayres (2013) examined and highlighted the positive attitudes of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners with

relevant to their level of computer knowledge, level of study and age. An Education Makers Panel comprising Afshari, Ghafiskr, Siraj & Jing (2013) in their research discovered that CALL is useful and easy to use. Wang-ru (2016) describes on how Chinese education sectors implemented CALL in their institutions successfully.

Further, Abu Seileek, Ali (2007) finds in a survey that students respond completely to both the CALL approach and the supportive computer-mediated techniques. Further, Mozghan Sedaghatkar (2018) proved the effectiveness of CALL on immediate retention of vocabularies in a research conducted on the university students. Hailah Alhujaylan (2019) states using CALL improves writing skills of students within a short period compared to that of the traditional ways of improving the writing skills.

### 3. Research Problem

The present research aims to find solution to the following statements

Is the traditional mode of teaching helpful in improving English Language Skills among the target EFL Saudi learners?

Are the target EFL learners interested in establishing a Computer Assisted Language Laboratory?

### 4. Participants

The sample of the study comprises 146 Saudi girls EFL learners at College of Arts & Science at Wadi Aldwasir, Saudi Arabia. They belong to different levels of English department pursuing English Program in Literature, Language and Linguistics semester wise. They complete the English program within four years comprising eight semesters. Each course has 45 credit hours covering fifteen weeks. The participants are from different age ranges as mentioned in the below table.

#### Age of the Participants

| Age          | N          | %           |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 15-18        | 52         | 35.6        |
| 19-22        | 73         | 50          |
| 23-25        | 21         | 14.3        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Table-1

The participants for the semi-structured interview are selected from higher level of their studies- 8 from level 6, 12 from level 7 and 16 from level 8 as mentioned in the below table.

#### The Interview Participants

| Level | N  |
|-------|----|
| 6     | 8  |
| 7     | 12 |
| 8     | 16 |

Table-2

Majority of the interview participants are from level seven and level eight as they can provide valuable suggestions for the establishment of Computer based language laboratory and its pros and cons.

### 5. Methodology

The study implements both qualitative and quantitative survey to explore the attitudes of the EFL learners towards establishing Digital Language Laboratory in their campus. The total participants are 146 pursuing English program at College of Arts & Sciences for Girls at Wadi Addawasir, Saudi Arabia. The EFL learners complete the English program at eight levels, each semester two levels and within four semesters they are qualified as graduates in English. The level seven and eight students were interviewed seeking their views on Computer Assisted Language Learning. They showed interest and positive attitude towards the language learning through technology. The obvious reasons they expressed that their experiences of

language learning are constrained to the classroom pedagogy with minimum focus on the practical use of the foreign language, a drawback. A few further commented it's a necessity especially in their country that provides less exposure to the functional use of the target language.

The questionnaire administered among the sample throws light on their age, level of the course and their views, awareness and attitudes towards Language Learning with the help of technology. The first two queries elicit information on their age and level of their course. The objectives of the remaining eight inquiries are based on Likert 4 scale as mentioned in the below table:

### Objectives of the Questionnaire

| Question  | Objective  |
|---|--|
| I get plenty of time to practice English language skills in the classroom.        | To find whether the schedule allotted for their courses is sufficient for language learning.   |
| I prefer instant feedback of my tests   | To explore the differences between traditional and CALL mode of evaluation.<br>The results of the tests in traditional mode of teaching language would be declared after evaluated by the instructors. Meanwhile the students remain curious. However, the tests attempted on computer systems with the help of the software generate instant results on the screen. |
| I desire practicing English language independently                                | To find the attitude of the students towards independent language learning. The great advantage of computer assisted language learning is the learners perform language tasks independently. In contrast to the teacher oriented teaching.   |
| I prefer completing English tasks in groups                                       | To check if they prefer cooperative language learning. This is possible in oral language activities like group discussions, JAM, presentations.....  |
| I wish my English teacher guide my language learning process personally           | To know their choice of language learning process either active or passive mode of learning  |
| I like performing language tasks on my computer                                   | To explore their experience in using computer for language learning  |
| I wish a computer assisted language laboratory is introduced in my English course | To discover their attitude towards introduction of CALL in their courses   |
| Learning English skills in a computer assisted language lab benefits me a lot     | To find their opinions on the benefits of CALL   |

Table-3

## 6. Data Analysis

The Likert 4 scale questionnaire is analyzed both statistically and descriptively as below. The questions are represented by alphabets. Descriptive and frequency analysis including means, standard deviation, median and variance are conducted in the present study as mentioned in the below table.

### Likert Scale Questionnaire Analysis

|               | Age  | Level | Q1 (A) | Q2 (B) | Q3 (C) | Q4(D) | Q5(E) | Q7(F) | Q8(G) | Q9(H) |
|---------------|------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Mean          | 19.3 | 4.1   | 3.02   | 2.8    | 2.3    | 2.9   | 1.9   | 2.1   | 2.6   | 2.9   |
| Std Deviation | 1.9  | 2.0   | 0.8    | 1.0    | 0.9    | 1.0   | 1.1   | 1.0   | 1.1   | 0.8   |
| Median        | 19.0 | 4.0   | 3.0    | 3.0    | 2.0    | 3.0   | 2.0   | 3.0   | 3.0   | 3.0   |

|          |  |  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|----------|--|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|          |  |  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Variance |  |  | 0.7 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.8 | 0.7 |

Table-4

### 6.1 Heat map

A Heat map is a graphical representation of data where the individual values contained in a matrix are represented as colors. Heat maps are perfect for exploring the correlation of features in a dataset. Therefore, the present study observes and presents the data in the following figure to reveal the correlation of the data basis.

### Heat map with annotations

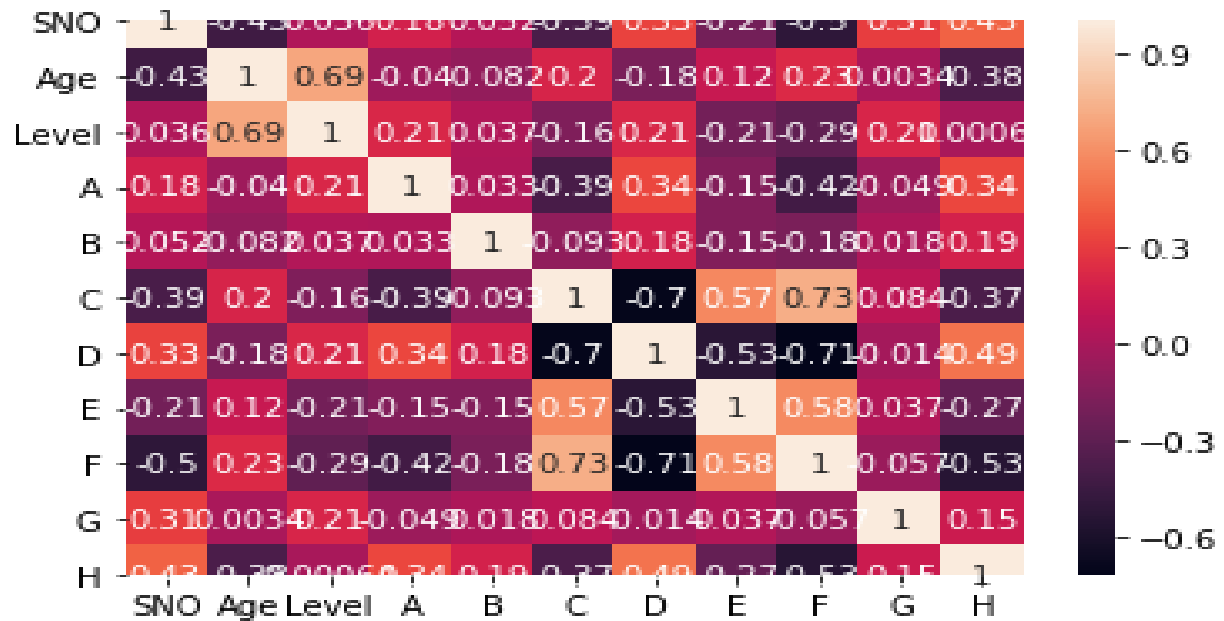


Figure-1

The above colorful figure vividly display the correlation among the dataset based on Likert 4 scale questionnaire.

### 6.2 Result

The results reveal that the attitudes of the participants under the study are positive towards the benefits of CALL. (Table-4) The aim of the study is to explore the attitudes of the EFL target students towards CALL and its introduction in their English courses. Majority of the participants disagreed that they get plenty of time to practice English language skills in the classroom. 30.8% of them strongly agreed prefer instant feedback of their tests. Most of them 49.3% strongly agreed that they desire practicing English language tasks independently whereas, 40.4% prefer completing their language tasks in groups, 34.2% strongly agreed that they wish their English teacher guide their language learning process personally, 29.4% wish a computer assisted language laboratory is introduced in their English course and 35.6% expressed that learning English skills in a computer assisted language lab benefits them a lot.

### Preferences towards CALL Analysis

| Question                                 | Strongly Agree (%) | Agree (%) | Disagree (%) | Strongly Disagree (%) | No response (%) |
|--|--------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| I get plenty of time to practice English | 6.8                | 19.1      | 39.7         | 34.2                  | -----           |

|   |      |      |      |      |       |
|---|------|------|------|------|-------|
| language skills in the classroom.   |      |      |      |      |       |
| I prefer instant feedback of my tests   | 30.8 | 28   | 21.9 | 19.1 | ----- |
| I desire practicing English language independently                                | 49.3 | 19.8 | 15.7 | 15   | ----- |
| I prefer completing English tasks in groups                                       | 40.4 | 30.8 | 14.3 | 14.3 | ----- |
| I wish my English teacher guide my language learning process personally           | 34.2 | 22.6 | 23.2 | 12.3 | 7.5   |
| I like performing language tasks on my computer                                   | 37.6 | 26.7 | 28.7 | 6.8  | ----- |
| I wish a computer assisted language laboratory is introduced in my English course | 28.7 | 29.4 | 20.5 | 21.2 | ----- |
| Learning English skills in a computer assisted language lab benefits me a lot     | 35.6 | 35.6 | 21.9 | 6.8  | ----- |

Table-5

## 7. Conclusion

The present research is conducted aiming to determine the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners towards imbibing a Computer Assisted Language Laboratory in their English courses. The responses of the higher level students are highly appreciable as they are enthusiastic regarding learning with CALL. The data reveals the positive preferences of the EFL learners towards establishing CALL in their college premises. They feel it provides plenty of opportunities to learn a foreign language practically. The Digital Language Laboratory provides instant feedback of their tests, assists them in practicing independently leading to autonomous language learning, and teacher guides the students personally in completing their language tasks. The oral language encourages EFL learners to perform in group tasks such as group discussions and role-plays. Thus, the present study recommends imbibing a digital language laboratory to settle the language learning issues in terms of practicability among the EFL learners. It relates the research problem with a solution of allotting credit hours to the practical sessions as well to give weightage to the language laboratory.

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