IMPROVING READING SKILLS THROUGH CALL FOR ESL LEARNERS: A SURVEY

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ABSTRACT:

Pakistan is a developing country. Its literacy rate is not praiseworthy and is at the low level in the ranking list of literate countries. The situation is even worse in rural areas. English is being used all over the world as an international language. It has become a Lingua Franca and a language of greater opportunities. It also enjoys a supreme status in society. Its sound knowledge is a successful passport for any job. For learning any language, both the oral and written skills are of equal importance. In fact, learning a second language is never easy. Learners have to wrestle with new vocabulary, rules of grammar, pronunciation and more. Computer assisted language learning is gaining popularity among educationists. So the current study determines to explore the perceptions of English teachers on integration of CALL in English language classroom. It also evaluated the ways to improve reading skills through CALL at secondary level. The study contained quantitative paradigm as research design. One hundred students and thirty teachers from Bahawalpur region participated in this study. The data was assembled through a close-ended questionnaire. The collected data was analyzed in SPSS. The results demonstrated that the Pakistani students have shown positive attitude towards CALL using inside the classrooms. The study also spotlighted that it motivated the learners to learn in team. If CALL is implemented efficiently in rural areas of Pakistan, it will be a high ranking tool for language learning. The recommendations and findings of this study should be taken into careful consideration and steps should be taken to implement those in our classrooms. If implemented intentionally, it is expected that the state of the teaching and learning of vocabulary skills at secondary level will be improved remarkably.

KEYWORDS: Reading Skills, CALL, Improve, Integration, Rural Areas,

INTRODUCTION:

Pakistan is a developing country. Its literacy rate is not praiseworthy and is at the low level in the ranking list of literate countries. The situation is even worse in rural areas (Bhatti, 2016). The students even after twelve years educations are unable to get command over English Language (Kannan, 2009; Bhatti, 2016). Students just study to pass their exams and most of them prepare specific areas of syllabus (Warsi, 2004) which directly affects their learning. Language is a weapon for man. It has to be taught and used in social groups. It is the only way to speak with each other and it is the way by which we can send our messages to others. It is not only used for routine dialogue but also used in education, research and science in spoken as well as in written form. Without it, man is like a dumb animal. For learning any language, both the oral and written skills are of equal importance. For this purpose, there is a dire need of interaction among the learner, educator and the study material. In fact, English is being used

all over the world as an international language and has become a Lingua Franca and a language of greater opportunities. It also enjoys a supreme status in society. Its sound knowledge is a successful passport for any job. Basically, learning a second language is never easy. It takes a long time to master it. Academic English is essential for the success of ESL learners in school settings. The social indicators of students learning process are parents, peers and teachers who help in refining the learning process of the learners through different literary events. It intends to investigate the problems, difficulties, needs and interests of the students of HSSC level in the area of reading skills. Reading skills have vital role for the success of students at school (Jarvis & Pastuszka, 2008. To calculate, students who can do extremely well in schools are those who have a strong foundation in reading and receive encouragement at home (Yubune, Kanda, & Tabuchi, 2007). Jose & Raja (2011) recommend that reading have immense importance for children in higher secondary schools. A sad thing is that schools offer the chance of improving reading skills to a very little amount (Bangs, 2011); however, a recent study on the use of technology in language education found that this position can be improved by using computers in higher secondary schools (Bax, 2011). The impact of technology in every field of life has increased rapidly so there is dire need to adopt CALL method in teaching and learning English in rural areas of Pakistan. It will help to enhance reading skills of English language learners. It is observed that most of teachers in rural areas are unable to pronounce many English words so their students also face problems to read efficiently. Many of the teachers are unaware of reading techniques and cannot help their students to teach perfectly. HSSC students of rural areas cannot pronounce the words accurately, unaware how to pronounce vowels and consonants rightly. It is observed that they feel shy while reading English rather than Urdu. Reading problems are Lack of self – esteem, lack of phonological awareness, lack of knowledge of orthographic and sight words (Kilpatrick, 2015). Phonemic awareness is difficult for ELLs because they may not yet have enough experience with English to be able to distinguish sounds that differ from those of their native language (Irujo, 2007). ESL students at higher secondary level in rural areas of Pakistan have lack of accuracy, fluency, phonological awareness and sight words problems while reading English Language from book and no one bothers to resolve this problem in future because there is no check and balance for reading skill in exams.

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

The researcher has observed that the secondary level learners of Bahawalpur face problems and difficulties in the area of reading skills. The students encounter difficulty in perceiving and recognizing the text of English. They cannot attain mastery and command of them in daily life interaction, communication, the academic subjects and requirements. So teaching reading to the secondary level learners through CALL is a new idea. Most of the English teachers are unaware of this innovative technique. That's why it seems them difficult to switch over to this new technique of teaching. The students also remain dull in learning reading skills in traditional classrooms. In our government schools, the majority of the students cannot comprehend the words they have been taught. With this scenario, the researcher decided to conduct a research on "Improving Reading Skills through CALL for ESL Learners: A Survey". This study will draw the attention of the teachers to use CALL to make their teaching effective, easy and

interesting. It will also investigate how the use of CALL helps the learners to overcome their short comings of reading skills in the target language. This technique has been considered to be an effective and productive activity. It will enhance the reading skills of English language learners. Reading competence comes only from self-motivation and a teacher can built confidence of learners through proficiency level of reading skill.

1.2 Objectives of the Study:

This study is an attempt to search for the most appropriate, fruitful and inspirational way to teach reading skills in secondary schools. So the objectives of the current study were:
1. To find out the impact of CALL for improving reading skills.
2. To find out the perceptions of the teachers regarding the use of CALL.

1.3 Research Questions of the Study:

To achieve the required objectives, following research questions were formulated:
Q1: What is the impact of CALL upon reading skills of ESL learners?
Q2: What are the perceptions of teachers about the use of CALL in the classrooms?
Q3: How can CALL be important in acquiring reading skills at secondary level?

1.4 Significance of the Study:

The current study is an attempt to provide a detailed analysis and description of CALL in order to emphasize the important role it plays in improving reading skills. The positive results of this research will support the English teachers to use CALL for developing reading skills of their students and even they can change their methods to make the students motivated and relaxed in teaching learning process. It will enable the teachers of English of secondary level to be in a better position to diagnose the causes and to offer appropriate treatment. Thus, the teachers, scholars, syllabus designers and educationists can use the present study for various pedagogical purposes including assisting learners to attain better mastery and command of reading skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW:
2.1 The Nature of Reading Skills:

English language has become a key to interaction among global community. Today it is spoken and understood almost everywhere in the world. All the administrative issues regarding business, political and academic are discussed in English. In Pakistan, English is being used and understood as second language. It is an essential part from KG to university level. Unfortunately in Pakistan, English is considered a difficult language due to different structure of vocabulary and pronunciation from local languages. Pakistan is a country where English is the medium of instruction in private and government schools but all in vain because many students are not able to read English text properly. Warsi, (2004) explored that conditions under which English is taught in Pakistan are not conducive to teaching and learning the Language. Nawab (2012) stated that majority of the English teachers who teach English L2 reading/ text materials or language skills, still prefer to use traditional methods, while teaching reading skill. Bhatti (2012), presented the study which showed 100% rating for using old traditional methods to teach reading skills. Students read text books daily but they do not read books for pleasure (Ansari , Panhwar and Umrani, 2012). EFL learners at secondary level, face difficulties in reading where they encounter ambiguous words, unfamiliar vocabulary, and limited available time to cognitively process the text, (Rashid, 2017). Study explored that problem

faced during teaching reading are lack of interest in reading skills, short concentration and low reading comprehension, (Fareed, Jawad, Awan, 2018; Warsi, 2004). ESL learners find conventional methods of language learning non-innovative (Kessler, 2007) and believe that computer can present the literature in various forms (McEnery & Wilson, 2011), latest, and presented more fascinatingly. Computer can engage the students in language learning in a number of thrilling and interactive activities which can improve reading skills (Yubune, Kanda, & Tabuchi, 2007).
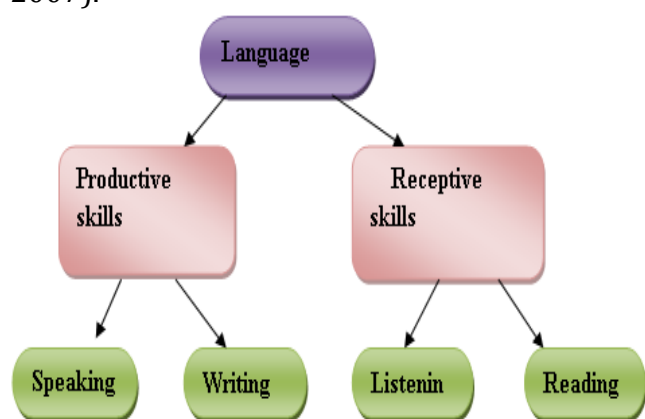
Classification of Language skills

Listening and reading skills are receptive and passive skills because the learner does not produce anything while listening or reading (Morehouse, 2017). Reading skill can be explained as "a cognitive ability which enables a human being to use while interacting with texts" (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). Reading is a means of language acquisition, communication, and of sharing information and ideas (Wikipedia, 2018). Reading is the development of interpretation written symbols to make meaning or to have new information. Reading drills more on our sense of reasoning which enables us to interpret and understand what we have read. As the third skill in language acquisition, it requires great deal of concentration on the material to be read, taking appropriate notes on the words and their

pronunciation and also the punctuation marks that guide the reading for meaningful comprehension (Straus, 2015).School children often encounter difficulty in reading especially when they are faced with difficult and ambiguous words. Sometimes it makes them lose interest in reading thereby making them not to get the content of the text due to high level of vocabulary associated with the test (Azikiwe, 2007, Straus, 2015).

However, in reading a text there is need for one to pay attention in the words used and then find the meaning of the words as they will assist the reader to acquire the message in the text and as well give description of what one has read. Children having difficulty in reading the ambiguous words are guided always by their teachers who clarifies some words and also make them to read and retell what they have read. To this end, the teacher needs to exercise patience especially with those children who are not fast in learning so as to move everyone along. Furthermore as was observed by Rasinki, (2017), making the text simple and easy to understand will go a long way to improve children's ability to read and comprehend. The text meant for children need not to be voluminous. Children need to have a short and precise text which can contain pictures that will give them a vivid or mental expression since words accompanied with pictures aid for better understanding especially in young children (Azikiwe, 2007).Reading as a receptive and productive skill needs a lot of attention and should not be taken for granted when it consists of vital information that gives the reader the opportunity to disseminate the information publicly to people understanding. Reading skills is the capability of a person to read, understand and grasp written words on a page of an article or any other reading material. The possession of a good reading skill will enable the individual to be able to assimilate a

written work within a short period while reading. Developing a reading skill for a human being is everlasting. And while reading at any given time the individual is expected to also think critically on the particular topic or subject to understand the point of the writer. A person, who desired to develop reading skill, has to do continuous reading. Pakistani ESL students should prepare for future challenges by strengthening their reading comprehension. The benefits will impact every student's life- awareness of scientific breakthroughs and global events; improved writing; entertainment. There should be engaging units which must be designed to sharpen reading strategies with thought-provoking activities such as graphic organizers, reading booklets, fill-ins, multiple choice exercises, creative expression, mixed reviews, and more. To recapitulate, reading is a skill which permits us to acquire a message be familiar with the written words (written symbols), understanding the meaning, used to teach pronunciation, acquisitive information from texts, (Коак,2011).

2.2 CALL and Reading Skills:

CALL is abbreviation of computer assisted language learning which is used by educationists to explain the use of computers as part of a language course (Hardisty & Windeatt, 1989). It is traditionally described as a means of 'presenting, reinforcing and testing' particular language items (Saeidi & Yusef, 2012). CALL offers integration of multiple media to ensure pedagogical benefits for learners (Irshad & Ghani, 2015). CALL develops relation between teacher, learner and peers; and increase motivation level of ESL learners by minimizing language learning barriers. Therefore, computer technology is an efficient mode of ESL pedagogy for promoting positive attitude to learning (Irshad & Ghani,2015).

Using the interactive computer software in the class may have encouraged the readers to process the meaning of the text more deeply and more actively (Saeidi & Yusef, 2012). Sawaki (2001) listed the studies carried out on computer-based and paper-based reading comprehension. Computer-based reading programs are effective and fairly quick in addressing the reading problems of young learners (Gerda van Wyk and Arno Louw, 2008). Computer- assisted reading programs offer learners the opportunity that we as educationalists should embrace (Wyk & Louw, 2008). The present study have been again approved that the modern technology is one of the most effective ways to improve students' English proficiency in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, combining with the higher motivation and autonomous learning abilities (Liu, 2015). CALL has showed positive results in improving the reading skills of students at secondary school (Bhatti, 2013).

Bhatti (2013) added that students enjoyed the reading material with a variety of pictures and sounds. CALL which has characteristics of large capacity, visual image, the fast speed as well as efficiency can stimulate students' interest in learning and make classroom atmosphere active so the efficiency of classroom teaching is significantly improved (Liu, 2013). The study confirms positive inclination of the learners towards language learning in CALL environment because it helps in increasing the understanding, interest and marks of students (Waheed, 2012). Nadera (2001), found through his study that e-reading is more active activity, involves more flexible reading strategies and most of all critical reading as the reader has to assess the significance of the multiplicity of material he comes across. Artan (2016), described in his recent study that control group and experimental groups consider computer

use to have a positive effect on teaching and learning, stating that access to authentic English content and YouTube made their teaching better and had a positive effect on their students' learning process. CALL makes EFL enjoyable, meaningful, and motivating relevant, and exciting, (Farrah & Tushyeh, 2010). Rahnavard & Heidar,(2017), found that the web-based learning is effective in enhancing learners' motivation in improving pronunciation. Neil J. Anderson, (2003), has emphasized in their study that metacognitive online reading strategies play an important role for both EFL and ESL readers. Some institutions also highlight their integration of technology as a point of difference in their institutional branding (Royo-Vela & Hünermund, 2016). After knowing the worth of using technology in schools, many institutions have included technology as a part of their curriculum delivery in order to enhance the learning, (Rashid et al, 2018). Reading comprehension activities improved in four areas i.e. test result, meaning construction, motivation and word defining through CALL, (Santoso, n.d). Recent study shows the valuable use of technology in EFL reading instruction and it works best when integrated in the instructional scheme (Taj, Ali, Sipra & Ahmad, 2017). A study shows that teachers realize that technology can do wonders only if it is delivered in the right way and Computers can powerfully handle a wider range of activities. (Rashid,2017) In recent studies on students and teachers, the researcher found that teachers did not use CALL to teach English language and students face certain problems in reading a text such as; slow speed of reading, pronunciation mistakes, and accent issue. Moreover, reading is most reluctant area of English Language class and students of rural areas feel problem to read English text extensively. Therefore the researcher decided to use CALL for teaching reading skill so the students had the opportunity to listen native speakers and to improve the reading issues which they faced in ESL class.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:
3.1 Research Design:

The current study was experimental in nature which included both groups: experimental and control group. In addition a questionnaire was also filled up by the teachers about their experience regarding impact of CALL for learning reading skills.

3.2 Research Tools:

Following research tools were used for the current study:
1: Questionnaire for teachers.
2: Pre-test and Post-test for students.

3.3 Research Procedures:

The study was designed according to the experimental approach .Two groups of the students were assigned as the participants of the study: an experimental group and a control group. The purpose of this research was to study the effectiveness of CALL for improving reading skills of the ESL learners to study English as a subject. This research was conducted in public and private secondary schools of Bahawalpur. For this study, the researcher chose "Randomized controlled group pre-test post-test design". As all the conditions were the same for the control and experimental groups, with the exception that the experimental group was exposed to a treatment while control group was not. Pre-test and post-test were also taken. At the same time, a questionnaire was also prepared for the teachers to collect information about their experience regarding impact of CALL on reading comprehension.

3.4 Population of the study:

Secondary level ESL learners of Bahawalpur City were the part of this study. The data was collected from ESL learners of secondary level in the academic year 2019-20. The study was limited to the Bahawalpur City only.

3.5 Sample of the Study:

In this study, one hundred secondary level students from Govt. S. D. High School, Bahawalpur and Workers Welfare High School (Girls) Bahawalpur participated. Grade-9 learners were selected randomly. Among them fifty students belonged to control group and fifty students' belonged to experimental group. Each group had equal participation of male and female students.

4. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS:

The data were analyzed with the help of using SPSS version 23. The mean distribution was calculated by using frequency table and standard deviation. The following table showed the different sources that were used by the participants for improving reading skills through CALL.

RQ1: What is the impact of CALL upon reading skills of secondary level learners?

Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation of Reading Sources

Descriptive	CALL	Book Reading	E. Media
Mean	3.97	3.90	3.10
SD	.89	.71	.68

The table1 showed that the students used CALL at their first priority to improve the reading ability. The second most important source of enhancing the reading ability was book reading. Some students also used electronic media but it was their third priority.

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers about the use of CALL in the classrooms?

Table 2 Comparison of Reading Habits between Control and Experimental Groups

Indicator	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Reading Habits	Control	50	3.12	.70	3.709	.002**
	Experimental	50	3.80	1.06		

**P<0.01

According to table 2, t-test was applied to investigate the difference between control and experimental students reading habits. There exists a significant difference between controlled and experimental groups of students in reading through CALL. The students in experimental group performed better in the test as compared with the students who participated in controlled group. The mean score of experimental group students (M=3.80, sd 1.06) and control group students (M=3.12, sd=.70), t=78(3.709). The significant value is p<0.01. The mean achievement score showed that the experimental group students have higher performance than that of control group students. They read through CALL to improve their reading performance.

RQ3: How can CALL be important in acquiring reading skills at secondary level?

Table 3 Comparison of Achievement between CALL and Non-CALL Readers

Readers	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
CALL	50	3.80	.50	1.390	.004**
Non-CALL	50	3.50	2.19		

**P<0.01

According to table 3, t-test was applied to investigate whether enhancement of motivation in reading English is due to use of CALL. The secondary level students who used to read through CALL performed better in the test as compared with the students who did not read through CALL. The mean score of CALL students (M=3.80, sd .50) and Non-CALL students (M=3.50, sd=2.19), t=78(1.390). The significant value is p<0.01.The mean

achievement score showed that the CALL students have higher performance than that of Non-CALL students. They read the texts to improve their reading performance.

4.1 Data Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire:

A questionnaire was also prepared to check the views of the teachers about the CALL to improve reading skills of the learners. Teachers told that when they provided their students proper guideline, their students took more interest in learning reading items. They considered themselves part of that activity and took part fully. At the same time 80% teachers told that they found their students more confident. 89% teachers were agreed that the use of CALL through different activities had a positive impact on the minds of the students. 100% teachers were strongly agreed that secondary level students' reading skills was improved with the help CALL.

5. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:
5.1 Findings:

The study highlights the impact of CALL on reading skills. This study gave very fruitful results in answering the research questions rationalized in the start about impact of CALL on reading skills. The results of this study are in line with Bhatti, (2013), Liu, (2015), Farrah & Tushyeh (2010), Rashid (2015) and Irshad & Ghani (2015). Bhatti (2013), explored that using CALL to teach reading skill is more significant than a teacher's lecture and the study showed 35% difference between experimental group and controlled group. Liu (2015) explored that the experimental group had huge achievements in terms of reading comprehension ability than the controlled group due to the use of CALL. Farrah & Tushyeh (2010), explored

that using CALL enhances the reading proficiency of ESL learners. Irshad & Ghani (2015), revealed that CALL has pedagogical benefits for ESL learners and it helps to increase proficiency level of English language learning.

This research spotlights the general overview of the attitudes of the students towards improvement in reading. The respondents were found more curious and interested towards the implementation of CALL in classes to learn reading skills. Variation of CALL tool helped to enhance the motivation and interest level of students. The effect of animated stories, dialogues and short stories cannot be negated in boosting up the interest in English language reading. The students showed a remarkable excitement for watching videos, listening to native speakers by using CALL in class. The ESL learners learned new ways to use the CALL environment for the enhancement of English language reading. Student centre approach enhanced self confidence in the learning of students. New feeling of liveliness made the students to love CALL learning environment. Subsequently the tiresome, dry and unexciting environment was changed into interactive, participatory and excited one which increased confidence and self-study of ESL learners. In the performance of pre-test, students were almost on same scale but after coaching session of thirty days, statistically significant difference in the marks of the students was found which were the most important cause of the attractiveness and effectiveness of CALL methodology among students.

To recapitulate, it can be concluded that for the teaching of English at secondary level, CALL proved to be an effective methodology. This study recognized the efficacy of CALL materials in their ability to

produce results especially for the improvement of reading skills. Moreover it has created an innovative way for English language reading for the students of rural areas and gave new path to researchers to move on. CALL learning environment is most effective for learning English on all aspects of language.

5.2 Conclusions:

CALL has shown positive results for the enhancement of reading skills of learners at secondary level. Using CALL for reading skill has generated a lot of interest among the students for reading skills. The students enjoyed and never get bored during learning session because CALL has variety of animated stories, sounds and eye catching pictures. Bhatti, (2013), concluded preparing power point presentations to generate more interest in language learning but in this study, the researcher found that there are certain online varieties available for the enhancement of English language learning. CALL proved its value by boosting motivation level of ESL learners and encouraged students greater than teachers. Therefore CALL is a competent mode for teaching reading skills and it promotes positive attitude for learning. In the same token, CALL proved the efficiency on reading skills for the learners presented by Liu (2015), which supports the results of the present study. Moreover, special network CALL laboratory was unavailable and classes conducted in an ordinary computer lab. The researcher faced many problems such as internet connectivity, load shedding, and lack of awareness for using CALL to enhance English language learning but noticeable change has been found after the completion of study. It is assumed that in future CALL will succeed in rural areas of Pakistan as digital media is increasingly used in and outside educational institutions. For this purpose, the report published by Ministry of Education (2004), on the development of Education in Pakistan illustrated accomplishment in computer based capacity building of ESL teachers. In addition, it aims to develop online courses for ESL learners and teachers. National Education Policy 1998-2010 also proposes significant steps for the induction of CALL at all levels in educational institution to modernize education. Likewise, National education policy (2017), aims to develop CALL resources to teach ESL learners and training for ESL teachers. These steps for the development of CALL are promising the bright future for ESL learners in Pakistan.

5.3 Suggestions and Recommendations:

On the basis of findings, following suggestions and recommendations were made:
Time may be increased for reading comprehension.
The students should be encouraged to participate in reading activities.
Medium of instruction should be in English so that they may practice the reading skills in their everyday life situations.

Parents and teachers role towards the use of reading is significant. They should encourage their kids and students to read through CALL to keep them abreast of what is happening around them. Reading training courses may be arranged for improving reading habits of students.
There ought to be sufficient daily papers to quicken reading tendencies.

This research empowers administrators to comprehend the significance of reading daily newspapers and enhances the students' communication abilities.

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