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**Using Phenomenography to compare the variation of  
language teachers and learners' attitudes towards  
Computer Assisted Language Learning**

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**Abstract**

The increasing use of new technologies in the language classroom is constantly altering the way teachers and learners experience language learning and teaching. The new possibilities that technologies bring into the language classroom need to be further examined primarily by exploring the ways in which learners and language instructors ascribe meaning to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). This paper focuses on presenting the main findings of a qualitative study using a phenomenographic approach to investigate how language teachers and learners experience, understand and ascribe meaning to CALL. The phenomenographic approach is adopted since it can richly describe the object of study by emphasising the variation in the meaning that is found in the participants' experiences of the phenomenon. More specifically, the study focuses on exploring learners' and teachers': a) range of conceptions for CALL, and b) attitudes towards the use of technological means in language learning. Briefly, students and teachers' approaches and attitudes towards CALL are analyzed separately in order to comparatively examine their views and provide constructive feedback to enhance the learning process.

**Keywords:** phenomenography; teacher attitudes; students attitudes; CALL ignorance; CALL awareness

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## 1. Introduction

It has been argued that the rapidly increasing use of computer technology in the language classroom brings new potential and possibilities in language learning and teaching (Gamper and Knapp, 2002). Research about students' and teachers' attitudes towards computer-assisted language learning in general (Ayres, 2002) or towards a specific technology (Kraemer et al., 2009; Mahfouz, 2010) reveal a positive overall contribution. Based primarily on small-scale studies, the research to date showed that students and teachers are in favour of using technology in the language classroom, as well as perceiving the benefits of its use for enhancing language competence (Varley, 2009; Mathews-Aydinly and Elaziz, 2010). Comparative studies exploring instructors' vis-à-vis students' attitudes and perceptions towards CALL reveal contradicting results. Wiebe and Kabata (2010) demonstrated that there is a gap between the students' awareness of the instructors' goals for using new technologies and the importance instructors place on CALL. Additionally, results also yielded a difference between students' reported use of CALL and instructors' perceptions of students' use of CALL, as well as between the types of technologies instructors and students thought were useful for successful instruction. Thus, in a highly technology-oriented educational system, CALL remains a phenomenon for which one can draw conflicting conclusions.

## 2. Methodology

The objective of this study is to investigate the range of perceptions students and teachers have on CALL. It is a qualitative study conducted through semi-structured interviews, which is the main instrument of phenomenography. The primary assumption of this method is the existence of a finite number of qualitatively different ways of perceiving a particular phenomenon (Souleles, 2006). The output of phenomenographic research consists of hierarchically arranged categories of description of the various conceptions of a phenomenon (Souleles, 2012). According to Souleles (2012), "phenomenography entails the empirical study of the different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, realise and understand aspects of the world around them" (p. 467).

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with 15 undergraduate students (7 male and 8 female) from five different research disciplines (engineering, fine and applied arts, media studies, geotechnical and health sciences) at different years of their study, and 12 language instructors (1 male and 11 female) in a public university in Cyprus. Considering the small number of interviewees, this is not an exhaustive study but rather a limited investigation that reflects on the dimensions of the particular context. Individual interviews lasted between fifteen to forty-five minutes and concluded when participants indicated that they had nothing more to state in relation to the interview questions. The set of questions was piloted with a number of learners within the same institution. Interviews were tape-recorded and notes were kept which form the raw material for this study. During analysis, the interviewee responses were classified into categories and each distinct way or theme in which the interviewees conceived and considered different elements of CALL was noted. This is the referential aspect of the analysis (what). At a second level of analysis, we focused on outlining how each theme was conceptualized by the interviewees (structural aspect of each thematic category). The replies comprised the conceptions expressed, and form distinctive categories that are mapped in the outcome space.

## 3. Categories of conceptions and outcome space

### 3.1. Students and instructors experiences of CALL

Without exception, all teachers stated that they use a wide range of technologies in their teaching. For both teachers and learners it was possible to distinguish different groups of technologies used in terms of their orientation and purpose. The types of technologies that encapsulate instructors and students experiences of CALL are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Instructors' and students' experiences of CALL

Instructors' experiences of CALL	Students' experiences s of CALL
1. Learning Management System	1. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)
2. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)	2. CALL glossing (L1, audio, pictural)
3. Social networking	3. Learning software
4. CALL glossing (L1, audio, pictural)	4. LMS
5. CALL software	5. Generic software and information on the web
6. Mobile devices	6. Generic multimedia resources
7. Generic software and information on the web	7. No experience of technology use
8. Generic multimedia resources	

### 3.2. Students and teachers attitudes towards CALL

This study revealed five distinct categories of students' attitudes towards CALL (Table 2) ranging from technology-dominated lesson and high awareness of CALL to the complete dismissal and ignorance of technology use in language classroom.

**Table 2:** Students attitudes towards CALL

A. Usefulness of technology-dominated lesson				
		B. Importance of technology-oriented lesson		
				C. Technology and traditional methods are useful
		D. Technology is useful but traditional methods are preferred		
		E. Not useful		
Referential Aspects				
Invent the meaning of language	Learn in a more entertaining and interesting manner	Variety of material that make the lesson more interesting	Technology provides access to information but cannot replace the teacher	Inability of computer to replace teacher
Structural Aspects				

With regard to teachers, this study revealed four distinct categories of their attitudes towards CALL (see Table 3), ranging from the importance of technology use within an appropriate pedagogical framework to preference for traditional teaching methods at the expense of technological tools.

**Table 3:** Teachers attitudes towards CALL

A. Regulated by the right pedagogical framework			
B. Integral part of teaching		C. Assistive	
		D. Useful but traditional methods are preferred	
Referential Aspects			
Pedagogy should guide the use of technology	Technology is an integral part of everyday life, including teaching and learning	Technology may facilitate learning but is not a panacea	Traditional methods allow teacher to have complete control on students' learning
Structural Aspects			

#### 4. Discussion

Students and instructors experiences and attitudes towards CALL vary from complete ignorance and depreciation of technological means to high levels of awareness and appreciation of their value in the language classroom. It is worth noting though that where there is agreement between teachers and students this is based on the perceived educational benefits of CALL in terms of enhancing authentic language use and language competence in general. Overall, students and instructors experiences of CALL tend to be consistent and adopt a shared positive stance towards the use of technology for learning and teaching.

#### 5. Conclusions

This study has provided an overview of learners' and instructors' attitudes towards CALL. This compilation of outcomes provides practitioners, policy-makers and managers with an overview of the challenges they face when endeavouring to incorporate technology in the language classroom; and thus implement different policies to overcome implementation challenges.

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