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COOPERATIVE VS. INDIVIDUAL LEARNING OF ORAL SKILLS IN A CALL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring the effectiveness of two computer-based techniques, cooperative and individual learning, for teaching and learning oral skills – listening and speaking. It was also concerned with investigating students' attitude towards using CALL approach and techniques for teaching oral skills. The sample of the study consisted of four groups. The first one studied oral skills according to the cooperative computer technique, and the second group was taught via the individual computer technique. The third group studied according to the cooperative traditional technique, while the fourth group used the individual traditional technique. The findings of the study which is based on a limited number of participants showed that the cooperative computer technique was found to be a functional method for learning and teaching oral skills. The survey conducted in this study also indicated that students had a positive attitude towards using CALL approach and the cooperative computer technique. As a result, it is recommended to integrate CALL approach into the oral skill curriculum.

KEYWORDS: oral skills; CALL; computer-mediated communication; cooperative vs. individual learning; listening and speaking.

1. Introduction

In the 1980s, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) was introduced, but it was not practical. Personal computers were scarce and CALL programs were still maturing. During the last two decades, however, matters have changed. Computers have become popular at both schools and homes. Learners generally receive training to use them, and the industry of English language programs comes to flourish. Higgins (1995) reported that computers have become more and more popular for studying language skills, including oral skills. Warschauer (1996), Levy (1997), and Crystal (2001) also pointed out that computer-based language learning improves learning language skills.

CALL has many advantages in teaching and learning oral skills, i.e., listening and speaking, over traditional learning. It is more flexible and readily available in and outside the classroom. Jeon-Ellis et al. (2005) stated that CALL-oriented projects have many advantages for teaching oral skills like using the computer anytime inside or outside the classroom. According to Ewing (2000), students find opportunities in a CALL environment to develop linguistic skills, including listening and speaking, which are unavailable in traditional L2 classrooms. Not only can learners receive immediate feedback about their errors, but CALL also allows them to work at their own pace.

CALL is helpful in learning and teaching oral skills, as it provides learners with opportunities to use language in authentic situations interactively. Mueller-Hartmann (2000) pointed that CALL projects allow students to learn oral skills in authentic situations, develop and express their views, and make meaningful communication possible. Sierra (1999) noted that CALL increases the effectiveness of performing a language task, and the computer is an excellent tool for learning the skills of listening and speaking in the classroom environment. It is also helpful in learning oral skills collaboratively. Gu (2002) emphasized that CALL-oriented classes in an EFL setting have provided students with opportunities to learn oral skills in authentic situations, which increases their levels of input and output, and enhances motivation, engagement, and willingness to learn collaboratively.

In individual learning, the student works alone and does not depend on classmates in the learning task. Cooperative learning, on the other hand, is based on the use of group or pair work in learning. According to Tan et al. (1999), cooperative learning is defined as a range of concepts and techniques used for enhancing the value of learner-learner interaction. Therefore, it is a very useful method for learners. They also confirmed that cooperative learning enhances the following six major aspects: achievement, liking for school, inter-ethnic relations, thinking skills, self-esteem, and enjoyment. Moreover, Phinney (1996) reported that cooperation and team effort should be the norm rather than the exception in learning. He added that the product of a teamwork is usually greater than what a single learner can produce. Schcolnik and Kol (1999) pointed out that teamwork skills in computerized instruction are essential for learning and cooperative group learning should be the most commonly used technique in teaching and learning EFL skills.

This study was conducted on four groups. The first one was taught according to the cooperative computer method, that is, using the cooperative computer-based group technique in teaching which includes dividing students into small groups or pairs who perform a task through interaction around the computer cooperatively. The third group used the same cooperative technique, but in the traditional way. The second group, however, studied according to the individual computer technique which means the use of computer-based teacher-class technique in teaching that includes teacher to whole class (collective) learning, and each student learns "individually" in the class via computer. The fourth group utilized the same individual technique, but in a traditional environment.

In sum, cooperative learning via computer has twofold benefits over the individual traditional technique. Firstly, it gives the group members the chance to make use of their abilities and talents. Secondly, learners will have the opportunity to have feedback through using the bulk of information available with the system. This kind of feedback is always available in a non-threatening atmosphere whenever the user wants it.

CALL approach for learning oral skills has recently developed a great deal. EFL learners can use audio or visual programs which enable them to produce synchronous and asynchronous linguistic communication for learning oral skills. Lin (1997) reported that interactive computer programs provide more authentic and communicative task-based activities for learning language skills. They include sound, graphics, video, and animation.

Coniam (1998) designed a computerized system which aims at training students and testing their performance in listening. The goal of Coniam's study is finding the effect of the program and investigating students' opinions in computerized listening. The program contains different types of exercises, such as appropriate-choice selection, true/false, and gap-fill. Coniam tested the effectiveness of the program on two groups of Hong Kong EFL learners. He compared their results to those who used a traditional method. The results of the study indicated that the computer-based listening programs discriminate well between students of differing abilities with significant correlations obtained for the computerized way. The students who used the program were asked for their reactions to the program. They responded that they find it enjoyable and non-threatening.

Ewing (2000) conducted a study about conversations of two groups of Indonesian EFL learners in a CALL environment. One was taught according to the computer-mediated project and the other studied in the conventional way. The results of Ewing's study that are related to my study indicated, "interactionally, students have more opportunity to speak and must rely on themselves rather than the instructor" (Ewing 2000: 333). They should also "take responsibility for their own language production, controlled not by the instructor but by the goals and agendas they set for themselves within the context of their group projects" (Ewing 2000: 333).

Gu (2002) investigated the effect of a computer-based course on the development of a group of Chinese EFL learners' oral skills. He concluded that CALL class is a good environment for genuine interaction between learners who benefit from each other because they work cooperatively. Computer-based communication courses have a positive effect on the learners because their linguistic input and output repertoire as well as their motivation increase. Jeon-Ellis et al. (2005) also reported that CALL-oriented projects provide learners with promising chances for making oral interactions collaboratively. They provide instructors with a context for genuine communication.

Lasagabaster and Sierra (2003) analyzed students' responses to using CALL programs and their benefits in teaching and learning language skills. The results of the study showed that CALL is more favored for learning the skill of listening than the skill of speaking. It was also found that some language skills like speaking are hardly pre-

sented in the CALL programs, and the role of the teacher is more important than the machine in learning the skill of speaking. The researchers concluded that CALL programs are complementary in the foreign language learning. Similarly, Ayres (2002) pointed that CALL is more favored by the students to learn the skill of listening than the skill of speaking.

On the other hand, Adair-Hauck et al. (1999) did not find an effect for teaching oral skills, listening and speaking, in a CALL environment. Students in the treatment group which studied in a CALL environment performed in the listening and speaking test as equal as the control group which was taught according to the conventional method. However, the study indicated, "it is both feasible and desirable to integrate, in principled ways, technology enhanced language learning activities into the language learning curriculum" (Adair-Hauck et al. 1999: 1). Students reported that CALL environment is a more helpful factor for learning the skill of listening than the skill of speaking.

While reviewing related literature about the use of computer for teaching the oral skills cooperatively and individually in a CALL environment, it is noticed that there is a dearth of studies in this area. Furthermore, to my best knowledge, no studies have been conducted about the use of CALL approach for teaching and learning oral skills by EFL learners at the Department of English, King Saud University, Riyadh, which creates a need for conducting more studies in this area. The present study is trying to bridge this gap. It is based on an experimental work and it seeks to introduce two computer-based techniques for teaching oral skills. It also investigates students' attitude towards the effectiveness of computer-based method and techniques.

1.2. The present study

1.2.1. Research problem

EFL learners encounter difficulties in learning language skills, especially the oral skills, i.e., listening and speaking, because they are not usually exposed to language and do not have the chance to use it in authentic situations. In addition, many studies show that oral language skills have received less attention from researchers than other skills. For instance, Barr et al. (2005: 56) asserted, "most CALL-based teaching and learning has tended to focus on non-oral activities such as software or Web-based reading, writing, or gap-filling type activities". Similarly, Coniam (1998) emphasized that computerized listening is an area that has received much less attention than other skills like reading.

In addition, many studies reported that CALL approach is very useful in teaching and learning EFL skills. Vick et al. (2000), for instance, claimed that computer-mediated courses have a lot of potential as they provide opportunities for learning in a cooperative environment and enable learners to make synchronous and asynchronous communication between pairs and groups of different learners. However, these claims need to be made clear through suggesting techniques, strategies, and methods, and test-

ing their effectiveness. The importance of the present study stems from the fact that it introduces computer-oriented techniques and methods based on authentic experiences for teaching/learning EFL oral skills.

The present study may be useful for EFL instructors, curriculum designers, and learners. Its pedagogical significance emanates from the fact that it is based on presenting practical techniques for teaching and learning EFL oral skills via computer. It can be helpful for the EFL instructors as it provides them with computer-based strategies, techniques, and methods for teaching the skills of listening and speaking. It may also be useful for syllabus-makers as it investigates the effectiveness of computer-based activities and the suitable techniques and methods for using them. Finally, the study may be useful for EFL learners because it can provide them with the most-up-to-date techniques and methods for the learning of oral skills.

1.2.2. Purpose and questions of the study

The present study aimed at finding out the effectiveness of computer-based cooperative and individual techniques for teaching and learning oral skills. It also investigated students' attitude towards using CALL approach and techniques for learning and teaching oral skills. More specifically, the present study sought to answer the following questions: (1) What is the effect of the cooperative/individual computer technique on the students' achievement in oral skills? (2) What is the students' attitude towards using the CALL approach, cooperative computer technique, and individual computer technique in learning oral skills?

2. Methodology

2.1. Setting and participants

The present study was conducted in the e-learning language laboratory of the Department of English Language and Literature of the College of Arts at King Saud University, Riyadh, during the second semester of the academic year 2004–2005, which extended for sixteen weeks. The department presents different programs for undergraduate and graduate students in English language and literature which aim at enhancing cross-cultural understanding and promoting mutual values. By the end of these programs, students are expected to produce language that approximate native language and gain a certain level of knowledge about English people, culture, customs, and values. Students, therefore, are exposed to several situations where they use English language in authentic situations and receive certain amount of information about English language and culture. Students who graduate from the department usually work as EFL teachers, translators, and administrators.

The sample of the study consisted of freshmen in the BA program of English Language and Literature in the department. They were enrolled in the "Listening and Speaking (I)" course. All the participants were Saudi EFL learners. They were divided into four groups. The first group (36 students) was taught by the cooperative computer technique and the second group (30 students) learned according to the individual computer technique. The third group (30 students) used the cooperative traditional technique while the individual traditional technique was utilized with the fourth group (34 students).

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Material

All students participating in this study used the same book, *Interactions (I): Listening and Speaking* by Judith Tanka, Paul Most, and Lida Baker (2004), 4th edition. They studied the first 6 units of the book. The focus of the course was on practical use of oral skills, listening and speaking. Every student would perform the tasks repeatedly within the class and in laboratory. Audio and visual materials were used extensively to train the students to listen to language used in different situations. Intonation drills were covered so that students could produce language approximating native language rhythms. To pass the course, the students should demonstrate their ability, at low-intermediate level, to:

(1) understand spoken English in a variety of communicative situations like lectures;
(2) speak about different topics in different communicative situations; and
(3) show an ability to produce spoken language that has an acceptable level of clarity.

2.2.2. Instructional software

NetSupport School is a computer program which was used in the study by the experimental groups. It enables the instructor to display a master screen on the students' workstations or view their screens on the master machine, distribute files, send and collect coursework automatically, and perform on-line chat and group chalkboard. The program allows the instructor to perform several computer-based activities. The following computer-based techniques and methods were used in the present study: remote control and monitoring of students' screens and keyboards, showing the instructor's screen on the students' workstations, sending files to different workstations, cooperative computer work, sending a message about the instructions of the lesson, visual and audio support, conducting exams electronically, requesting help by students, and electronic pair work. The instructor also utilized *Windows Media Player*, a program integrated into the *Windows* operating system, for showing visual and audio presentations.

2.2.3. Test

In order to answer the first question of the study, a test was designed by the researcher to gauge the effect of the techniques on students' performance in oral skills, listening and speaking. The test was comprised of two parts, listening and speaking. The speaking section was meant to evaluate students' ability to speak about different topics in different situations and produce spoken language with acceptable level of clarity. Students were interviewed by the instructor and each student was asked to speak about three topics (personal information, role-play, and describing a picture). The students were interviewed in pairs away from the class and had the chance to choose who they want to be interviewed with. Before the interview, students were told about the components of the interview and the criteria that would be used to assess them.

Students were videotaped while they were interviewed. Two independent raters who were blinded about the membership of students into the group evaluated students' interviews. If there were less than 10% difference between them in evaluating a student, the average was counted and taken as the grade of the student. If the difference was more than that, the student was evaluated a third time and the average was found. The oral assessment rating scale made by Harris and McCann (1999: 44) was adopted in evaluating students in speaking. However, the marking scheme was modified to suite this study. Below is the modified marking scheme that was used in this study.

10–9 Fluency: Tasks done very well; little hesitation.
Accuracy: correct use of structures studied so far; clear pronunciation.

8–7 Fluency: Tasks done quite well with some hesitation.
Accuracy: Use of different structures covered so far. Not many mistakes; pronunciation quite clear.

6–5 Fluency: Tasks done adequately; quite a few pauses.
Accuracy: Use of some of the structures covered; some mistakes, but reasonable understanding possible; pronunciation satisfactory.

4–3 Fluency: Tasks not done adequately; a lot of hesitation.
Accuracy: structures and lexis limited; a lot of mistakes; poor pronunciation.

2–1 Fluency: Response completely inadequate.
Accuracy: Almost incomprehensible.

The listening section of the test was based on the objectives of the learning material of the course. That is, it aimed to evaluate students' comprehension in a variety of communicative situations. They listened to several messages, dialogues and short passages based on authentic material. Each of them was followed by a question. The exam con-

sisted of fifty questions. Each question was followed by four choices. One is the model answer and the other three are distracters.

The test content was validated by a team of English language specialists. It consisted of three senior university professors holding PhD in linguistics who had ample experience of teaching the course. They were requested to validate the content of the test with regard to test instructions, relevance of the questions to the content, suitability of the content to course goals and objectives, and suitability of distracters. They presented several suggestions like giving an example question, adding questions about language functions, and changing some distracters. Their remarks, notes and suggestions were taken into consideration. The test questions were extensively field-tested. The internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha reliability for the written section of the achievement test instrument was determined to be 0.82.

2.2.4. Questionnaire

The researcher used a four-point Likert-type response format (1 = always agree; 2 = often agree; 3 = sometimes agree; 4 = never agree, respectively) with which each student should agree or disagree. The items were derived from students' responses about the advantages or disadvantages of using CALL approach and the individual/cooperative computer techniques. The first ten items were about the effectiveness of CALL approach while the other items were about the usefulness of the individual/cooperative computer techniques (see Appendix).

The same three professors were requested to have a look at the questionnaire and give their assessment in terms of content validity and clarity of instructions. They presented some suggestions like using a four-point Likert scale instead of two and dividing the questionnaire into two parts about CALL approach and techniques. Their comments and suggestions were taken into consideration. A pilot study about the questionnaire was conducted and the items were extensively field-tested. The inter-item reliability of Cronbach's coefficient alpha on suitability of using CALL approach and techniques was determined to be 0.86. Students were given enough time to answer the questionnaire (an average of 20 minutes). Students answered the questionnaire for an independent examiner to keep away from motivating them to give positive answers (1 and 2) and avoid negative answers (3 and 4) to please their instructor.

2.3. Procedure

At the beginning of the course, the instructor introduced CALL and its application in learning EFL skills, especially oral skills. Students were given the chance to ask questions about the course, techniques and methods to be used in learning/teaching the oral skills.

Members of the first group were divided into smaller groups and a leader was assigned to each of them. The instructor set the scene for pre-listening activities by sending each student a file which contained the instructions for doing the task in the textbook. The groups worked cooperatively to discuss the questions and each of them reported the answer through one of its members. The instructor also asked questions about the pictures and linked the lesson to students' experiences. He used to ask the first group to close their books and then played the audio and visual files, using *Windows Media Player.* As well, he displayed his screen to the students' workstations. They listened to the text to find general information for the first time. They listened to it again to find specific information. They also listened to the same text for the third time and then they filled in spaces with the suitable words. After listening, they worked in groups to discuss the answers; each group reported the answers through one of its members. The instructor checked the answers and the students corrected their errors. The third group used the same cooperative techniques that were utilized by the first group, but it studied in the traditional environment.

On the other hand, members of the second group did the same listening tasks. However, they were not divided into cooperative groups, and were taught according to the individual computer technique which included teacher-class learning (collective learning). The instructor set the scene for each activity and each student worked individually to do the activities in the classroom without interacting with other classmates or getting help from them; each worked by himself to receive the questions, listen to the text, think of the answer, and report it to the instructor. The instructor then provided them with feedback about their answers. Similarly, members of the fourth group used the same strategies and techniques, but according to the traditional method.

In the speaking activities, the first group was also divided into smaller groups or pairs. The instructor set the scene for each activity. The students then worked cooperatively to discuss the questions and seek answers. Each student had the opportunity to express his opinion. After the groups ended the discussion, each student had the chance to participate, and some students asked questions. The instructor kept watching and listening to the students. His role was mainly setting the scene for listening and speaking tasks. When he received a help request, he provided the students with the help they needed. Members of the third group did these speaking activities according to the same individual technique. However, they studied in a traditional environment instead of using the computerized method.

Members of the second group did the same speaking activities individually without interacting with or getting help from other students according to the individual computer technique. That is, the computer-based teacher-class technique in teaching was used. It included teacher-to-whole-class (collective) learning, and each student learnt "individually" in the class via computer. Each did the task by himself and reported the answer to the instructor who then provided them with feedback about their answers. On the other hand, the same individual strategies and techniques that were used by the second group were utilized by the fourth group, but according to the traditional method.

2.4. Statistical analysis

Mean scores and standard deviations in the achievement test were found in the pre- and post-test using *SPSS*. An analysis of t-test was also administered to find if there were any significant differences between the results of the four groups in oral skills, listening and speaking at $p<.05$ level. To identify students' attitude towards using CALL approach and cooperative/individual computer technique, the mean scores and standard deviations of the students' responses in the questionnaire were gathered, analyzed, and counted, using the survey module in *NetSupport School* and *SPSS.*

3. Results

3.1. Students' level of achievement

The study had two independent variables: (i) method of teaching, i.e., computerized or traditional and (ii) technique of teaching, i.e., cooperative or individual. There was also one dependent variable, achievement of the students who participated in this study. The Descriptive Statistics resulting from the description of the properties of the variables included in the study and means and standard deviations were made for the results of all students who participated in this study as presented below.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations in the achievement test

Method	Group	Technique	Listening		Speaking	
			Mean	SD*	Mean	SD*
Computerized	1	cooperative	76.46	29.45	70.67	27.23
	2	individual	69.34	29.83	61.67	23.43
Total			72.90	29.64	66.17	25.33
Traditional	3	cooperative	56.23	18.70	36.71	20.62
	4	individual	45.33	19.70	35.43	15.67
Total			50.78	19.20	36.07	18.14

*SD = standard deviation

According to the results in Table 1, the groups that studied the oral skills via the computerized method achieved higher scores in the test than the other groups that used the traditional method. The mean score was 72.9 in listening and 66.17 in speaking for the former method while it was 50.78 in listening and 36.07 in speaking for the latter. An

analysis of t-test was also conducted to find if there were any significant differences between these results and a t-value of 9.64 was obtained which was found to be significant at $p<.05$ level.

It was also found that the cooperative technique was more useful than the individual technique (mean score of 66.35 and 57.33, respectively) in teaching oral skills. A t-test analysis was found to be 4.12, which is significant at $p<.05$ level as stated below.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations in for technique in the achievement test

Technique	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Cooperative	66.35	24.08	4.12	.000
Individual	57.33	24.77		

The first group that was taught according to the cooperative computer technique got a higher mean score in the skill of listening (76.46) and speaking (70.67) in the test than the second group that used the individual computer technique for studying listening and speaking (mean score of 69.34 and 61.67, respectively) with significant differences (t-value = 5.0, Sig. = .000). Similarly, the third group that studied by the cooperative traditional technique got higher scores in listening (56.23) and speaking (36.71) in the test than the fourth group which studied the same skills (mean scores of 45.33 and 35.43, respectively) according to the individual traditional technique. An analysis of t-test shows that there are significant differences for these findings. A t-value of 1.89 was obtained at $p<.05$ level.

Finally, students had high mean scores in the skill of listening. It is 76.46 for Group 1, 69.34 for Group 2, 56.23 for Group 3, and 45.33 for Group 4. However, students in the same groups scored lower means in the skill of speaking (mean score of 70.67, 61.67, 36.71, and 35.43, respectively). To find if there are significant differences for the skill of listening and speaking, an analysis of t-test was conducted. The t-value was found to be 5.57, which is significant at $p<.05$ level.

3.2. Students' attitude towards using CALL for teaching oral skills

To identify student general attitude towards using CALL for teaching oral skill, listening and speaking, a ten-item section of the attitude questionnaire was administered to the experimental groups, the first and second groups (66 students) as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Student attitude towards using CALL for teaching oral skills
(1 = always agree; 2 = often agree; 3 = sometimes agree; 4 = never agree)

Item	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
1	45	10	8	3	1.53	0.88
2	50	12	2	2	1.48	1.37
3	51	14	1	0	1.21	0.41
4	55	10	0	1	1.19	0.50
5	57	7	1	1	1.21	0.54
6	60	2	3	1	1.12	0.44
7	57	3	3	3	1.27	0.75
8	55	10	1	0	1.18	0.42
9	59	5	1	1	1.15	0.50
10	64	2	0	0	1.03	0.17
%	83.8	11.4	3.0	1.8	1.23	0.60

The general student attitude towards using CALL for teaching oral skills was quite positive. Table 3 shows that the majority of the students (83.8 %) of the study always and 11.4 % often agreed that CALL was a functional method for studying oral skills (mean of 1.23). This means that students generally favored using CALL for teaching oral skills. On the other hand, only 3.0 % thought that CALL was sometimes suitable and 1.8 % said that it was ineffective in learning the oral skills.

Item 10 (“Using computer in learning the oral skills helped me to extend the time of the lesson”) had the highest mean (1.03), and Item 9 (“Using computer in learning the oral skills helped me to extend the place of the lesson”) had the third highest mean (1.15). This shows that students benefited from the computer in learning oral skills outside the classroom. Item 6 (“Using computer in learning the oral skills helped me to express my opinion”) achieved the second highest mean score (1.12). This was followed by Item 8 (“Using computer in learning the oral skills helped me to hear the lesson more clearly”) with a mean of 1.18.

Item 7 (“Using computer in learning the oral skills helped me to save time when I studied”) had a low mean (1.27). This may be explained by the results in Item 9 and Item 10, which shows that students spent more time in using the computer for learning oral skills, as they found it enjoyable. Other items had noticeably lower means than the general mean (1.23) such as Item 1 (“Using computer in learning the oral skills helped me to improve the listening skill”) and Item 2 (“Using computer in learning the oral skills helped me to improve the speaking skill”) (means of 1.53, and 1.48, respectively). However, such means still show that students have a positive attitude for learning and teaching oral skills in a CALL environment.

3.3. Students' attitude towards the cooperative computer technique

The attitude of the first group towards using the cooperative computer technique for teaching oral skills in a CALL environment was investigated. For this reason, a questionnaire of fifteen items (Item 11–Item 25) based on a four-point Likert scale was administered to all students in the first group which studied according to the cooperative computer technique (36 students). The results of this survey are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' attitude towards using the cooperative computer technique (1 = always agree; 2 = often agree; 3 = sometimes agree; 4 = never agree)

Item	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
11	30	3	2	1	1.27	0.70
12	25	10	1	0	1.33	0.53
13	33	2	1	0	1.11	0.39
14	31	3	1	1	1.22	0.63
15	29	5	0	2	1.30	0.74
16	30	2	2	2	1.33	0.82
17	32	2	1	1	1.19	0.62
18	28	2	4	2	1.44	0.90
19	34	2	0	0	1.05	0.23
20	34	1	0	1	1.11	0.52
21	30	3	2	1	1.27	0.70
22	34	1	0	1	1.11	0.52
23	30	2	1	3	1.36	0.89
24	29	5	1	1	1.27	0.65
25	35	1	0	0	1.02	0.16
%	85.9	8.3	2.9	2.9	1.22	0.60

Most of the members of the first group (85.9 %) who were taught by the cooperative computer technique found it to be always efficient and practical in learning the oral skills. Some of the members of the first group (8.3 %) said that they often found the computer to be feasible in learning oral skills (mean of 1.22). Others (2.9 %) were less convinced of the use of CALL for learning the oral skills, as they said that they were only occasionally satisfied with the technique and only 2.9 % thought that the cooperative computer technique was not effective at all.

Some items had apparently higher means than the total mean (1.22). For example, Item 25 ("Using this technique provided more chances to benefit from the instructor") got the highest mean (1.02). This shows that most students (35 out of 36) felt that they got a more individual attention from the instructor in the computer-based class. The

second highest one was Item 19 (“I would like to take another course if I could use this technique”; mean of 1.05). This was followed by three items which got the same mean (1.11). They are Item 13 (“I became more interactive and participated actively”), Item 20 (“The computer helped me to use English in real-life situations”), and Item 22 (“I prefer to study using this technique”).

On the other hand, other items had lower means than the general mean (1.22). The lowest mean (1.44) was for Item 18 (“It allowed me to think critically”). Item 23 (“Using this technique did not break my privacy”) had the second lowest mean (1.36). It was followed by Item 12 (“I became less shy”) and Item 16 (“I became more self-dependent”; 1.33 both). Item 15 (“I studied in a relaxed atmosphere and a stress-free environment”) came next with a lower mean (1.30). Finally, items 11, 21, and 24 had the same mean (1.27).

3.3. Students’ attitude towards the individual computer technique

The attitude of the second group towards using the individual computer technique for teaching oral skills in a CALL environment was investigated. Therefore, a survey of fifteen items based on a four-point Likert scale was administered to the students of the second group (30 students). The results of this survey are presented below.

Table 5. Students’ attitude towards using individual computer technique
(1 = always agree; 2 = often agree; 3 = sometimes agree; 4 = never agree)

Item	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
11	15	10	3	2	1.73	0.90
12	6	8	10	6	2.53	1.04
13	10	9	5	6	2.23	1.13
14	2	3	17	8	3.03	0.80
15	13	10	4	3	1.90	0.99
16	12	8	2	8	2.20	1.24
17	16	10	2	2	1.86	0.81
18	12	10	4	4	2.00	1.05
19	5	6	0	19	3.10	1.24
20	20	5	3	2	1.56	0.93
21	12	13	3	2	1.83	0.87
22	2	5	3	20	3.36	0.99
23	22	1	7	0	1.50	0.86
24	15	5	5	5	2.00	1.17
25	10	11	4	5	2.13	1.07
%	38.2	25.6	16.0	20.2	2.19	1.01

The second group that was taught according to the individual computer technique was not much convinced of the efficiency of the technique used for teaching them (total mean of 2.19). Only 38.2 % of them said that they always liked the individual computer technique and 25.6 % thought that it was often useful. The rest of the group were more doubtful about the effectiveness of using the individual computer technique for learning the oral skills. Sixteen percent of them reported that they were sometimes convinced of the use of the approach while the other 20.2 % were never satisfied with using such a technique for learning oral skills.

According to Table 5, some items got apparently higher means than the total mean (2.19). Item 23 ("Using this technique did not break my privacy") had the highest mean (1.5). The second highest one was Item 20 ("The computer helped me to use English in real-life situations") with a mean of 1.56. This was followed by Item 11 ("I benefited from my mates a lot"; mean of 1.73) and Item 21 ("The computer helped me to see different viewpoints and broadened my points of view"; mean of 1.83).

However, some items scored noticeably lower means than the general mean. Item 22 ("I prefer to study using this technique") had the lowest mean (3.36). The next lowest ones were Item 19 ("I would like to take another course if I could use this technique"; mean of 3.10) and Item 14 ("Using this technique was interesting and I enjoyed it"; mean of 3.03). These items show that students had a negative attitude towards using the individual computer technique for teaching oral skills.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Based on the results of this study, the group which used the cooperative computer technique achieved better results in the listening and speaking test than the other groups which were taught according to the individual technique and traditional method. This finding is in harmony with what was reported by Heller (1990) who emphasized that learning in a computer-based environment has several opportunities for exploration, and the EFL learner finds the chance to benefit from his classmates when they are involved in discussing the topics set by the instructor. Cooperative computer learning in particular is found to be a functional as well as a result-oriented technique for two reasons. First, the production of a group is generally more than an individual's production. Second, each member of the group can benefit from his mates in the group. Gu (2002) and Jeon-Ellis et al. (2005) pointed that CALL-oriented projects provide students with promising chances for making oral interactions collaboratively.

Computer-based teaching is found to be especially advantageous to weak students who are usually embarrassed to ask or speak. However, they are encouraged to share when they chat with their mates informally. Khan (1997) described computer-based learning as an environment of a formal and informal collaborative learning where learners interact casually. The use of computer, therefore, is found to be an efficient medium that motivates the weak students to be involved in the linguistic interaction. Similarly,

Tan et al. (1999) observed that many students do not ask their instructors about the problems that they encounter because of their shyness. It becomes easy for them to overcome such difficulties through cooperation with other classmates during a CALL class. Thereupon, their performance in oral skills improves.

The cooperative computer technique was also more favored than the individual computer technique in learning/teaching oral skills by the students. According to the results of this study, the first group, which studied oral skills through the cooperative computer technique, had a higher mean than the other group which was taught according to the individual computer technique (general mean of 1.22 and 2.19, respectively). This finding is supported by other studies. For instance, Greenfield (2003) indicated that cooperative learning in a CALL environment in general receives the most positive student response.

According to the findings of this study, students achieved better results in the listening test than the speaking test in a CALL environment. This can be attributed to the fact that listening is a receptive skill while speaking is a productive skill. Blanchard et al. (1988) asserted that receptive skills are easier to learn than productive skills. That is, people usually make less effort when they speak than listen. Furthermore, students reported that using the computer in learning the oral skills helped them to improve the skill of listening more than the skill of speaking, which shows that students learnt the listening skill easier than the skill of speaking. This finding entails that more focus should be put on learning and teaching the skill of speaking.

This finding is in line with what was pointed out by Adair-Hauck et al.'s (1999) study, which reported that students favor CALL environment for learning the skill of listening to the skill of speaking. Moreover, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2003) pointed that students feel that they need much to improve in speaking in a CALL environment because they learn to speak better with a teacher than a computer. They also underline the variety and quality of the listening tasks. Moreover, Ayres (2002) stressed that students prefer learning the skill of listening to the skill of speaking in a CALL environment.

The findings of this study also indicated that students' general attitude towards the use of CALL for teaching oral skills, listening and speaking, is quite positive. The students also said that CALL helped them to extend the time and place of the lesson and found it to be a helpful medium to express their opinions. These findings are in agreement with what was reported by other studies such as that of Greenfield's (2003), which showed that students have a positive attitude towards the use of CALL for teaching the skill of listening. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2003) also reported that students find CALL listening programs to be largely useful and helpful. Furthermore, Coniam (1998) indicated that students have more opportunity to speak and must rely on themselves rather than the instructor in a CALL environment.

On the other hand, the "saving time" item had the lowest mean score. When this item is compared to the items with the highest mean score ("CALL is an extension in the time/place of the lesson"), it can be inferred that CALL does not waste students' time, but they spend more time in learning oral skills via computer because it is moti-

vating and enjoyable. Greenfield (2003) found that because CALL is enjoyable, students are more motivated to learn oral skills.

In addition, CALL is found to offer a great opportunity in teaching and learning oral skills. In the present study, the students admitted that they had more chances to benefit from the computer in learning oral skills. The majority of them (62 out of 66) reported that they thought that the use of computer was an extension in the time and place of the classroom. Jeon-Ellis et al. (2005) also confirmed that the CALL context could provide students with more opportunities for activities through which language learning occurs.

Finally, this study, which is based on a limited number of participants, shows that computers play an important role in learning and teaching oral skills. CALL should be integrated into the oral skill curriculum. The use of the cooperative computer technique proves to have several advantages over the individual computer technique, and it is recommended to use it. Further questions for research may include using other techniques for teaching different language skills in a CALL environment.

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APPENDIX

The survey used in the study about the use of computer and call techniques in learning the oral skills.

Dear Student,

The following is a list of items which may possibly reflect your opinion on using computers in language courses. Please mark the degree (from 1 =always agree; 2 = often agree; 3 = sometimes agree; 4 = never agree, respectively) which you think represents your view for each item.

Item	Using computer in learning the oral skills helped me to	1	2	3	4
1	Improve the listening skill.				
2	Improve the speaking skill.				
3	Discover my errors and mistakes.				
4	Learn in an integrative way.				
5	Learn easily.				
6	Express my opinion.				
7	Save time when I studied.				
8	Hear the lesson more clearly.				
9	Extend the place of the lesson.				
10	Extend the time of the lesson.				
	The cooperative/individual computer technique				
11	I benefited from my mates a lot.				
12	I became less shy.				
13	I became more interactive and participated actively.				
14	Using this technique was interesting and I enjoyed it.				
15	I studied in a relaxed atmosphere and a stress-free environment.				
16	I became more self-dependent.				
17	I became a better problem solver.				
18	It allowed me to think critically.				
19	I would like to take another course if I could use this technique.				
20	The computer helped me to use English in real-life situations.				
21	The computer helped me to see different viewpoints and broadened my points of view.				
22	I prefer to study using this technique.				
23	Using this technique did not break my privacy.				
24	The feeling in the class was friendly.				
25	Using this technique provided more chances to benefit from the instructor.				