



The role of CALL in the ecology of language teachers' well-being and professional development

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Abstract. While previous studies have established the significance of CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) in language education, the extent to which CALL influences language teachers' well-being and their professional development has not yet been fully understood. This echoes Dörnyei's (2018) argument that although language teachers are the most important factors in learners' success, their contributions have not been considered sufficiently. As such, this short paper presents an ongoing mixed-methods project investigating Vietnamese and Japanese language teachers' well-being and the role of CALL in the ecology of language teaching at both personal and work levels using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system framework. The primary method is the grounded theory analysis and preliminary results from Vietnamese teachers' semi-structured interviews which have shown the importance of CALL in language teachers' well-being's ecology. Also, the role of the community of practice has also emerged as an informal support in language teachers' ecological well-being system.

Keywords: language teachers, CALL, well-being, ecological perspective, professional development.

1. Introduction

Teaching English is not an easy endeavor, especially when teachers have to handle multiple tasks, some of which include administrative paperwork, teaching methodologies, and classroom management techniques. Language teachers inevitably need to find ways to maintain their physical and mental well-being on a daily basis. Mercer (2021) argues that problems related to well-

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being in education, in English Language Teaching (ELT) particularly, should be solved as soon as possible when more and more mental health issues are being reported, especially depression and anxiety. Some uncovered by previous studies are increased emotional labor, shifting identities, energy-intensive teaching methodologies, language anxiety, intellectual demands (Benesch, 2017), and more importantly, emotional exhaustion (Daniels & Strauss, 2010). CALL is no longer an uncommon approach in a language classroom. Research investigating CALL and its affordances has been the focus of many scholars. Nevertheless, studies investigating the importance of CALL to language teacher well-being are still scarce. For this reason, as part of a PhD project investigating language teacher well-being in Vietnam and Japan from the ecological perspective, this paper sets out to study the role that CALL plays in each layer of language teachers' ecological well-being system and the extent to which CALL affects language teachers' well-being and their professional development, particularly their physical and mental health.

2. Literature review

2.1. Language teacher well-being from the ecological perspective

To understand language teachers' well-being, it is important to perceive them as individuals whose well-being is unique and paramount to the whole ecological system of ELT. In this respect, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system framework may be helpful. The ecological system of a person needs to be taken into consideration in order to understand their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He proposes that the system comprises four main subsystems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. According to Cross and Hong (2012), the microsystem is an environment in which teachers, students, and parents communicate and influence one another in a multidirectional and reciprocal relationship. The mesosystem is the place where teachers do not participate directly, yet they are affected on a daily basis. According to Price and McCallum (2015), it includes interactions among different microsystems such as teachers' work and their private life. The macrosystem is the biggest environment which encompasses the entire ecological system of language teacher well-being. Some typical factors are politics, economy, legal, and cultural influences. Even though teachers do not participate directly, they are influenced by this system because they need to follow the norms and understand what is happening in their working culture.

2.2. CALL as a participant in the ecology of language teacher well-being

Thanks to previous research into technology, the assistance CALL provides language teachers with can be categorized into two main parts, that is, acceptance and persistence toward CALL. If positive attitudes toward CALL result in a higher frequency of CALL application and enhance perseverance upon encountering CALL-related difficulties (Drossel, Eickelmann, & Gerick, 2016), insufficient training and preconceived ideas toward CALL (Stockwell, 2012) might lead to CALL rejection. Hence, CALL is not only a teaching approach, it also plays a key role in teachers' professional development and well-being. Helping teachers handle CALL-related difficulties and put it into practice might result in a better outlook toward the profession and motivation for long-term pursuit. Therefore, this project focuses on studying CALL and the role it has in each system of the language teacher well-being's ecology. Three research questions encompassing the inquiry are as follows.

- To what extent does CALL influence the ELT ecology of language teacher well-being?
- To what extent does CALL influence language teachers' professional development from the ecological perspective?
- To what extent do language teachers in Japan and Vietnam differ in their perspectives on the role of CALL in the ecology of their well-being and professional development?

3. Methodology

For this PhD project, participants are teachers at tertiary level from Japan and Vietnam. A mixed-methods design is employed using the grounded theory approach and data triangulation as the primary method. Data includes (1) semi-structured interviews conducted individually with 30 language teachers who are currently working at university, (2) focus group interviews, and (3) a quantitative-oriented questionnaire.

However, as this paper sets out to understand the role of CALL in the ecological system of language teachers' well-being, only data collected from the individual semi-structured interviews are utilized. Three participants, two of whom have

a master's degree, have been interviewed. They are all working in the private sector with at least five-year teaching experience. The interview time varies from 45 minutes to 60 minutes focusing on three main parts and the protocol was adapted from Dörnyei's (2007) advice on conducting interviews. The first part focused on the participants' backgrounds and their teaching experience. The second part includes open-ended questions investigating the role of CALL in their well-being and professional development, such as *'how do you feel about technology in teaching'*, *'what do you do when you encounter a technological problem'*, and *'is using technology stressful to you'*? The interviews ended with a feedback session where the participants asked questions related to the interview. Interview data were then analyzed qualitatively using the grounded theory approach and the results are presented in the next section.

4. Preliminary results

Findings from three interviews indicate that not only does CALL play an important part in the microsystem (i.e. the individual level), but it also exists in other systems, namely meso-, exo-, and macrosystem of language teachers' ecological well-being. The participants mentioned that using CALL was not for their own benefits anymore (the mesosystem). They need the competence to help engage their students (the microsystem) and increase the productivity for their schools (e.g. delivering online classes, handling administrative tasks, etc.). Also, the participants mentioned that frustrating as CALL learning may be, it was also a catalyst to initiate more informal conversations with their peers, which eventually strengthened the bonding in the workplace.

5. Conclusion

Overall, analysis from the interviews indicates that CALL does play a key role in the ecology of teachers' well-being, especially the way it influences language teachers' professional development in this ecology. This echoes with Hodstadler et al.'s (2020) arguments on the stakeholders teachers have to deal with in their profession, such as school policies or colleagues. However, CALL's existence does not entirely entail complete negativity. The community of practice established through the CALL frustration in this study helped teachers overcome CALL-related obstacles and enhanced their well-being. For institutions and policymakers in both public and private sectors, this hopefully can become a helpful reference to construct a more comprehensive support system in the workplace environment

to help teachers and learners gain optimum outcomes. More importantly, the study also hopes to shed more light on how to provide teachers with trustworthy guidelines to help them deal with mental health issues on their own and advance their professions.

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