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# The Use of Computer-mediated Communication to Develop EFL Learners' Oral Performance and English Vocabulary

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***Abstract:*** *To explore how Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) influences spoken language and vocabulary acquisition in EFL contexts, two relevant case studies are presented to bolster the central claim that CMC can yield positive outcomes for oral proficiency, particularly in terms of syntactic complexity, and for lexical growth. The paper also examines the advantages and disadvantages of CMC, which can be distilled into three core areas: heightened authenticity, greater equality among participants, and increased engagement. On the other hand, its limitations predominantly revolve around the technological proficiency demanded of both teachers and students, the potential for ambiguity and misunderstanding inherent in digital interfaces, and various barriers that hinder smooth online interaction. In view of these considerations, the implementation of CMC carries practical implications for three key groups: learners, instructors, and educational institutions.*

***Keywords:*** *Computer-mediated Communication, English as a Foreign Language, Oral Performance, Vocabulary*

## 1. Introduction

Technology is widely recognized as advancing at an unprecedented pace, and its integration has become increasingly pervasive across various domains of modern life. This trend is particularly evident in the field of language education, where researchers have shown growing interest in understanding how technological tools influence the learning process and contribute to improved outcomes for language learners.

In response to these inquiries, several scholars have offered encouraging findings. Internet-based communication, for instance, has been associated with notable gains in student motivation, which in turn facilitates the development of both spoken and written communicative competence [8].

Parallel to this, the past several decades has witnessed a remarkable surge in the global demand for English proficiency. As the de facto international lingua franca, English has undergone structural evolution, such as the regularization of word order and the emergence of *do*-support, trends that reflect the broader shifts characterizing today's interconnected world [9]. In many non-English-speaking regions, English is also widely adopted as a second language. According to Kim, contemporary second language acquisition (SLA) pedagogy emphasizes sociocultural, meaningful, and interactive communication [12]. Within this framework, computer-mediated communication (CMC) not only enhances linguistic accuracy through student-teacher interaction but also serves as a robust resource for advancing second language development.

Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that a primary objective of language instruction is to cultivate learners' speaking and writing abilities, enabling them to engage in responsible and effective communication [17]. To this end, many language institutions are actively implementing diverse pedagogical strategies, such as oral practice and writing exercises, aimed at elevating learners' overall language competence. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine the extent to which CMC influences English learning effectiveness, with a particular focus on oral performance and vocabulary acquisition. To support this inquiry, two case studies exploring the role of CMC in enhancing spoken English and lexical knowledge will be analyzed as evidence. The discussion will commence with a clarification of key terminology, namely CMC, CALL, and EFL, and their relevance to spoken language and vocabulary development. Subsequently, the advantages and limitations of CMC will be reviewed, followed by a consideration of how these findings may inform practical applications within

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educational settings, viewed from the perspectives of teachers, students, and institutions.

Accordingly, the following sub-questions will guide the investigation:

1) In what ways does CMC facilitate language learning, specifically about oral proficiency and lexical growth?

2) How can the adoption of CMC yield pedagogical benefits for teachers, learners, and educational institutions alike?

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1 Computer-mediated Communication*

Computer technologies "have introduced unprecedented opportunities for language learners to access and be exposed to authentic resources and multimedia materials and to communicate in new ways within and beyond the classroom" [21]. This shift not only exerts a positive influence on learners' writing proficiency, speaking competence, and oral interaction in a second language (L2) [23], but also fosters a renewed pedagogical paradigm in which students assume a more central role, thereby facilitating a transition from the conventional teacher-dominated model to a more student-cantered classroom environment. It is widely acknowledged that meaningful engagement and effective communication can significantly enhance learning outcomes. However, research examining the advantages and disadvantages of synchronous computer-mediated communication in L2 acquisition reveals considerable discrepancies between this mode of interaction and traditional face-to-face classroom discourse patterns [24].

The definition of Computer-mediated Communication varies depending on context, and one of the most frequently cited definitions describes it as "a communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers" [6]. Trentin and Benigno [20] further refined this conceptualization by specifying various forms of distance communication, including "access to and transfer of information, thematic conferencing via e-mail, audio- and video communication, etc." CMC encompasses a broad range of tools, such as the Internet, email, instant messaging, mobile texting, and multiuser interaction platforms. However, certain forms of communication—such as hearing advertisements, using megaphones, dedicated analogue teletype systems, or electronically enhanced systems—are excluded from the scope of CMC [13].

Although the volume of CMC-related research has grown considerably in recent years, scholarly inquiry continues to emphasize those features that are believed to set it apart from conventional face-to-face (FTF) communication [16]. The ways in which CMC diverges from traditional FTF interaction are primarily reflected in its varied forms and functions, which span the linguistic, sociocultural, and technological domains. To begin with, CMC removes the restrictions of time and place, enabling interaction to take place in either real-time or delayed modes. Moreover, it supports a diverse range of media, combining textual, auditory, and visual elements with hyperlinking and hypermedia functionalities. An additional technical strength of CMC lies in its capacity to facilitate communication across multiple configurations—including intrapersonal, interpersonal, small-group, and large-audience formats [16].

### *2.2 English as a Foreign Language (EFL)*

As noted by Iwai [14], EFL learners are defined as individuals acquiring English in countries where it is not spoken as a native or primary official language—for instance, Chinese students studying English within China. Zimmerman [25] contended that vocabulary development constitutes a foundational element of language acquisition, as it fosters a sense of mastery over the target language. He further asserted that insufficient lexical knowledge could impede meaningful communication. This principle applies equally to spoken English, given that both oral expression and written production rely heavily on vocabulary for effective exchange. Chun [5] demonstrated that networked communication not only enhances learners' writing abilities but also contributes to gains in oral proficiency. Her research indicated that CMC enables students to produce and initiate diverse discourse structures and speech acts, and that writing skills cultivated through CMC may gradually transfer to speaking competence. Additionally, it is worth noting that the rapid evolution of internet language continuously shapes contemporary English vocabulary. In light of this, Androutsopoulos [1] emphasized that newly coined terms should undergo ethnographic examination prior to their acceptance as legitimate internet neologisms.

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## 3. The Possibilities and Limits of CmC in Language Learning

Several studies have conducted comprehensive comparisons between conventional face-to-face classroom interaction and synchronous computer-mediated communication. These investigations [23] confirmed the anticipated benefits of synchronous CMC, which can be summarized as follows: (1) more equitable and broadly distributed student participation; (2) promotion of collaborative dynamics among learners; (3) heightened motivation for language practice, particularly among those who tend to remain silent in oral discussions; and (4) reduced anxiety surrounding L2 oral communication, alongside positive implications for both writing and speaking proficiency. The subsequent discussion will centre on three key dimensions influenced by CMC—namely, authenticity, equality, and participatory engagement.

### *3.1 Benefits of Computer-mediated Communication*

First, CMC has the capacity to foster authenticity by affording learners direct and convenient access to genuine learning materials [11]. In the past, according to Kinginger, incorporating realia and other forms of authentic texts into foreign language instruction posed considerable challenges [12]. CMC offers a pathway to this ideal outcome, as online communication tools facilitate connections with native speakers and authentic cultural content, thereby potentially transforming foreign language education from "a decontextualized exercise" into meaningful engagement with "authentic real-world contexts of language use" [11]. Given that spoken English demands extensive practice and timely correction, and that vocabulary expansion is grounded in broad reading exposure, interaction with authentic texts enables learners to encounter valid expressions and standard pronunciation, which in turn supports clear and unambiguous communication. This shift also stimulates learners' interest in exploring the sociocultural dimensions of language use, as such engagement represents a highly desirable educational outcome [12]. Nevertheless, Kinginger also noted that relatively few studies have assessed the extent to which learners perceive the social meanings embedded in linguistic forms within computer-mediated environments. Consequently, whether CMC can effectively enhance the sociocultural understanding of language remains an open question requiring further empirical inquiry.

Second, CMC tends to promote greater equality in student participation compared to face-to-face classroom interaction. To begin with, CMC establishes a safe and supportive environment for self-expression, particularly benefiting introverted learners who may lack strong communicative skills. Such students can avoid the potential embarrassment of exposing their weaknesses or voicing dissenting opinions in physical classroom settings, and they often grow more willing to articulate their thoughts through computer-mediated written language [7]. In contrast to conventional classroom discourse, where a small number of students typically dominate while others remain passive, online communication encourages broader involvement, with each student tending to contribute more evenly to class discussions. In other words, learners may experience an enhanced sense of psychological security in virtual settings. In addition, CMC affords learners ample time to prepare for interactions, as well as to reflect on, interpret, and respond to the contributions of others [5]. This provides an equitable and independent platform where every student, regardless of personality traits or social abilities, can work toward shared objectives with adequate preparation time. Furthermore, CMC extends access to learners who might otherwise be marginalized by geographical or temporal constraints, making it particularly suitable for remotely situated language learners.

Moreover, the egalitarian nature of CMC is also reflected in its potential to mitigate stereotypical biases, as it directs communicators' attention toward the substance of discourse rather than the identities of the participants [11]. Face-to-face communication is often influenced by factors such as accent, physical appearance, and other external cues, whereas online exchanges tend to emphasize the sharing of experiences, ideas, values, and emotions. These dynamics contribute to more enduring and equitable communication, which in turn enhances language learning outcomes.

Third, the equality fostered by CMC also corresponds to increased levels of participation, both in qualitative and quantitative terms [19]. One evident manifestation of this is the rise in learner motivation.

### *3.2 Limits of Computer-mediated Communication*

Despite the positive findings reported in various studies, some scholars remain skeptical about whether engagement with CMC can genuinely lead to improved language proficiency. The following discussion revisits several obstacles that impede the full realization of CMC's potential, examined from the perspectives of students, teachers, and educational institutions.

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First, CMC carries inherent risks in terms of fostering interpersonal connections among communicators, particularly with regard to misunderstanding and distrust, especially when employed across diverse tasks and multiple objectives [3]. This concern is illustrated in an international language learning program involving American and French students who utilized asynchronous CMC to exchange ideas in both English and French. According to the author, the rhetorical dissonances expressed by students from different cultural backgrounds negatively affected the emotional tenor of communicative exchanges, even though these expressions did not hinder the conveyance of meaning [11]. Such issues are particularly likely to arise when language learners practice spoken English through asynchronous CMC. This mode of communication tends to impede the development of deeper emotional bonds between teachers and students, or among students from varied backgrounds, as asynchronous CMC does not permit real-time responses. Given that positive student-teacher relationships are conducive to establishing a secure and supportive learning environment where students can interact with instructors, exchange ideas, and take intellectual risks, this limitation is noteworthy.

Second, both students and teachers encounter numerous challenges related to the use of technology [18]. As a technology-mediated form of communication, CMC is heavily dependent on digital tools and online platforms. Rasheed observed that although students express a willingness to acquire up-to-date technological skills, the majority of technical difficulties they face stem from their inability to effectively utilize digital tools for learning purposes, as well as their expectations regarding the level of support they anticipate receiving. Ideally, if students received proper instruction on the functions of various online communication tools, they would be better equipped to tailor their learning pace to their individual needs. For instance, online spoken English practice workshops offered at universities provide valuable support for international students seeking to enhance their oral proficiency, while various social media platforms enable language learners to connect with native speakers around the world for idea exchange.

In addition, institutions implementing CMC should provide training to students on the effective use of technology and on diverse strategies to maximize the educational benefits afforded by these tools. Furthermore, teachers are also grappling with challenges arising from the integration of technology into their pedagogical practices. Research indicates that the technological obstacles faced by educators are largely attributable to their reluctance or hesitancy to adopt technology for instructional purposes. This phenomenon may be explained by the tendency of educational institutions to prioritize student needs over those of instructors, coupled with the observation that students often possess greater technological proficiency than their teachers [18]. Bagherbeigi examines how CMC influences EFL learners' oral proficiency[2]. Thirty Iranian intermediate EFL students were randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group, each consisting of fifteen participants. The experimental group engaged in two months of online speaking practice via WhatsApp Messenger, a platform supporting both synchronous (audio or video calls) and asynchronous (voice messages) communication, while the control group received no such intervention. Findings revealed that the experimental group demonstrated significant improvement in oral performance across eleven of fourteen measured indicators, particularly in the development and frequency of syntactically complex structures. Participants also reported high levels of satisfaction with the online intervention, suggesting strong potential for broader CMC integration in language education. Another study investigated vocabulary development among Algerian EFL learners following a 10-day online communication intervention [15], addressing two research questions: whether Facebook can serve as a viable tool for vocabulary learning, and whether targeted training on Facebook-based methods enhances lexical growth. Facebook enables both synchronous interaction through instant messaging and asynchronous exchanges via comments, offering learners access to authentic language use in a relatively low-anxiety environment. Results indicated that Facebook usage facilitated vocabulary acquisition, particularly when learning activities were carefully designed with clear objectives. Nevertheless, the platform's recreational nature may also pose distractions. The study concludes that Facebook should complement, rather than replace, traditional instruction, and its educational application requires prudent oversight.

## 4. Implication of CmC for Future Practice

From the teachers' perspective, CMC should be integrated into ELT curriculum design through a balanced mix of synchronous and asynchronous modes alongside face-to-face interaction. Teachers are encouraged to employ Visual Representation Tools, such as mind maps and outlines, to present grammar concepts clearly, while also providing constructive guidance via online scripts to sustain discussions [4]. Diversified course designs, including role-play and simulation activities like those used at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, promote learner-centered education and practical application of knowledge.

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From the institutions' perspective, schools are responsible for delivering effective training to enhance technological proficiency for both staff and students, along with clear safety guidelines. Research indicates that limited adoption of CMC often results from inadequate or untimely training. Additionally, institutions should ensure continuous access to up-to-date authentic learning materials to fully leverage the benefits of CMC in language education.

## 5. Conclusion

The overarching aim of this article is to examine the efficacy of CMC in EFL contexts, with particular attention to spoken language and vocabulary development. To this end, the article commences with a detailed introduction to relevant terminology, conceptual frameworks, and contextual background, followed by a critical examination of both the limitations and advantages associated with CMC. The benefits are categorized into three key dimensions: enhanced authenticity, greater equality, and increased participation. Conversely, the limitations primarily pertain to technological proficiency required of both instructors and learners, the potential for ambiguity and misinterpretation arising from technological mediation, and various obstacles that impede effective online interaction. Two case studies aligned with the research focus are subsequently presented to substantiate the central thesis, namely, that CMC can positively influence spoken English, particularly regarding syntactic complexity, and contribute to the expansion of learners' vocabulary. In view of these findings, the practical implications of CMC implementation are discussed from the perspectives of students, teachers, and educational institutions.

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