Saudi Students' Perceived Attitudes Toward Computer-assisted Class Discussion CACD as a vehicle for Communicative Interaction

Basim H. Alahmadi
Madinah College of Technology, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

The concern of this paper is a semi-experimental study designed to investigate the Saudi students' perceived reactions to Computer Assisted Class Discussion CACD as a facilitator of communicative interaction through the administration of a debriefing questionnaire and a semi-structured focus group interview post session. The implementation of CACD in Saudi classrooms has particular relevance to the Saudi learners because it cuts out the potential for the cultural problems which might be imposed on the Saudi students if they were asked to communicate with learners from outside the institution. The study took place in the Madinah College of Technology (MCT), Saudi Arabia with the cooperation of eight Saudi male students (four dyads) of intermediate level who interacted with one another in synchronous mode (MSN Messenger) over the course of three weeks. They attempted to jointly complete three tasks: two information-gap and one decision making. The data suggests that participants described the experience as useful, valid and enjoyable and claimed that it was basically a stress-free experience. The fact that participants favored the experience of CACD over traditional oral face-to-face F2F classrooms indicates that CACD would be welcomed in Saudi EFL classes. Given these results, the study indicates that there could be a significant role for CACD as a vehicle for communicative interaction in Saudi EFL classes.

1. Introduction

The increase in the importance of English as a lingua franca and therefore English as a foreign language EFL in Saudi Arabia has been accompanied by rapid educational changes in answer to economic needs. Saudi Arabia is particularly worth investigating in this field of ELT because there is a paucity of literature in relation to ICT and, apparently, no available studies on Computer Mediated Communications CMC and language learning in Saudi Arabia; however, a modest number of studies do show an occasional inclusion of some areas of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Therefore, the main reasons for implementing this study arose from the absence of interactional communication as a language learning tool in Saudi classrooms and the potential of CACD to facilitate such communication. Therefore, the suitability of CACD for the Saudi Classrooms is an interesting issue and worth investigating. The first step to accomplish this task is to investigate students' perceived personal attributes toward CACD beforehand as Chapelle [7] has maintained over the years, "…any discussion of technology in second language research would not be complete without an inclusion of personal performance data that reveal personal attributes". Before we proceed in our study, it would, therefore be useful to explore the aspects of Saudi society and culture which could be seen as being responsible for the basic features of the Saudi EFL classroom.

2. Researched culture

Saudi community is basically religious and conservative. Islam plays a fundamental role in determining the values, norms, practices of society and attitudes. It is worth mentioning that the one of the striking feature that profoundly influences the Saudi learning system is the segregation of sexes. This is also true for everyday life. This segregation is maintained physically i.e males are not allowed to mix with unrelated women. These practices are prescribed in Islam. Islamic religion – in many versus at Qura'an – tells us that confining women to their own company is designed to maintain their chastity and to prevent any encroaching of their honors Almunajjed [1] . As for our study, the most impressive consequences of the use of the CACD in Saudi Arabia are that they introduced an unprecedented new means of communications of both sexes that was not viable before. Therefore, gender separation is partially overcome because although they are physically apart, they still can communicate using CACD not necessarily with each other but with the outside world. Having presented a brief idea about the identity and the norms of the Saudi society, a quick look at the Saudi EFL classes is equally needed.

2.1. Saudi community and its norms and identities in education

The situation in the EFL classrooms is over-determined by the factors mentioned above. Apparently, the Saudi community is largely conservative and religious where hierarchical structures are the norm. In other words, learners are not likely to engage in many situations where they can use dialogue with an authority figure, such as a teacher, present. Secondly, Saudi Arabia follows a rigid hierarchical educational system where syllabi are made exclusively for Saudi learners and accordingly there is no space for negotiation. Thirdly, due to the hierarchical educational system and the fact that Saudi learners are exam/certificate-oriented, learners and parents tend to resist any additional teaching material or strategies, claiming that this is a digression and could lead students to fail their exams. Speaking about the ideologies of the Saudi EFL classrooms, pedagogic factors do contribute to a considerable role. For instance, the absence of speaking skills could be attributed to the teaching methodology – grammar translation approach GTA - which does not, as yet, acknowledge the communicative language teaching CLT method. Moreover, Saudi students see the teacher as a leading figure and as the only source of knowledge in the classroom. As Dow and Ryan [9] assert: "…in traditional educational systems, the teacher is an authority figure whose role is to tell students the correct answer". The author, as an ex-Saudi student, would argue that (Saudi) students would find it difficult to accept a teacher who does not fulfill the two previous concepts of a) having the dominant role, and b) being the only source of knowledge in the classroom. To summarize, social, cultural and psychological factors play a vital role in the Saudi classroom. Having presented a brief review of Saudi learners' culture and related issues underpinning this study, a discussion of CACD viability for the context of the study is now necessary.

3. The viability of CACD at Saudi English classrooms

Given that discussion above coupled with a plethora of literature on the impact of CACD technology, the CACD viability is an interesting and useful area of investigation in the Saudi context In various parts of the world, networking technologies often known as 'Computer mediated Communications' (CmC), have had an enormous impact on language learning. Task-based Synchronous CmC could be termed as computer assisted class discussion CACD. Therefore, CACD is one disguise of CmC. Through literature review,

many studies have been conducted to investigate the role of CACD in language learning such as those of Chun [8], Kelm [11], Dwyer [10] and Blake [6]. They all subscribe to the belief that task-based CACD sessions allow learners to engage in meaning negotiation which can improve their conversational management skills/communicational strategies with the end result being greater language fluency, hence successful SLA conditions. Unfortunately, none of those previous studies examined CACD on Arab students. As this technology is still at its infancy and is under-researched area, the author has scrutinized this field and examined CACD usability on Saudi students. The functional definition of CACD in this study is "computer mediated communications which occur in real time and in a single class that allow learners to interact and through the use of the keyboard". The rational of this study then revolves around the idea that classrooms have long been looked at as educational communities, so, potentially could CACD be used to build online communities or "virtual schoolhouses" Stevens [14]. Unprecedently, it could be one of the ways in which a more interactive element can be introduced into the Saudi classroom.

Now it is clear that CACD has a particular relevance to the Saudi learner because it cuts out the potential for the cultural problems. A significant hazard in Synchronous CmC is flaming which is unacceptable behaviors and offensive comments that violates the netiquettes. Flaming could be imposed on the Saudi students if they were asked to communicate with learners from outside the institution. However, CACD is a promising and effective solution in this case because the online interaction will be kept to space and time limitations. Hence, flaming is easily overcome. If this study yields positive results, CACD can be employed in Saudi EFL classrooms in the future to optimize the interaction between students when a specific interactional task has been set.

4. Learners' attitudes about CACDs

The important concept of Chapelle's discussed above about examining students' personal attributes has shaped the design of this current study. Scarcely scattered in the literature review, only a handful of previous CACD studies examined student's attitudes toward CACD or CmC in general. These studies report that learners seem to have positive attitudes towards CACD's activities. Warschauer [16] and Dwyer [10] have both investigated students' attitudes after a short course of CACD studies, Beauvois [2] and Blake [6] also examined the same attitudes but after a long-term course of studies. Beauvois [3], as one of the pioneering researchers in CACD, examined the attitudes of intermediate French

learners in a comparative study for a five-week long course on reading. Both F2F and CACD discussion were examined. She conducted interviews and created questionnaires to investigate learners' attitudes to CACD. Her learners reported that they had enjoyed the CACD experience, found it less stressful and felt that they had produced more output in CACD than in F2F discussions. A year before, using the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator Beauvois and Eledge [2] examined students' attitudes towards CACD and found that both personality types (introvert & extrovert) perceived CACD as a linguistically affective and personally beneficial experience. Later, Dwyer's [10], Blake's [6] and Warschauer's [16] studies all came to the same conclusions.

Another long research CACD study, which lasted for two terms, was conducted by Blake [6] on Spanish intermediate learners who were asked to do three types of activity (decision-making, information-gap and jigsaw). Students' attitudes were collected using surveys; these showed that learners found it motivating, fun to learn with, and conducive to L2 learning. Warschauer [16], as a seminal researcher in the field of CmC at that time, conducted a similar short-term, comparative study but his sampling frame was made-up of advanced English learners whose attitudes were sought through questionnaires only. His learners revealed that CACD was more comfortable, less stressful and more creative. A second short-term study which investigated student's attitudes was carried out by Dwyer [10] who conducted a small scale study on three CACD sessions; he investigated the role of negative feedback in CACD. In the semi-structured interviews employed to seek students' attitudes towards CACD they revealed that CACD sessions were easy to follow, more communicative than traditional F2F discussion and believed it to be a good learning environment where they were able to notice others' mistakes and learn from them.

5. Description and justification of the research

5.1. Context of the study

The Madinah College of Technology MCT is one of several polytechnic colleges in Saudi Arabia which is supervised by a government agency. The general aim of these polytechnic colleges is to prepare manpower to become qualified sufficiently to undertake technical, clerical and administrative jobs in production and service firms that operate in the private as well as in the public sector. Enrolled students spend three years studying for a higher diploma in a variety of technical fields, for example: computer science, mechanical and electrical

engineering, office management, and travel and tourism. During their courses of study, students are expected to finish three English Language modules, these are: 1) EGP (English for General Purposes); 2) ESP (English for Special Purposes); and modules which vary according to the students' major area of study.

5.2. Subjects of this research

Eight Saudi male MCT learners studying in the computer department participated in this study. The reason for targeting learners from the computer department was that they were computer literate and faster typists. Subjects were first nominated by their teacher who was briefed about the criteria needed for the experience. Then, they were filtered according to the information acquired by means of a two-page background questionnaire. Finally, the researcher had a short, informal conversation with students to re-check their English language abilities; this also allowed the researcher to gain knowledge of the typing speeds of the appointed students while they were involved in a short computer-based activity. The goal was to ensure that these students were good candidates for the study and that there would be no constraints regarding their linguistic abilities, computer attitudes, professional skills and typing speeds. The result of the questionnaire revealed that their English level was pitched between lower and intermediate levels and they all had They all had a good knowledge of the MSN messenger chatroom and reported favourable attitudes towards computers, thus training sessions were not provided prior to the study.

All participants were then given a demographic background questionnaire. The validity of the research was maintained because the researcher did not explain that he was measuring their attitude. The subjects were also reassured as to the confidentiality and anonymity of the study and were given pseudonyms. They were also informed that any personal information would be securely kept by the researcher. Throughout the process of data collection the researcher stressed the fact that students' performances had no bearing whatsoever on their final grade.

Since only three weeks had been allocated to this study, it was felt that conducting a pre and post treatment test would not yield solid results from which firm conclusions could be drawn. Firstly, because post-treatment tests are more suited to longitudinal studies where more time is available and more accurate results can be obtained. Secondly, in such cases the researcher must be sure that both positive and/or negative results are precisely attributed to the use of CACD and not to any external factors.

5.3. CACD tool

The instrument of this study was free, downloadable software called MSN Messenger 7.5. When using this, the screen is split into two halves: the top half shows student's interlocutors' replies; the bottom half shows the student his message as he is typing. Although there are many Synchronous CmC chatrooms available on the internet, (e.g. Skyp, AOL Instant Messenger, and ICQ), the MSN Messenger 7.5 was chosen because it is the most popular chatroom for MCT students. Additionally, it allows for real-time Synchronous CmC, is easy-to-download and, most importantly, it has the facility to save the complete record of any written transactions.

5.4. Communication tasks

For the purposes of this experiment, three different tasks were prepared for the participants; the purpose of each task was explained to their English teacher who confirmed that the level of the tasks was compatible with or a little higher than the level of the students. Those were:

- an information gap task 'two-way exchange. (Figure 1)
- an information gap task 'one-way exchange. (Figure 2)
- a decision-making task.

The first task, adopted from Ur [15] and called "spot the difference", involved each learner in holding a pertinent amount of the information which they needed to exchange in order to solve the task (Figure 1). The task was to identify the differences between two pictures held by each student; although the pictures looked the same, there were at least eight differences; the task had to be completed without showing each other their pictures, therefore, the learners had to work collaboratively in order to identify the differences.

The second task was a 'picture placement' task adopted from Ross-Feldman [13]. The learners were given two similar pictures of a kitchen where five pieces of utensils were unplaced. Picture A showed the place where B's utensils should be and vice versa (Figure 1). In this way, again without showing each other their pictures, learners had to work collaboratively, helping each other to place the missing objects in order to make their kitchens identical by placing the utensils in the correct place. While this task is a one-way task, a closer look at it would reveal that it can be regarded as a reciprocal or a combination of a two 'one-way' exchange of information task which can, in fact, result in as much negotiated interaction as a two-way task.

As CACD is a relatively new area in the field of SLA, in fact, it can be considered to be in its infancy. Accordingly much of this research is exploratory in nature. The researcher felt that it was an appropriate time to explore a new type of task within the CACD sessions. The third task is a 'decision-making' task, where learners discuss and debate controversial issues, i,e women driving in Saudi Arabia. This issue is contemporary since the Saudi community in the last few years has been split into two sides, one supporting the idea of allowing women to drive and the other opposing it. Inspired by the idea of "pushed output", the researcher believes that it ca be demonstrated through the techniques of discussion and debate. The question required to be debated in this decision-making activity asked "R U 4 women driving in Saudi Arabia?" (based on a comparable study carried out by Kern [12] on French learners in USA "R U 486 pills in the US to prevent abortion?"). Obviously, this is an open task where there is no right or wrong answer.

5.5. Pilot study and classrooms/CACD observation

In order to estimate the approximate time needed for the subjects to complete each task, and also to gain experience in overcoming any possible negative outcomes, a pilot study was conducted. A number of useful ideas emerged from the pilot study. The researcher fine-tuned the lab hardware, and needed a notebook to jot down any interesting comments. Most significantly, it was noted that there was a negative effect on the flow of the discussion and students' performance every time the teacher became involved in the chat. Thus, the researcher minimized his involvement to the bare minimum of requirement. After being given permission and prior to the CACD sessions, the researcher scheduled three appointments with the teachers to observe their F2F classes. In order to triangulate the data of the study, the researcher applied observations to CACD sessions as well so as to examine the engagement of the students and to what extent they feel relaxed in CACD. The combination of these three observations was designed to help ensure a more accurate assessment of MCT students' attitudes toward CACD. More importantly, it was likely to enhance the internal validity of the current research study as stated in Chapelle [7].

5.6. Procedure of the study

Each dyad took one task a day; all tasks were covered in 12 days during three weeks where the researcher was involved as facilitator but not an instructor. In order to minimise anxiety and personal
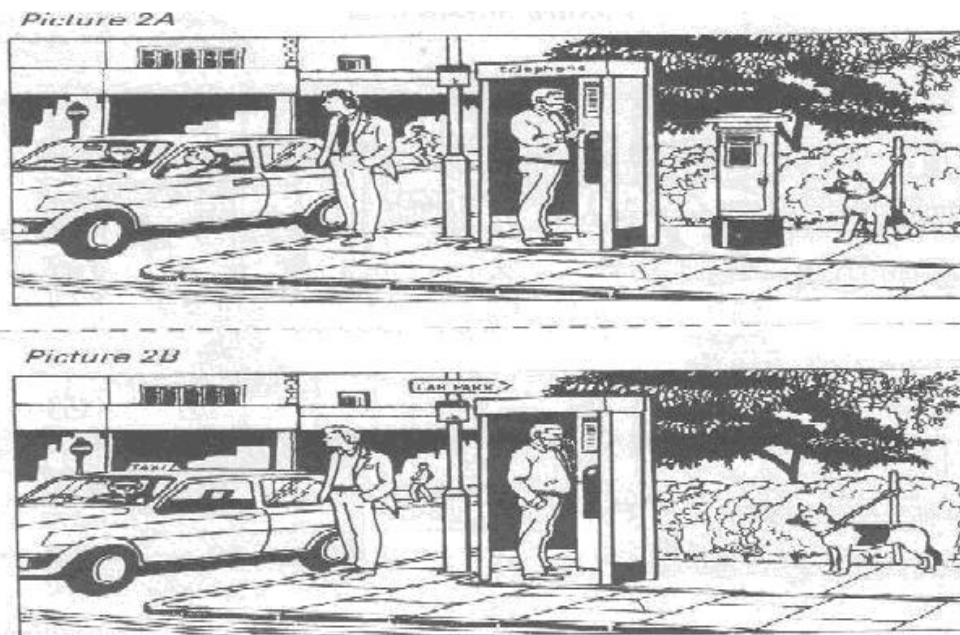
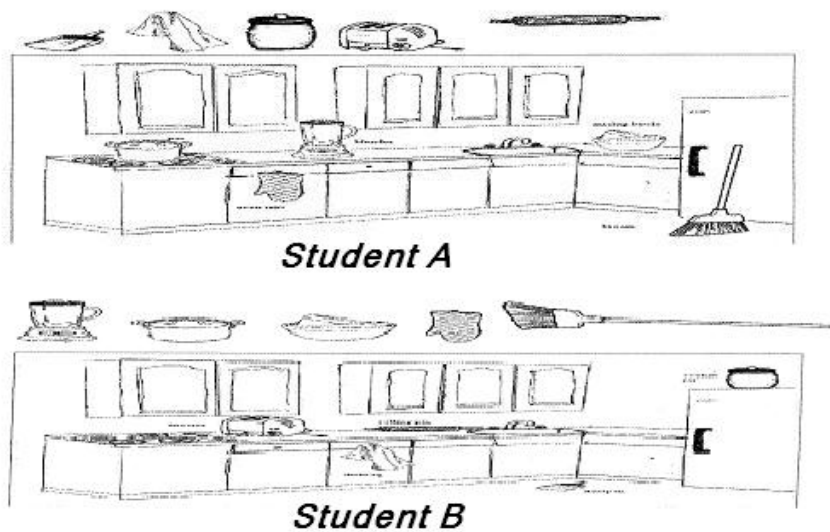**Figure 1. Information gap task "two-way exchange"**

Figure 2. Information gap task "one-way exchange"

contact, the lab was a U-Shaped configuration facing outwards where learners did not face each other. This configuration helped to maintain reliability and to maximise the trustworthiness of the research since it prevented students interacting in the mother tongue. Students used their email addresses and passwords to access their MSN account. Since each session consisted of two students only, giving them pseudonyms for the sake of anonymity would have been pointless. Participants were then asked to complete a fourteen question debriefing Likert-scale (Table 1) and open answer questionnaire. The

397

questionnaire was administered so as to identify students' reactions to their experience of CACD, online interaction with their peer and to find out how relaxing, beneficial, engaging or stressful it was. Basically, the questionnaire focused on three factors, these were: affective; participative; and communicative. While composing the debriefing questionnaire, two points were taken into consideration. First, that the questions should not be leading to or contain any positive affirmation. Second, the questionnaire was composed as an advance preparation to the interview which covered the same factors.

A semi-structured focus-group interview was also administered in order to collect data about students' opinions of CACD. The researcher chose to hold interviews as well as ask respondents to fill in questionnaires because the former can be more revealing and thus beneficial to the quality of data collected when in-depth information is required, especially in regard to finding out about feelings and motives. In fact, interviews usually yield richer and more real – emic - data than questionnaires. Bell [5] posits that the focus group interview is rich in data because of the interaction factor which makes it more interviewee-centred. The researcher asked subjects' consent to record their discussions so that ethical validity of the research could be maintained. In this interview, the researcher investigated the perceived assessments of the CACD sessions in areas such as motivation, enjoyment, equality of participation, and frustration. It is important to note that the two questionnaires and the interview were carried out in the subjects' native tongue, so as to avoid any language barriers that might affect subjects' perceptions and efforts to provide fuller replies.

6. Results and discussions

6.1. CACD observation

In general, throughout the 12 CACD sessions, students were absorbed in the chat as they were typing, reading and scrolling the chat screen up and down all the time. Previous CACD studies, for example those of Warschauer[16], Beauvois [4], and Dwyer [10] who found similar results, i.e. that CACD was much more engaging to the students. Their attention to the tasks did not seem to wane as the discussion progressed. Participants remained silent although occasional laughter was heard but there was no sign of hesitation or pressure. This finding contradicts that of Chun [8] who observed that the risk of hesitation is always present in CACD. Participants in the current study concentrated intently and were enthusiastic about what was being shown on their screens. Therefore, CACD does not only

provide equal participation for the Saudi EFL students but maximises their language participation in an unprecedented way in strong contrast to the conventional Saudi F2F EFL classes. Previous studies also found CACD's potential for enhancing participation was the first and most important advantage of CACD for language learners [4], Kelm [11] and Kern [12]. Partially or entirely CACD's lack of verbal cues (stress, intonation, etc) and para/non-linguistic communication (nodding, shaking the head etc.) makes it a distinctive medium of interaction and should be discussed more widely to clarify various points. By this I mean that CACD is different from speech, since the latter is an explicit medium enhanced with extra features, i.e. verbal and non-linguistic cues, which help to convey an exact message.

6.2. Analysis of debriefing questionnaire

As students' conceptions of CACD cannot be measured, their attitudes were measured through the indicators set by the researcher earlier. The set indicators were affective, participative, and communicative. Affective factors, as a key indicators of student' attitudes, were covered in questions one to six where seven out of eight students strongly agreed about the enjoyability of the experience. In fact, nearly all participants agreed that the CACD sessions were fun and reported that they were motivated in the chat; only one of them was neutral. None of them felt that the experience was stressful. Five participants agreed that chat was a relaxing experience as they did not have to pay attention to their pronunciation, two of them disagreed and one was neutral. However, the majority of students indicated that they were embarrassed when they misspelled words in the chat, only two students strongly disagreed. Participative factors were covered in questions seven to ten: all participants strongly agreed that they participated in English in equal amounts. Six students reported that they communicated with their peers and instructor in the chat more than they did in the F2F classrooms, one of them was neutral and two left blanks. With regard to communicative benefits, covered in questions eleven to fourteen, five students felt that communicating in the chat was easier, two disagreed and one strongly disagreed. This disagreement could be attributed to the fact that some students felt nervous when the instructor was involved in the chat. Participants were split as to whether the time provided was long enough to communicate well - five agreed, three disagreed. Again, half of the participants favoured large group chat and the other half favoured one-to-one peer chat.

Table 1. Debriefing Likert-scale questionnaire

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I enjoyed the online discussion with my classmates.					
2.	I found learning English this way is fun!					
3.	I was more motivated in the chat than in the traditional classrooms.					
4.	I felt stressed when I had to respond to a question from my peer.					
5.	I felt relaxed in the chat because I didn't have to pay attention to my pronunciation.					
6	I was embarrassed in the chat because I had to pay more attention to writing.					
7.	I participated as much as my peers because I was compelled to respond to them.					
8.	I communicated with my peer and teacher more than I usually do in traditional F2F classrooms.					
9.	Communicating with the teacher and my peer in the chat was easier than in the F2F classrooms.					
10.	I could not communicate well because the time was short. I needed to think and respond quickly.					
11.	I prefer to chat in pairs rather than in large groups.					
12.	I have learned new words from my peer.					
13.	I have benefited from the chat by noticing my friend's mistakes					
14.	I think I was speaking more than I was writing in the chat.					

6.3. Analysis of semi-structured interviews

The focus-group semi-structured interview included 10 open-ended questions designed to explore the same areas investigated in the post-session questionnaire. Questions one to five focused on the affective factors of CACD; six to seven on the participative factors; eight to ten on the communicative factors. When responding to my questions, several topics emerged based on the experiences of the students; in fact, the students were allowed to go off at a tangent in an attempt to cover as many aspects of the questions as possible. Accordingly, my analysis will not follow a linear transcript of the answers but rather the most important findings for each factor.

With regard to affective factors, all participants reported positive feelings and welcomed the experience. They attributed their enjoyment of the experience to many factors, chief among them were: low anxiety discussion atmosphere; the text-based medium was easier to understand; CACD provided more time for the chatters to think before they responded. I would also argue this feeling of comfort and enjoyment could be attributed to the aspects of equality, meaning equal ability to participate, equal language levels and to the tasks themselves. These responses largely confirmed the many findings of previous CACD studies Beauvois [2], Kern [12] and Kelm [11].

One participant claimed: *"CACD is never boring where you are always involved, engaged and interested just the opposite of F2F classroom"*. Most of them did not have any problems with their spelling; they said that they could understand their peers' comments and vice-versa. Interestingly, they explained that their level of comfort increased as

they progressed through the chat session. However, two cases where they felt stressed and anxious were reported: 1) when their instructor was involved in the chat. The latter case was expected, especially since this was their first exposure to CACD, however, this potential problem could be alleviated either by more practice or by specifying less time to each task. However, for the first problem, when asked why they felt anxious when the instructor was involved in the chat, one of them replied;

"I would have liked this experience to be more impersonal [where personal identities are really anonymous] so that I am not worried about being instructed or re-corrected and enjoy more freedom in the chat especially in front of my teacher. Why did not you have two chat windows; one is the same like what we had, and the other includes only the teacher and the student so that the other student did not know about his peer being instructed".

In fact, this method was adopted by a previous CACD study conducted by Dwyer [10]; the idea looks very promising and could be extremely useful because learners would never be afraid of losing face.

In regard to the participative factors, the most positive effect was that the experience allowed the students to interact more in English. As one participant reported, "I honestly believed I did not practice English as much in my life in any other English class before". These findings corroborate previous CmC studies Beauvois[4], Kelm [11] and Kern [12]. MSN messenger was strongly appraised by the students as a participation incentive. They claimed that it encouraged them to use English regardless of their typing experience and that it had many features such as icons, animated marks, was of a user friendly design, and they were familiar with it.

In connection with communicative factors, interestingly one of the students claimed: "I felt I was compelled to communicate with my, there was nowhere out", this was the same point as that made by Beauvois [3] when said it is the students' "day-in-court". Throughout this enforced communication exercise, I would argue that students produced and received comprehensible feedback because there can be no communicative interaction without comprehension. These features of communicative interaction are a central prerequisite for a successful SLA process. Although students agreed that they could manage to communicate smoothly and were never under pressure of time, they all believed that the 'discuss and debate' activity needed more time and suggested one hour. In regard to the tasks, the majority favored the "placing kitchen stuff" activity and their least favored activity was 'discuss and

debate'. They claimed that this latter task required a better vocabulary and wider background knowledge. This could also be due to the lack of visual stimulus what Ur [15] calls "visual focus" which would generally keep them engaged and involved in the activity. In short, it suffices to keep the communicative factors discussion limited to these limited points as it could variously cover many interrelated aspects of SLA. This includes but not limited to meaning negotiation, collaboration of meaning and the semantic and syntactic features of CACD discourse. Apparently, discussing these features in details is beyond the scope of the current study.

The researcher also investigated students' opinions on whether they found the use of icons and animated marks useful in their chat. They asserted that they had little effect on the conversants and would not really convey anger, pleasure or surprise etc. One of them said "I used to send an icon indicating that I was laughing while I was not". These comments appear to indicate that emoticons and kinesics are not communicative - like verbal and non-linguistic cues in speech - in this situation. This could be attributed to many factors including the limitations of their ability to convey shades of emotions, smileys, for example, are limited compared with verbal cues in speech. Additionally, emoticons could be applied unintentionally, whereas in speech, most communicative signs are applied intentionally, and in F2F interactions body-language often helps to convey a message but this needs more modalities, i.e. vision and sound, which is impossible in the chat.

One student reported *"Although I did not learn too many words, but I learned from my friend's mistakes and most importantly I learned how to communicate with people in English in the chat, I will practice this at home".* This indicates that CACD could pave the way to successful SLA since it allowed students to notice their language output and their friends' input.

7. Conclusion to students' attitudes toward CACD

In conclusion, it seems clear from the discussions above that students showed mostly positive attitudes towards the use of CACD and reported a tendency to welcome the experience; they also had the desire to learn English this way. Although students identified many advantages and disadvantages of CACD, the most important benefit was the drastic change in the amount of their participation of L2 in Saudi EFL classes. Participants did arguably spot some pitfalls of CACD but the acclaimed reported benefits seem to outweigh the limitations and accordingly CACD was welcomed by the participants of the study, who, while engaged in the online interactional discussion,

found the experience stress-free, valid, useful and enjoyable. Overall, we can confirm that CACD could be implemented into Saudi EFL classes to generate communicative interaction and interactive and successful second language learning. The findings of the debriefing questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews showed a positive attitude towards the experience and reported that it was engaging, useful, enjoyable, motivational and stress-free. They stressed the idea that CACD allowed them to use English in a way that had never been possible before. This because they were invariably compelled to talk to each other as Beauvois [3] term it the students' "day-in-court". These potential benefits of CACD indicate that it would be welcomed by the students in MCT. The findings have also highlighted the crucial role of the instructor or teacher as a facilitative but not a participant of the chat. The findings of this study, in line with similar studies in this field, have some implications for teachers who aim to use CACD as a new means of interaction in EFL classrooms. . Another finding is that the tasks should be pictorial, goal-oriented, have a two-way exchange of information, should be well pre-structured and preferably have a variety of outcomes so that learners are forced to engage in communicative interaction. As CACD has been found to clearly induce the interactive competence, It is also highly recommended that future CACD researchers use a chat programme that shows the time of each message such as Skyp or ICQ so as to better understand the nature of the interactive CACD discussion.

It is hoped that this research study will contribute to the literature of CACD research as the researcher is unaware, to date, of any previous CACD studies that have set out to investigate CACD's ascribed effect as a promoting tool for communicative interaction. While the participants of this study were Arabic native students, the overwhelming majority of similar studies have been carried out with English, Spanish, Korean or Japanese native students. The results should be restricted to MCT participants or to the subjects under study, any generalisations remain tentative. Finally, it is axiomatic that this study cannot provide an account of all aspects of CACD as a facilitator of communicative interaction. It should be seen as inductive rather than definitive. Further research of greater depth and from different perspectives is direly required.

8. References

[1] Almunajjed, Mona. (1997). *Women in Saudi Arabia today*. London. Macmillan.

[2] Beauvois, M. H., & Eledge, J. (1996). Personality types and megabytes: Student attitudes toward computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the language classroom. *CALICO Journal*, 13, 27-45.

[3] Beauvois, M. H. (1997) Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC): technology for improving speaking and writing, In: Bush, M.D. & Terry, R.M. (ed). *Technology-Enhanced Language Learning*. Lincolnwood, IL.: National Textbook Company: 165-184.

[4] Beauvois, M. H. (1998) E-talk: Computer-assisted classroom discussion – Attitudes and motivation. In J. Swaffar, S. Romano, P. Markley and K. Arens (Eds.) *Language Learning Online: theory and practice in the ESL and L2 computer classroom*. Austin, TX: The Daedalus Group.

[5] Bell, J (2005). *Doing your research project*. Suffolk. The Bath Press.

[6] Blake, R. (2000). Computer mediated communication: A window on L2 Spanish interlanguage. *Language Learning & Technology*, 4(1), 120-136. Available from: http://llt.msu.edu/vol4num1/blake/.[Accessed 15-August-10].

[7] Chapelle, C. A. (2004) Technology and second language learning: expanding methods and agendas. *System* 32 (4): pp.593-601

[8] Chun, D. M. (1998) Using Computer-Assisted Class Discussions to facilitate the acquisition of interactive competence. In J. Swaffar, S. Romano, P. Markley and K. Arens (Eds.) *Language Learning Online: theory and practice in the ESL and L2 computer classroom*. Austin, TX: The Daedalus Group.

[9] Dow, R. & Ryan, J (1987) preparing the language students for professional interaction. In: Rivers, W. M. (1987) *Interactive language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

[10] Dwyer, N. (2005) *Computer-Assisted Class Discussion and Second Language Learning: An Investigation into the role of negative feedback*. Master's dissertation. University of Brighton.

[11] Kelm, R. (1992) The use of synchronous computer networks in second language instruction: a preliminary report. *Foreign Language Annals*, 25 (5): 441-454.

[12] Kern, R. (1995). Restructuring classroom interaction with networked computers: effects on quantity and characteristics of language production. *Modern Language Journal*, 79, 457-476.

[13] Ross-Feldman, L. J. (2005) *Task-based interaction between second language learners: exploring the role of gender*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Georgetown

[14] Stevens, Vance (2000) Developing a Community in online Language Learning. In: Syed, Z & Heuring D (Eds.) *Tools of the trade: Teaching EFL in the Gulf* . Abu Dhabi. Military Language Institute: 85-101

[15] Ur, Penny (2005) *Grammar Practice Activities: A practical guide for teachers*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

[16] Warschauer, M. (1996) Comparing face-to-face and electronic discussion in the second language. CALICO 13: 7-26.