

Learning English as a Foreign Language afar Wall with MALL – A Case Study with Undergraduate students

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Abstract

Mobile assisted language learning is undergoing rapid revolution. Language learning becomes easier and interesting with a device. The study explores on the perceptions and opinions of Undergraduate students of a particular university, examining Mobile Assisted Language Learning in the learning of English as a Foreign Language. The sample population consisted of 60 undergraduate students of an Engineering course. A qualitative and quantitative research was conducted to measure the actual perception of the students through Mobile. A questionnaire survey was conducted with acceptance model. The findings revealed that most of the students had positive perception about Mobile Assisted Language Learning in the learning of English as a Foreign Language and the students believed that MALL would help learn faster and easier. Hence it can be recommended that MALL can be used in curriculum under the caption Information and communication technology teaching aids for better learning in English classrooms.

Keywords: MALL, English learning, Curriculum, Projected aid

Introduction

Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) – is a subarea of the growing field of mobile learning and deals with the use of mobile technology in language learning. In MALL there is no need for learners to sit in a classroom or at a computer to get learning materials. MALL can be considered an ideal solution to language learning barriers in terms of time and place. The first use of MALL took place in 1980's when Twarog and Pereszlenyi used telephones to provide distant language learners with feedback and assistance.

According to Colpaert (2004) mobile learning environment might be:

- face-to-face
- distance
- online
- self-paced
- calendar-based

The field of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is an approach to language learning that is based upon the use of mobile devices such as MP3/4 players, PDAs, smartphones like the iPhone or Samsung Galaxy, and tablets like the iPad and Google Nexus. MALL combines mobile learning with computer assisted language learning. It has gained

popularity in the last few years due to our hectic mobile lifestyle and the widespread adoption of mobile telecommunications and computing devices with Internet connections.

Mobile learning can be characterized by its potential for learning to be: spontaneous, informal, personalized, ubiquitous. Such learning can be used when people/learners encounter shortage of time:

- As the result of working longer hours
- Working and studying

In such a situation a busy learner may tend to use portable devices to learn new material rather than taking time for traditional classroom-based courses. Physical characteristics of mobile phones play a key role in making them useful and desirable in the learning process. These factors are: keypad vs. touchpad, screen size, audio functions. Another important factor in mobile learning is present on the side of the learner, these being:

- Learner skills
- Learner's prior knowledge and experience with mobile devices for learning
- Learner's attitude towards the learning through a mobile phone

These factors are crucial in the output quality of such mobile-based tasks. Ineffective mobile-learning there is a shift from teacher-led learning to student-led learning via m-learning. Student-led learning allows for a greater degree of choice about the way in which the same information can be accessed on a handheld device than on a desktop. It is more like personal or self-learning for students who are accustomed to take independent decisions concerning their learning process.

The proliferation of mobile technologies generates a new approach related to the field of language learning and teaching known as mobile-assisted language learning or MALL in short. Kukulska-Hulme and Shield postulate that "MALL differs from computer-assisted language learning in its use of personal, portable devices that enable new ways of learning, emphasizing continuity or spontaneity of access and interaction across different contexts of use" (Kukulska-Hulme and Shield. P, 2008: 273). Palalas states that "Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) can augment second language teaching and learning by taking it into the real world" (Palalas. P, 2011:71). Miangah and Nezarat "MALL deals with the use of mobile technology in language learning. Students do not always have to study a second language in a classroom. They may have the opportunity to learn it using mobile devices when they desire and where they are" (Miangah and Nezarat. P, 2012, 313).

There is a rapidly growing literature on the area of mobile learning which indicates the increasing use of mobile technologies for learning and teaching practices. Stockwell and Hubbard posit that "Research has for the most part shed a very positive light on the potential of the role that mobile devices may play" (Stockwell and Hubbard. P, 2013:2). Stockwell and Hubbard go on to claim that "Mobile-assisted language learning is quickly securing its place in language learning contexts, and the availability of the powerful tools that learners possess makes it an attractive supplement to other forms of teaching and learning a second language" (Stockwell and Hubbard. P, 2013:11).

Research Questions and Review

The issue of m-learning may induce curiosity, skepticism or excitement. The typical questions to be investigated is:

- Is it really possible to learn/learn a foreign language with such small devices?
- What Category of students use mobile devices for teaching and learning/learning a foreign language?
- What sort of subjects and situations are appropriate for mobile learning?

According to Oberg et al. (2012) as well as many other researchers, mobile learning can be used within or outside classroom, but is most effective in collaborative learning among small groups as it offers the opportunity of close interactions, conversations, decision-making, recording tasks/speech etc. while being physically on the move or in different places which is not possible in case of using desktop/laptop computers. Learners can be more directly connected with real world experiments/tasks, exploit their free time better and improve their language skills when being on the move. MALL deals with the use of mobile technology in language learning. Students do not always have to study a second language in a classroom. They may have the opportunity to learn it using mobile devices when they desire and where they are. As learning English is considered a main factor for professional success and a criterion for being educated in many communities, providing more convenient environment for people to learn English is one of the strategic educational goals towards improving the students' achievement and supporting differentiation of learning needs.

There are many researches and developments towards the use of wireless technology for different aspects of language learning. In the following lines it has been tried to demonstrate the benefits of using mobile phones in learning English as a second language. Areas of mobile-based language learning are diverse among which the most common ones are vocabulary, listening, grammar, phonetics, reading comprehension, etc.

Methods

To explore the student's practices of mobile devices and readiness to adopt mobile devices in language learning, an action research was conducted. Accordingly, both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted. The target population of this study consisted of EFL undergraduate students at a private university. Since it is impossible to conduct a research on the whole population of undergraduate students, 60 EFL students were selected randomly. A survey method was adopted in order to collect the data required for the study. To investigate the research questions, a questionnaire administered to 60 students. The main endeavor behind this questionnaire is to gather data to answer the research questions.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

In terms of determining student's readiness to use mobile-assisted language learning, the results indicate that students of English who have participated in this research show high level of readiness and enthusiasm towards the adoption of mobile devices as an innovative tool which can actively engage them in enhancing language skills. The informants show their readiness to learn anytime and anywhere, interact and share information, receive assignments...etc. Even though, when interviewed with some of the English teachers, the study indicated that mobile technologies are significant in making teaching and learning easier, they do not show strong willingness to implement them in classroom activities in order to enhance language-learning skills. This is may be due to the lack of infrastructure such as Wi-Fi in the university. The study shows that students and teachers are technologically, and competently ready for the use of mobile technologies in learning and

teaching context. This gives the English language teacher the opportunity to blend the use of mobile technology with their traditional teaching. This might help educators to create a new learning environment and give them the opportunity to design new activities, and methods of learning and teaching.

Conclusions

The paper aimed at presenting both the theoretical background of MALL, which is still a growing and underestimated field as well as showing its practical side and the examples of specific activities, tasks, interfaces and systems that are already available to the public and which can be of help to EFL teachers and students. Nowadays due to the growth of wireless technologies, MALL is available through numerous devices. They offer very short tutorials as well as full-courses. Such devices support the retention and utilization of newly acquired language skills. Predicted growth of MALL is reinforced by the overwhelming “lack of time” (decrease of free time). The need for traditional classroom-based or even online courses will decrease, however, nothing can substitute the dynamics of the traditional classroom. It will become, and in fact, is becoming, an ideal solution for students or professionals willing to acquire new languages. The recent advances of mobile and wireless technologies have opened new visions into the fields of learning and teaching. MALL is one of the effective approaches that try to support e-learning features in general and enhancing language teaching and learning with the help of mobile technologies. In this regard, mobile-assisted language learning has a significant influence on classroom environment, and curriculum design. However, educators have to find ways on how to best integrate MALL in the EFL classrooms.

Ease of MALL

The following part contains the list and the descriptions of several interesting examples of learning systems or interfaces that can be used on mobile devices. It may serve as a guide for English language teachers who are willing to introduce mobile devices into their course both in class as well as out of the classroom in the form of homework.

MAWL – Mobile Assisted Word-Learning

Word-learning is one of the basic steps in language learning. A general traditional approach for learning new words is to keep a dictionary and use it whenever one encounters a new word. Mobile Assisted Word-Learning – MAWL is an augmented reality based on collaborative social-networking interface for learning new words using a smartphone. MAWL keeps track and saves all textual contexts during reading process along with providing augmented reality-based assistance such as images, translation into native language, synonyms, antonyms, sentence usage etc.

Rosetta Course / Rosetta Stone

It is undoubtedly one of the most-recognized brand names in language learning software. The Rosetta Course uses picture and word matching as the primary focus of early lessons, as well as masculine or feminine article determination (where applicable). There is also speech recognition option which assures that the learner is pronouncing the words correctly by providing specific sound signal for correct and wrong pronunciation respectively. There is an extremely large language selection, and you can sample multiple languages from the same demo application.

www.educatorstechnology.com

This website contains a handful of useful presentations, augmented reality games for all ages of student's useful tools and applications for teachers, iPad and Android applications for learners. All in all, it seems to be a very interesting and useful website for both learners and instructors of English as a second language.

http://www.podcastsinenglish.com

It contains various listening situations, cartoons, dialogues etc. on many different topics and for different levels of learners. Recorded situations or role-play offer native accents as well as show written forms of most important words used in them, for less advanced levels.

www.talkenglish.com

Contains listening material for repeating or dialogues recorded by native speakers to listen to, such as: simple sentences and expressions, more complex sentences and dialogues, dialogues to download on one's mobile phone, dialogues with quiz questions and check answer system as well as showing the dialogue transcript, from the basic to advanced level, business, idioms and phrases, pronunciation. What is most useful, dialogues which are recorded by native speakers so that the learners can listen to original accents and acquire proper accent in their own speech.

Suggestions

What can be suggested for the further research is the area of empirical studies providing specific evidence on how the mobile technology use can enhance/encourage individual's learning results. For reliability longer studies and larger test groups are required. Moreover, to be able to make the language acquisition process more effective and to be able to influence EFL proficiency results it is necessary to investigate the possible changes in individual's learning strategies when using mobile devices in their language learning. It would be also interesting and beneficial to investigate and analyze the connection between individual's strategies, learning styles and use of mobile technology. The knowledge gained from such investigation would be profitable for educators, learners and also the systems developers. From the pedagogical point of view, research on how the use of mobile technology affects individual's time management when learning a new language is needed to understand if this technology can open additional learning possibilities, for example, in terms of engaged time as well as in the development of student autonomy with the help of mobile devices.

MALL deals with the use of mobile technology in language learning. Students do not always have to study a second language in a classroom. They may have the opportunity to learn it using mobile devices when they desire and where they are. As learning English is considered a main factor for professional success and a criterion for being educated in many communities, providing more convenient environment for people to learn English is one of the strategic educational goals towards improving the students' achievement and supporting differentiation of learning needs. There are many researches and developments towards the use of wireless technology for different aspects of language learning. In the following lines it has been tried to demonstrate the benefits of using mobile phones in learning English as a second language. Areas of mobile-based language learning are diverse among which the most common ones are vocabulary, listening, grammar, phonetics, reading comprehension.

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