



Effective Foreign Language Learning with Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (Mall)

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ABSTRACT

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) deals with the use of mobile technology in language learning. In contrast to classroom learning, in MALL there is no need for the learners to sit in a classroom or at a computer to get learning materials. The main characteristics of mobile learning (m-learning) are recognized as a learning process to be personalized, spontaneous, informal and ubiquitous. The learners feel a greater sense of freedom of time and place, so that they can take the advantage of spare time to learn a foreign language when and where they are. In this article, we have looked at some applications of m-learning and we have observed the advantages and disadvantages derived from using mobile technologies for students as well as professionals

KEYWORDS

mobile-assisted language learning, mobile technology, foreign language learning

INTRODUCTION

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has received significant attention as an approach that enhances a learner's experience using handheld mobile devices, such as "mobile phones, smartphones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and their peripherals such as tablet PCs and laptop PCs" (Traxler, 2005). Mobile-Assisted Language Learning deals with the use of mobile technology in language learning. The use of mobile technology in education offers new learning experiences and flexibility in learning – learning anywhere and anytime –with increased opportunities for learning across multiple contexts, through social and content interactions, using personal electronic devices. MALL can augment foreign language teaching and learning by taking it into the real world. At the same time, it is stressed that mobile devices are not substitute for existing learning devices, but they serve as extension for learning in new environment having new capabilities.

MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) – An overview

In 1973, when the mobile devices were invented for the first time, no one ever thought some day they would become an important part of routine life. As soon as the mobile phones became a crucial part of our lives, there felt a need for using them in language learning tasks. Students do not always have to study a foreign language in a classroom. They may have the opportunity to learn it using mobile devices when they desire and where they are. Learning a foreign language is necessary today for professional success, it provides an edge over others in the career front and a criterion for being educated in many communities. Educationalists today consider, providing a more convenient environment for people to learn a foreign language as one of the strategic educational goals towards improving the students' achievement.

M-LEARNING AND TEACHING

The focus in acquiring foreign language skills is for survival either while working there professionally or while on vacation, today's youth needs oral and written communication skills. Therefore, the communicative potential of mobile devices be a crucial prerequisite for m-learning. Thus, the application of m-learning in teaching draws the foreground of the sociocultural dimension. At the same time, it impacts the cognitive dimension of learning, besides, it permits to decrease the amount of ready-to-use information (Pachler, 2009). Such effects of m-learning can occur in the process of either

in-classroom or out-of-classroom application of mobile devices in teaching. In-classroom utilization it activates close interaction, conversation and decision-making among students due to m-learning activities, especially if students are divided into small groups. Such learning experience can hardly be achieved out of the classroom.

The following are some fields where MALL helps students and professional perfect their language skills: some tested areas of mobile-based language learning are vocabulary, listening, grammar, phonetics, reading comprehension, etc.

2.1 Learning Vocabulary

The type of activities focusing on vocabulary learning via mobile phone are many and it depends on the level of language proficiency of the learners. Sending e-mail or SMS to students is a common way of learning new vocabulary based on the lessons covered in the classroom. Learners can be provided with some tailored vocabulary practices based on activities performed in the classroom. They are, then, asked to complete them on their mobile phones and send them back to their instructors. Learning vocabulary can also be accompanied by the pictorial annotation shown on learners' mobile devices for better understanding of new words.

2.2 Listening Comprehension

Listening exercises may be considered the first stage in learning a foreign language. With the

advent of the second generation of mobile phones, it is now possible to design a mobile multimedia system for learning listening skills through listening exercises. Students can listen to native speakers and expose themselves to the cultural aspect of the foreign language while learning the language.

2.3 Learning Grammar

Grammatical points can be learnt through a specifically designed program installed on mobile

devices, in which grammatical rules are taught, followed by multiple-choice activities where

learners select the correct answer from the given alternatives. Grammatical explanations may also be presented to learners via vocal service or short message service.

2.4 Pronunciation

The second generation of mobile devices enable their users to access multimedia functions including listening and speaking ones. A good m-learning service should consist of speech facilities for transmitting voice. Having such facilities, the learners may download dictionaries with sound functions so that they can learn the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar or new words to be able to fulfil their learning needs. Mobile devices with multimedia function give the learners the opportunity to record their own voice. Then, teachers are able to make a better assessment of the students' weaknesses in pronunciation. Then, they can compare their voice with an ideal pronunciation and make an improvement in this skill.

2.5 Reading Comprehension

Reading practices help learners to enhance their vocabulary, and vocabulary knowledge, in turn, helps them to promote reading comprehension. Reading activities can be offered to learners either via a well-designed learning course installed on the mobile devices or through SMS. In either case upon finishing the reading activity, the learners are provided with a reading text function to evaluate their reading comprehension skill.

MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING – ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The long-standing desire to make use of digital technology and multimedia in language learning classrooms has, in part, been satisfied by the recent development of applications for mobile devices. Among all modern communication devices, mobile phones are the most powerful communication medium even richer than email or chat as it can act as a learning device despite its technical limitations. Advantages of using mobile devices are:

1. Portability: - such devices can be taken to different places due to small size and weight.
2. Connectivity: - mobile devices can be connected to other devices, data collection devices, or a common network by creating a shared network. It provides the learners with the opportunity of close interaction, conversation, and decision-making among the members of their group due to the specific design of the learning activity on mobile phones. These types of interaction among learners and their physical movement can hardly be achieved when desktop or laptop computers are to be used.
3. Individuality: - activities platform can be customized for individual learner: the learner controls the learning process and progress in his/her own space based on his/her cognitive state. With MALL, we observe a shift from teacher-led learning to student-led one, via m-learning. Learners, in this model, become more active, autonomous, and collaborative as they co-construct meaning for themselves and others (Palalas, 2011).
4. Autonomy: - Learning through the computer or e-learning enables the learners to learn in a non-classroom environment when they are at home in front of their personal computers online or offline. However, learning through the mobile phone or m-learning provides the learners with the opportunity to learn when they are in the bus, outside or at work doing their part-time jobs. In fact, they can learn every time and everywhere they are. Despite the autonomous nature of many MALL approaches, MALL can also encourage collaborative learning. This is often done by using Web 2.0 technologies such as twitter, facebook, and Youtube. Through social media, students can develop language skills together. This form of learning also leads to authentic assessments, which provides clear evidence of what the students can do.
5. Affordability: - Comparing with other wireless devices such as laptop computers, mobile phones are rather inexpensive having functions as Internet browsers available in most devices.
6. Self-reliable: - Teacher may be absent, students can do self-study with the help of mobile assisted language apps.

While MALL clearly offers great promise, it has also its own **constraints**, some of the **disadvantages of MALL** being: -

1. small screen, reading difficulty on such a screen, data storage and multimedia limitations, and the like.
2. Many of the mobile phones are not designed for educational purposes. That is, it is difficult for the learners to use them for the task given by the teachers to be carried out. However, those devices which are appropriate for specific learning tasks are too expensive for most of the learners to buy.
3. Tendency towards distraction, and the perceived need to be connected always.
4. Lack of pedagogically tested apps, and the downsizing or absence of devices such as the keyboard or mouse.
5. Tracking performance is another issue. In a world of evidence-based learning, it is difficult to monitor how several dozen students are doing on their phones to learn a foreign language. In addition, any new approach to learning requires the training of the students to utilize new tools.
6. Another major concern is that the current crop of MALL approaches and the apps that go with them are focused primarily on lower-level thinking. Apps consist of dictionaries, translators, and flashcards. Such approaches are useful for memorizing but not as beneficial for higher level thinking such as summarizing, compare/contrast, and or evaluating. As such, MALL is most beneficial for beginners but not as valuable for advanced language learners who are trying to communicate for academic purposes.

CONCLUSION

The rising speed of mobile technology is increasing and penetrating all aspects of the lives so that this technology plays a vital role in learning different dimensions of knowledge. Today, a clear shift from teacher-led learning to student-led learning that m-learning allowed causes the students feel, the need to use the technology more effectively and interestingly than before. In fact, we can provide a richer learning environment through mobile phones for our language learners. Although going through language activities on mobile phones may take longer time compared to computers, the learners feel a greater sense of freedom of time and place, so that they can take the advantage of spare time to learn a foreign language when and where they are. Mobile technology gets learning away from the classroom environment with little or no access to the teacher, though the learning process can hardly be accomplished without a teacher's direction or guidance. As the demand for acquiring a foreign language increases and the people time for more formal, classroom-based, traditional language learning courses decreases, the need felt by busy users for learning a foreign language through MALL will inevitably increases. In other word, MALL can be considered an ideal solution to language learning barriers in terms of time and place.

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