

Chapter 8

The Effectiveness of Mobile–Assisted Language Learning (MALL): A Review of the Extant Literature

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the effectiveness of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) through investigating the evidence from the extant literature. MALL is widely used by teachers and institutions to support different models of language teaching such as content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and English as a medium instruction (EMI). In particular, the chapter focuses on the determinants of MALL through reviewing a number of studies which show that the evidence points to a complex relationship rather than a unidimensional one in terms of MALL's place in language learning and its effectiveness in reality. The study once more emphasises the complex nature of language learning and cautions about the promise and risks of adoption of MALL.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a sea change in mode of teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, which rendered the use of mobile technologies a must for most institutions. Often caught unprepared, educational establishments had to assess fast the use of alternative modes or mobile assisted learning in the field of education, language learning has also had its share of shock waves making mobile learning the only viable and safe learning environment. In this context of health crises, it has become of utmost importance to assess the effectiveness of alternative methods of mobile learning options. Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) is a self-paced learning supported and/or facilitated by any kinds of mobile device (i.e. mobile phones, tablets, or pads) that can be used while language learning and teaching (Hoi, 2020; Ezra & Cohen, 2018; Shi, Luo & He, 2017; Sun et al., 2017).

MALL is extensively used to increase the effectiveness of different language teaching methods i.e. English as a Medium Instruction (EMI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) which combine content and linguistic skills in parallel (Aguilar & Muñoz, 2014; Yang, 2015). The applications of MALL are particularly found appropriate for CLIL method since MALL can create a learning environment where L2 (second language) as the vehicular language can be practiced anytime and anywhere. Yet, this chapter does not only focus on the impact of MALL applications on CLIL. The main reason of this is that researchers in the field have a common belief that the effects of technology are more or less the same for different language teaching models (Loewen et al., 2019; Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler, 2013). Busy life courses that leave people with less time to spend in language classrooms and social aspects of language learning (i.e. social environments shaping individuals' knowledge) have led to a noticeable shift towards a more mobile technology-based language education (Cerezo, Calderón & Vicente, 2019; Kukulska-Hulme, Lee & Norris, 2017; Reinders & Benson, 2017).

In line, advances in mobile technology enabled educators to implement several technology-oriented language teaching models to improve learning performance of students (García Botero, Questier & Zhu, 2019; Zou, Li & Li, 2018; Burston, 2015; Song & Fox, 2008). Besides, learners could experience their personal studying atmosphere as well as obtaining freedom to access learning materials through the use of various functions of mobile devices (Zou et al., 2018; Wu, 2016). Parry (2011) claims that “the future students will inherit is one that will be mediated and stitched together by the mobile web” (p. 16). Similarly, Zou et al. (2018) who term the current society as the “mobile society”, state that “mobile learning is one of the significant tools by which learners can learn English without the restriction of time and place” (p. 694). Indeed, the mobile learner society argument of Zou et al. (2018) is supported by the estimates which show that the number of new mobile subscribers would reach 5.9 billion by 2025 (Kaliisa, Palmer & Miller, 2019). Needless to say that this trend will increase the integration of mobile technologies into language teaching evermore.

There are innovative features of mobile technologies and diverse mobile applications that aim to enhance different skills of learners. These applications can either be the specialised ones that were developed for the specific requirements of language learners (i.e. Babbel, Duolingo, Rosetta Stone), or the more generic type of current social media applications (i.e. Facebook, Kahoot, Twitter, WhatsApp, WeChat) that can be used in combination with other conventional language learning and teaching methods.

Against the widespread implementation of MALL in language classes, numerous studies (i.e. Loewen et al., 2019; Moghari & Marandi, 2017; Burston, 2015; Chinnery, 2006) which have investigated the effectiveness and success of MALL for English language learning and teaching yielded inconclusive results. The emergence of these mixed findings shows that the benefits and effectiveness of MALL need

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