Chapter 6
Mobile-Assisted Language Learning from the Student Perspective: Encouraging Effective Language Learning Strategies Outside of the Classroom

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ABSTRACT
This chapter seeks to refocus the conversation about mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) from the instructor’s perspective to the student’s. I argue that mobile “teaching” does not need to be located within a course, but that we are “m-teaching” whenever we encourage or enable learners to use mobile devices “to facilitate, support, enhance and extend ... [their] learning” (Attewell, Savill-Smith, & Douch, 2009, p. 1). This chapter will explore important concerns related to this definition, including conceptions of learning, blurred boundaries between personal and educational lives, the affordances and limitations of mobile devices, and learner autonomy. A look at the m-learning research literature will show students’ perceptions of MALL running the gamut from skeptics to believers. Finally, the chapter reports on the long-term investigation of learner beliefs and practices of MALL which is underway at Mount Holyoke College, and offers five initial conclusions.

INTRODUCTION
Mobile devices are ubiquitous in today’s society, and college-aged students are adept at using them, for certain purposes. Rarely will college students be parted from their cell phones, and impressive is the speed at which they can text. Although students may carry their iPhones® at all times, comfortably texting friends, playing games, and posting profile updates, will they explore the iTunes® application directory for language learning “apps” (applications)? And if they do, will they select apps that they can effectively integrate into their language-learning processes? Do they understand, beyond a general familiarity, what podcasts are and why they might be useful? And if they have subscribed to podcasts in the target language, will they utilize them in a manner that...
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will be successful in advancing their language proficiency?

Second language teachers and researchers have lauded the potential of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Smart phones and MP3 players can become language learning tools, allowing students to easily and immediately access materials from a variety of sources and to engage with those materials where and when they please. Mobile devices are highly portable; are designed to work with text, images, audio, and video; are able to connect with other devices and with the Internet; and can function as miniature computers, running software applications and storing data, but costing much less. These characteristics afford a range of learning strategies known to be effective for language acquisition: breaking larger study activities into smaller chunks distributed over time (Chinnery, 2006), differentiation and individualization of instruction (Huizenga, Admiraal, Akkerman, & ten Dam, 2009), and allowing learners to study at their own pace (Cooney & Keogh, 2007). In essence, mobile devices allow us to extend language learning outside of the classroom in new ways, “freeing our students from their usual language lab assignment routine” (Sathe & Waltje, 2008, p. 32).

In response to the concern that “a new generation of pupils is largely being educated with old paradigms and methods” (Huizenga et al., 2009, p. 332), researchers have begun to investigate m-learning (mobile-learning) in general and MALL in particular. This growing body of literature largely reflects the teacher’s perspective, building an empirical basis by which to answer questions such as: how can I effectively integrate m-learning activities into the design of my language course? Without denying the importance of this work, the present chapter will attempt to re-focus the conversation on the opposite side of the teaching-learning partnership. While m-learning can be seen as a supplement to the traditional classroom or as a medium for distance-education, we will look at the ways in which students choose to integrate MALL into their daily lives and study routines:

“The challenge lies in using mobile technologies well, both as an enhancer in the classroom and to bridge arenas that are usually referred to as separate — such as school and free time” (Mifsud, 2003, p. 103).

This chapter will survey the current literature on academic podcasting technology and MALL, asking what is known about how students perceive these technologies and how students choose to incorporate MALL in their personal process of learning a second language. It will also report initial results of an investigation underway at Mount Holyoke College, which seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What MALL strategies do students find most effective for language learning?
2. Why do students prefer these strategies?
3. What support can a language resource center and language faculty provide to result in a greater number of students effectively applying MALL strategies?

DEFINITIONS

M-learning can be defined as “the exploitation of ubiquitous handheld technologies, together with wireless and mobile phone networks, to facilitate, support, enhance and extend the reach of teaching and learning” (Attewell et al., 2009, p. 1). One of the touted benefits of m-learning is that it allows learning any time and anywhere, implying an exclusion of the times and locations in which learning has traditionally taken place. Indeed, much of the research investigating m-learning has been situated within distance- or blended-learning environments, in which the teachers and students may not have frequent (or any) face-to-face contact. This chapter will not follow a strict definition requiring the learner to be mobile. Instead, exploring Attewell et al.’s definition, the goal is to question how mobile devices can “facilitate, support, enhance and extend the
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