Chapter 11

The Impact of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on Phrasal Verbs of Iranian Intermediate EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on phrasal verbs learning in EFL context. Participants were 40 intermediate Iranian English learners. They were randomly divided into experimental and control groups of 20 each. The instruction of the control group was limited to the class activities but the experimental group received the instruction through Short Messaging Service (SMS) on their smart cellphones and worked with a new phrasal verbs learning application by Cambridge University Press called Phrasal Verbs Machine (PVM). The analysis of the data revealed that MALL instruction was more effective than in class language learning instruction. Results of the study indicate that smart cellphones as a tool for language learning provide a platform for language learners to use the language actively.

INTRODUCTION

One of the technologies that can be used to help learners in learning a foreign language is a mobile phone which is dominant in most students' life. They are not just communication devices anymore. They are useful computers that fit into students' pockets, and are always with them and nearly always on, and can be used in any kind of learning (Prensky, 2005). This technology has brought about a new type of language learning called Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). As with other forms of technology, MALL is a branch of technology-enhanced learning which can be implemented in numerous forms

including face-to-face, distant, or on-line modes. MALL currently serves not only as a primary source of language education for students, but also supports the retention and utilization of newly-acquired skills whenever they are required. Through mobile participation in short exercises and tasks, learners are able to keep their linguistic talents sharp while reducing the risk of degradation of valuable knowledge, skills, and abilities. Mobile learning is undergoing rapid evolution. While early generations of mobile learning tended to propose activities that were carefully crafted by educators and technologists, learners are increasingly motivated by their personal learning needs, including those arising from greater mobility and frequent travel. It is often argued that mobile devices are particularly suited to supporting social contacts and collaborative learning (Kukulska-Hulm, & Shield, 2008).

Mobile learning can be defined as any educational provision where the sole or dominant technologies are handheld or palmtop devices (Traxler, 2005). According to Brown (2010), mobile learning as the exploitation of ubiquitous handheld technologies, aims at enhancing and extending the achievement of teaching and learning purposes. He also states that mobile devices make learning environment pervasive. According to Kukulska-Hulme, Evans, and Traxler (2005), mobile learning has a range of attributes: "It can be spontaneous, personal, informal, authentic, situated, contextual, portable, and ubiquitous (available everywhere) and pervasive (so integrated with daily activities that it is hardly noticed)" (p.7).

According to Geddes (2004) mobile learning is the kind of learning which takes place at any time and in any place; that is, it extends teaching and learning outside of the walls of the classroom. An important feature of this type of learning is that students feel responsible for their own learning. Since mobile phones are widespread everywhere and are popular among students for communication with each other, they may offer a motivating alternative for second/foreign language teaching and learning.

Fageeh (2013) states, mobile devices can induce increased vocabulary learning and enhanced motivation for vocabulary acquisition by encouraging ubiquitous learning via their portability and access to various activities. They also have an important place particularly in young people's lives. Mobile phones have significant potential in the portability and versatility.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Many studies in computer mediated communication (CMC) have highlighted the technology capabilities in improving vocabulary acquisition of EFL learners much more than conventional approaches to teaching (Nakata, 2008; Jones, 2006; Yoshii & Flaitz, 2002; Al-Seghayer, 2001; Okuyama, 2007; Groot, 2000; Horst, Cobb, & Nicolae, 2005; Hulstijn, 2000; Koren, 1999; Loucky, 2003; Tsoua, Wang, & Li, 2002; Jones & Plass, 2003; Yeh & Wang, 2003).

As far as MALL is concerned, many studies have investigated the impact of smart phones on vocabulary learning from a pedagogical perspective (e.g., Redd, 2011; Stockwell, 2010; Alemi & Lari, 2012; Stockwell, 2007; Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009; Thornton & Houser, 2001, 2005; Hsu et al., 2013; Levy & Kennedy, 2005; Kennedy & Levy, 2008; Lu, 2008; Song, 2008; Zhang, Song, & Burston, 2011).

The general results of the studies as reported above leads one to conclude that the mobile devices and smart phones are more helpful in improving vocabulary learning of students compared to conventional book-based, self-regulated vocabulary learning because of the time and space free nature of presentation of lexical items in mobile-based instruction (Nation, 2001; Thornton and Houser, 2005; Zhang et al., 2011).

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