

Going to the MALL: Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in English Language Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The widespread ownership of mobile devices paved the way for educational institutions to reconsider teaching practices and strategies to accommodate the integration of these tools in the classroom. This study was conducted to explore the possibilities of MALL strategy in Senior High School English language instruction. The study utilized descriptive research method through the use of researcher-made questionnaire to identify the respondents' background knowledge in the use of mobile devices and their regard on MALL strategy. Results of the study show that students navigate and manipulate basic features and functions of mobile devices that for relevant, useful and entertaining, and seldom for educational purposes. However, students have acknowledged the potential that mobile technology offers to an English classroom. Even with the limitations and challenges in integrating MALL and mobile learning opportunities, students are positive of the countless possibilities and opportunities MALL can offer in English language classrooms.

Key terms: *Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, MALL strategy, mobile learning, mobile technology, English language instruction*

Introduction

The global networked world has acknowledged English as the language of the 21st century. It is a 'common tongue' that enables people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities to communicate. It is the only language understood almost everywhere among scholars and educated people, as it is the world media language, and the language of cinema, TV, pop music and the computer world. English is indeed the lingua franca of the world and the World Wide Web. It is

for the following reasons that there has been a shift in pedagogy in the teaching of the language in educational institutions in many countries. Educators and policymakers have also turned to the range of technologies available for use in language learning and teaching which became central to language practice. Kukulska-Hulme (2013) purported that although the four macro skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing remain the foundation stones of language learning, 21st century calls for a “greater learner autonomy, flexible use of

new tools, and sophisticated use of social networks” to keep up with this time of rapid change.

One technology that offers promising possibilities and opportunities especially on the area of language teaching is mobile technology. These hand-held devices have been part of the everyday life of most people regardless of age, gender, sex, educational attainment or socio-economic status. In addition, these mobile devices are becoming more and more powerful and are replacing some of the tasks that would normally be done on traditional computers and laptops. Starting around 2000, research has created from these mobile technologies an approach of language teaching known as mobile assisted language learning, usually shortened as MALL (Ghrieb, 2015). It is the use of technologies such as mobile phones, MP3/MP4 players, personal digital assistant (PDAs) and palmtop computers in language learning. In fact, language learners are using their mobile phones, in particular, in more explicit way as observed in students’ usages of mobile phone for translating words, reading electronic books, and listening to podcasting, among others. These students do not always have to study in a second language classroom. They may have the opportunity to learn the language using mobile devices whenever and wherever they want. MALL may be a potential solution to language learning barriers in terms of time and place.

For instance, Griffiths University in Australia performed teaching Italian language via sending two to three SMS messages a day to the learners (Pachler, Bachmair, & Cook, 2010 as cited in AL-Qudaimi, 2013). On the other hand, to

provide learners with effective English language learning environment, Chen and Hsu (2008) in Taiwan created Personalized Intelligent Mobile (PIM) learning system. Another use of mobile learning specifically to improve listening skills was that of Huang and Sun (2010) who developed a multimedia system for English language learners based on their mobile phones’ capabilities. Moreover, considerable number of mobile English language learning programs has surfaced like that of BBC World Service’s Learning English which affords learners with English language lessons via SMS in Africa and China (AL-Qudaimi, 2013). These are just a few of the plethora of MALL adoption strategies and activities which different educators and researchers have explored in different parts of the world. Consequently, even developing countries have also tried to explore the potential of mobile technologies in education. The study of Valk, Rashid & Elder in 2010 has documented the use of mobile phones for educational purposes in developing countries like Philippines, Mongolia, Thailand, India, and Bangladesh.

Moreover, as learning English is considered the 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 (Miangah et al., 2012). With the affordances that MALL offers, English language teachers are provided with enormous possibilities for exposing students to a wide spectrum of language content in variety of forms which promote

communication, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration.

However, though the Philippines has been tagged as the fastest-growing smartphone market in Southeast Asia according to the International Data Corporation's (IDC) Asia/Pacific Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker (2016), and even with the unending list of the affordances that these mobile technologies has to facilitate the learning of a target language, the MALL integration in the country has remained quiescent for several years. This is manifested on the teachers' attitude towards students bringing of mobile phones in the classroom. Some teachers still frown upon students' use of these hand-held devices in the classroom and some even prohibit bringing mobile phones to school. The endless possibilities of mobile technology in assisting students learning of a language has not been fully explored, or if used, not fully maximized.

On the other hand, it is also important to note that students can have very different perceptions about mobile technology and different levels of technological literacy compared to educators. As such, the use of mobile technology might be favorable for students as 21st century learners are tagged along with these portable devices, but this may be limited by educators who largely control the learning environment. Consequently, if educators fail to see the benefit of using new technology it will become extremely difficult for that technology to gain traction. It can also be noted that there have been no other published studies documenting the implementation of MALL in the country.

It is in the above premise that this study is

conducted. It aims to explore the possibilities of Mobile Assisted Language Learning strategy in English language instruction. Since MALL is still in its infancy especially in the country, this study will serve as a resource for researchers and educators who plan to integrate MALL in their language classes.

Statement of Objectives

This study aims to explore the possibilities of MALL strategy in Senior High School English language instruction. Specifically, it attempts to explore the following: background knowledge and extent of use of mobile technology among students; and the respondents' regard on the use of mobile technology in terms of: ease of use and usefulness.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employed the use of descriptive research method through the use of questionnaire as its main data gathering tool. The study is conducted in six (6) senior high schools – three (3) public and three (3) private schools, in Cebu City. These schools are selected based on their population - the number of senior high school students enrolled and the school's openness for the conduct of the research. It utilizes survey questionnaires– one to identify the respondents' background knowledge in the use of mobile technology and the other to determine the respondents' regard in the implementation of MALL strategy. The first questionnaire to be given to the respondents is composed of two parts. Part 1 asks for the demographic profile of the respondents and part 2 is composed of statements that will determine the

respondent's background knowledge in the use of mobile technology. It is also classified according to knowledge and use of mobile technology among respondents. The second survey questionnaire is composed of statements classified according to perceived ease of use (PEU) and perceived usefulness (PU) of mobile technology as used in English language instruction. This questionnaire is adopted from the study of Callum (2011) and Ghreib (2015) and is modified by the researcher to fit to the nature of the study

and the respondents.

Results and Discussion

Students' Background Knowledge of Mobile Technology

Teachers in basic education often regard their students as "digital natives" since they are more exposed to gadgets. They have been tagged along with these recent developments in ICT and its related tools. Table 1 shows the students' background knowledge of mobile technology

Table 1. *Students' Background Knowledge of Mobile Technology (n=404)*

	Statements <i>With mobile device, I know how to</i>	Weighted Mean	Description
1	text/send SMS or make a call	3.9	Strongly Agree
2	take pictures/images	3.8	Strongly Agree
3	send pictures/images to other people	3.7	Strongly Agree
4	edit digital photos/pictures/images	3.4	Agree
5	listen to music	3.8	Strongly Agree
6	download music from the web	3.5	Strongly Agree
7	watch videos and/or movies	3.7	Strongly Agree
8	download videos and/or movies	3.4	Agree
9	share/send movies to other people	3.3	Agree
10	play games and other mobile apps	3.7	Strongly Agree
11	install applications from the web, Google play or App store	3.7	Strongly Agree
12	take down notes	3.5	Agree
13	store information/files	3.5	Strongly Agree
14	create documents such as MS word	3.3	Agree
15	send/share files to other people	3.6	Strongly Agree
16	read/access PDFs, notes and the like	3.3	Agree
17	edit documents such as PDF, Word and Excel documents	3.2	Agree
18	access the dictionary	3.7	Strongly Agree
19	create memos, events or reminders	3.6	Strongly Agree
20	backup and restore personal data and applications	3.3	Agree

21	connect external USB to mobile phone	3.5	Agree
22	use the calculator	3.8	Strongly Agree
23	check weather updates	3.4	Agree
24	access information and/or services on the web	3.5	Agree
25	navigate/browse through different websites	3.6	Strongly Agree
26	use social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, etc)	3.9	Strongly Agree
27	communicate online via chat	3.8	Strongly Agree
28	create and send email	3.5	Strongly Agree
29	access email	3.5	Agree
30	add attachments to emails	3.4	Agree
31	upload files online	3.5	Strongly Agree
32	download files from the web	3.6	Strongly Agree
33	record audio	3.5	Strongly Agree
34	record video	3.5	Strongly Agree
35	upload audio recordings on the web	3.2	Agree
36	upload video recordings on the web	3.3	Agree
37	see current location using Google maps, Google earth or GPS	3.0	Agree
38	turn the mobile device into a second monitor of the computer	3.7	Agree
39	screenshot phone display	3.5	Agree
40	use the mobile device as hotspot	3.8	Strongly Agree
General Weighted Mean		3.43	Agree

The data above show a mean of 3.43 interpreted as Agree when senior high school students are asked about how well they know the various functions of mobile devices such as cellphones, PDAs or tablets. It is also worth noting that students' responses for each item are all positive considering that their answers are only between Agree and Strongly Agree.

This shows that overall these students manipulate and navigate basic features and functions of mobile devices. Items that got higher mean and interpreted as *Strongly Agree* were on the basic features and use of mobile devices like texting and sending

messages; using social networking sites and communicate online via chat; sending pictures or images to others; listening and downloading music; watching videos and movies; playing games and other mobile applications; installing applications from the web, Google play or App store; storing information/files; sending and sharing files to other people; accessing the dictionary; creating memos, events and reminders; navigating and browsing through different websites; creating and sending email; uploading and downloading files online; recording audio and video; and using the mobile device as hotspot.

On the other hand, items that were interpreted as *Agree* are mostly on features and functions of mobile devices that are not common and are seldom used by students because of the nature of its use. For example, the feature of seeing current location using Google maps and the like needs to have Wifi access or fast data connection, hence, students may feel that doing it is expensive. This is also true in items like accessing information in the web; accessing and attaching files in email; and uploading audio and video recordings. Another important feature of mobile device that students could really benefit from is on being able to create and edit documents such as Word and Excel, however, student respondents only *Agree* that they know how to do this considering that in most cases they do editing of documents only in laptops and computers. This can also be explained by the fact that, as observed by the researcher, students are not allowed to use their cellphones while in the class. Moreover, this result shows that students are mostly competent and knowledgeable in the features and functions of mobile devices which are also **relevant** to them. They very well know how to use the functions and features of a certain tool if it necessitates them to use these in a daily basis. Instead of banning cell phones, educators should start actively embracing them. Yes, these hand-held devices have been part of the everyday life of these students; however, competence in using each feature and function of these devices vary according to its **relevance** and **usefulness** to the user.

Students' Extent of Use of Mobile Technology

Figure 1 shows the students' extent of use of mobile technology. It shows the different

activities students can do with their mobile device as well as the weighted mean indicating the extent of usage among students. The general weighted average as shown in the figure below is 2.81 which is interpreted as **Often**. This means that students generally **often** use the different functions or features of their mobile device. However, looking at the graph closely, it is worth noting that students very often use their mobile phones to access social networking sites. *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* in their article dated October 24, 2017, reported that the Philippines is the world's number 1 in terms of time spent on social media. The report, called Digital in 2017, showed that Filipinos spent an average of 4 hours and 17 minutes per day on social media sites such as Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter.

Moreover, it is also important to take note that listening to music also got a very high mean and is second in rank. As observed, even in jeepney or in the streets, you see young people with headset and headphones. More than texting, you see these young people using their mobile phones to listen to music. These young people find listening to music an aid to help them focus, memorize, keep on task and take stress off their mind. Furthermore, third on the line is communicating through online chat. As compared to the basic function of mobile device such as texting and making a call which only got a mean of 2.8 (Often), communicating through online chat (mean – 3.5) is more popular among young people. One's ownership of mobile phones already goes beyond being able to text or send SMS and make a call. The data above shows that these students who belong to Generation Z,

digital natives, used their mobile phones mainly to visit social networking sites, listen to music, communicate through online chat, browse the net, play games, watch videos and not so much on texting and making a call or in activities that may promote learning and aid in classroom activities like taking down notes, editing and creating files like MS docs, or reading notes. This data further purport that the students now, the young people, use their mobile device mainly for **entertainment**. This is supported by the Fluent’s annual survey in terms of the top five categories of app usage in the Gen Z; leading in the list is social media, then online messaging, music, gaming and travel/maps. This implies that mobile devices are not used for learning or for educational purposes to a great extent. According to Callum & Jeffrey (2010), there is a need to convince the students first of the potential of mobile devices as a learning tool before teachers can integrate it as part of their classroom activities. For mobile device to penetrate in classes and to be recognized as a learning tool/device, students should see first the potential of this device in learning.

Respondents’ regard on the use of mobile technology in terms of ease of use and usefulness

There are countless possibilities of learning a second language in a mobile-based environment. However, one also needs to

Table 2 *Students’ regard on the use of mobile technology in terms of **ease of use and usefulness** (n = 404)*

Constructs <i>(according to Technology Adoption Model)</i>	General Weighted Mean	Description
ease of use (PEU)	3.08	Agree
usefulness (PU)	3.20	Agree

consider that it has also its own constraints especially on its hardware and software specifications like mobile devices with small screens, low data storage, limited multimedia capabilities and pedagogically tested applications.

Table 2 shows the students’ regard on the use of mobile technology in terms of ease of use and usefulness. It further shows that students generally *Agree* that the adoption of mobile technology would be free of mental effort (ease of use) and that the adoption of it would produce better outcomes compared to non-adoption (usefulness).

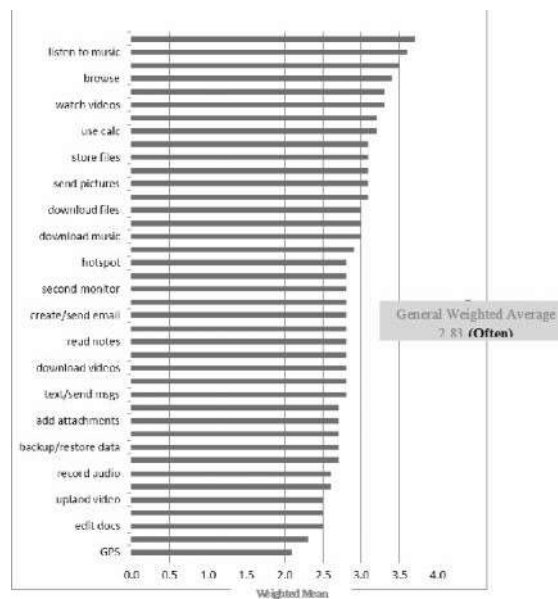


Figure 1 Extent of Usage of Mobile Technology among Students

Moreover, according to Davis, these two factors, perceived ease of use (PEU) and perceived usefulness (PU), influence a user's attitude towards technology, which in turn affects the intention to use the technology. However, there are also instances wherein although the individual might have a negative attitude towards a specific technology he or she will still use it. This is because the negative attitude towards PEU (perceived ease of use) could be outweighed by a positive belief on its PU (perceived usefulness) leading to a positive intention to use the technology. Although the student-respondents do not generally view mobile technology as learning tools, they still find it easy, convenient to use as well as useful in helping them in classroom related activities specifically as tools in improving students' English language skills. They say,

"Using my mobile device in the activities made things easier and it did not take as much time. It is very handy and useful." Student Respondent 2 (SR2)

"Mobile technology/MALL will make your activities easier, can communicate with other person anytime, anywhere." SR5

"We can easily find some information or etc? using the devices in classroom-related activities." SR7

"Making the students to have interest in technology and have a convenient way of learning that is very portable." SR8

"There is a wider range of information or sources to choose from in the worldwide web. Learners and the teacher can easily access sources and information." SR13

"Enables us to be ready and equipped for the work that is set ahead of us in the future

since we are the 21st century learners. It is portable." SR11

"We were able to access more information that is needed in the class. We were able to explore more into new information with the help of the applications in our mobile phones and we are able to save learning materials." SR15

"We would recommend using MALL because learning is made more portable and accessible and it is very relatable to the modern generation. It makes students more comfortable in making the activities because they know so well how to use the devices." SR3

The result of this survey further implies that students have indeed acknowledged the **potential** that mobile technology offers to an English classroom.

Conclusion

MALL offers amazing opportunities to re-design the way students learn English highlighting the dynamics of mobile device, language learning, and fun. Even with the limitations and challenges in integrating MALL and mobile learning opportunities, students are positive of the countless possibilities and opportunities MALL can offer in revolutionizing English language classes.

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