Mobile Assisted Language Learning Across Educational Contexts

Edited by Valentina Morgana and Agnes Kukulska-Hulme

New York: Routledge
US $35.99
ISBN 9780367714093 (Hardback)
152 pages
2021

Reviewed by Ahmed Al Khateeb

Mobile Assisted Language Learning Across Educational Contexts is a volume from the Routledge Focus on Applied Linguistics series, which explores a wide range of issues related to using mobile technologies in class and outside classes for language learning and development. The current edition, co-edited by Valentina Morgana and Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, offers an extensive discussion of existing research trends, practices, methodologies, and theories around designing mobile learning classes and the way in which mobile technologies can be adapted for lifelong learning and continuous professional development. This book clearly contributes to the field of technology-enhanced language learning and educational technology, as it presents real cases with robust data about the ubiquity and features of mobile devices which offer more potential for making learning more approachable, communicative, engaging, and active.

Affiliation
Department of English Language, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia.
email: ahalkhateeb@kfu.edu.sa

https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.21736
The popularity of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) as a discrete discipline is growing continuously, since it provides new opportunities for teaching language outside conventional classes. Kukulska-Hulme (2018) overtly defined it as “the use of smartphones and other mobile technologies in language learning, especially in situations where portability and situated learning offer specific advantages” (p. 2). Mobile-assisted language learning has become popular because it increases learners’ mobility, flexibility, collaboration, continuity of learning, and promotion of self-regulation, as well as immediate access to information and creation of multimodal content (videos, audios, and photos). Mobile-assisted language learning is also considered an economical choice. In contrast to physical spaces such as labs or even computers, it provides a low-cost option for language teachers and researchers in the areas of language, emerging technologies, and language learning in the era of mobile education.

As the use of mobiles in language learning has become a trending issue over the last decade, Mobile Assisted Language Learning Across Educational Contexts explains various uses of MALL-relevant applications in numerous contexts with learners from different stages: from childhood to university (the latter including undergraduate and graduate students). It thoroughly describes how to transfer knowledge and integrate the appropriate content according to learners’ needs. It also gives details concerning how to harness MALL in learners’ daily practices and make it part of their formal traditions. Additionally, it shows how to make it more applicable to learning for academic purposes, not just for entertainment and wasting time. Mobile Assisted Language Learning Across Educational Contexts informs the readership of further outcomes and the limitations of MALL, using various designs, innovative methods, and genuine tasks for enriching various language learning aspects. This includes language skills and components, higher-order thinking skills, and cultural elements for better understanding of language.

The book contains seven main chapters coherently structured under one key major area of investigation, that is MALL, and concludes with an informative index for relevant concepts. Each chapter narrates a unique story about using MALL, its implementation, affordances, potentials, limitations, and methodologies to explore how MALL operates in different places under different circumstances.

The first chapter, “Mobile Assisted Language Learning Across Different Educational Settings: An Introduction,” draws the attention of readers to the expected features of content creation and the interactive processing of tasks synchronously and asynchronously that have become viable within this promising field in recent years, including the theoretical approaches applied. This
chapter focuses on the role of mediation connected with mobile tools among learners at various ages.

The second chapter, “Unreported MALL Studies: What Difference Do They Make to Published Experimental MALL Research Results?,” includes critiques concerning previously published research on MALL. This chapter claims that some findings were not reported in such research, as well as pointing to a lack of precision and comprehensiveness which might affect the appropriateness and validity of such studies. The chapter also argues that there is a disregard of some data reported by various meta-analytical studies. The reason for not reporting these data is thought to be the multiplicity of research area topics covered (e.g., mobile device ownership, software reviews, technical design, learning outcomes, etc.). There is also confusion about where MALL research can be found, as it exists in various places, including journals of educational technology, mobile technology, and language learning.

The third chapter, “(Re-)Contextualizing Storytelling with Children in English L2: Mobile-Assisted Language Teacher Education,” reports on the impact of storytelling and digital multimodal practices in an online special interest community for language teachers using the LearnWeb platform. The chapter explores the outcomes of digital narrative practices of young and teen English language learners in informal communicative settings. The findings have confirmed the establishment of the following practices: searching, planning, rehearsing, performing, assessing one’s work, and sharing recordings and comments.

The fourth chapter, “Effects of an Extensive e-Book Reading Programme on Middle School EFL Students,” details an experiment concerning the effect of extensive e-reading among secondary school learners of English as a foreign language in Italy. The results confirmed the usefulness of implementing mobile tools for practicing reading for longer periods. The findings have also reported a positive change in the learners’ perceptions of reading, e-libraries, and e-resources available for reading.

The fifth chapter, “Participants’ Perceptions and Perspectives of Intercultural and Social Inclusion in an Award-Winning Virtual Exchange Project,” examines the practice of virtual exchange, which is equivalent to telecollaboration, in higher education in Italy. The findings have shown that such socially oriented online practice contributed to learners’ social, psychological, and multilingual improvement as well as their digital literacy competence.

Further, the sixth chapter, “Mobile Collaborative Activities and Learner Metacognition,” examines learners’ metacognition using specific mobile-based activities designed in higher education in Japan. The results have shown the power of using MALL and its related tools in designing different collaboratively oriented activities, leading learners to practice collaboration easily.
Such activities help learners to boost their capabilities, increasing innovative reflection and deep understanding.

The seventh chapter, “Conclusions: A Lifelong Perspective on Mobile Language Learning,” is the concluding chapter in this collection. It synthesizes key ideas, thoughts, and issues stemming from all the chapters. It also focuses on the future of mobile education and language learning in terms of pedagogical perspectives, methodological approaches, and curriculum design. The chapter suggests five possible themes which should be considered: (a) breaking down barriers; (b) unfettered flow of information; (c) frequent interaction and reflection; (d) enjoyment and perception of personal gains; and finally, (e) multiplicity of technologies, modalities, and methods. Other issues that need attention include authenticity, seamlessness, personalization, communication, and collaboration.

In the same way, this collection clearly presents further implications of MALL in new contexts and under unique conditions, such as its use at the time of crisis, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The book also establishes a new notion relevant to the possibility of implementing mobile technologies in formal settings in classes in schools and at universities. Different chapters of this volume provide examples of how mobile technologies have evidently revolutionized the practice of language learning, making it personalized and continuous throughout a learner’s lifetime.

However, there is no collection that describes all best practices relating to the implementation of mobile technologies for all settings. Different settings have their own needs, features, characteristics, and conditions that need to be carefully considered before a decision is taken to adopt MALL. This volume specifically reports the findings from a global perspective of some case studies in European-related contexts. There are more contexts (e.g., in Asia and Africa) that are still to be investigated in terms of the effects of MALL, as the conceptualization of MALL is not well developed in some countries in those continents where several constraints might exist, including connectivity and infrastructure as well as social and cultural issues. More elaborate discussion is also needed about the role of MALL in supporting autonomy and self-regulated learning and learners’ motivation. Further research may focus on the differences of using mobile technologies between children and adults, as the former is suggested with extra caution. In sum, this book is considered to be a reference book for anyone interested in MALL, including undergraduates, postgraduates, and language educators.
About the Reviewer

Ahmed Al Khateeb is an associate professor of applied linguistics and computer-assisted language learning at the English Language Department, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. He holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics and Modern Languages from the University of Southampton in the UK. He is a winner of the Fulbright scholarship and visiting scholar at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He has widely published in internationally recognized journals. His research interests include technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), advanced learning technologies, telecollaboration and language learning, intercultural communication, and psychology of language learners and their cognitive behaviours.

Reference