THE POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES OF MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) FOR EFL/ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) studies have indicated promising potentials for English language learning enhancement. However, since the implementation of MALL can be viewed as the process of transition from physical learning to e-learning, the implementation has also faced challenges in real practices. Thus, this study aims to review the opportunities and challenges that have been experienced by EFL/ESL learners in the implementation of MALL. Using descriptive qualitative method, the study was done by employing library research to collect the data. The study reviewed 30 publications in the MALL implementation area. The data were analyzed based on the reported potentials and challenges in the MALL implementation. They were then categorized into the subthemes describe the potentials and challenges. The findings showed a variety of benefits and issues in MALL implementation.

Keywords: Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL); mobile learning, educational technology

Abstrak
Penelitian Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) telah menunjukkan potensi yang menjanjikan untuk peningkatan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Namun, karena penggunaan MALL dapat dipandang sebagai proses transisi dari pembelajaran fisik ke e-learning, implementasinya juga menghadapi tantangan dalam praktik nyata. Maka dari itu, penelitian ini bertujuan mengulas keuntungan dan tantangan yang dialami oleh pembelajar EFL/ESL dalam implementasi MALL. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian dilakukan dengan menggunakan penelitian kepustakaan untuk mengumpulkan data. Studi ini meninjau 30 publikasi di bidang implementasi MALL. Data dianalisis berdasarkan potensi dan tantangan yang muncul dalam implementasi MALL. Kemudian data tersebut dikelompokkan ke dalam subtema yang menggambarkan potensi dan tantangan tersebut. Hasil temuan menunjukkan beragam manfaat dan permasalahan dalam implementasi MALL.

Kata kunci: *Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL); mobile learning, educational technology*

INTRODUCTION

Language learning has been greatly influenced by mobile technology in recent years. A growing number of educational institutions are looking into

opportunities for their students to use technology for learning, both inside and outside of the classroom, as a result of the increase in the use of mobile devices as teaching tools. In the current time, mobile technology is reshaping the field of language learning and is being investigated as the next frontier for improving English language teaching and learning (Hashim et al., 2017). The technology has resulted in numerous breakthroughs in learning methods and materials. Mobile technology can help learners by providing new learning experiences (D. Kim et al., 2017).

One of the learning experiences that learners can have with the help of mobile technology is Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL). MALL offers several benefits for students. These positive impacts are gained in a number of ways. Panagiotis & Krystalli (2020, p.15) mention the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). It raises students' enthusiasm to learn allows students to freely develop communication skills, promotes the use of the target language as a unique mode of communication, provides exercises that have relevance to real-world situations, improves interaction between actual and virtual worlds, and more importantly, promotes learning in a fun way. MALL also offers good learning opportunities to the students with its flexibility and enormous access. Mobility has enabled learning to become independent on location even out of the classroom (Kwangsawad, 2019, p.75). There will be no spatial boundary for students to study as they can carry mobile phones anywhere.

MALL has evolved from Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and m-learning (Çakmak, 2019). The personal use and portability across contexts make the distinction between MALL and CALL. Looking at the characteristics, MALL is similar to m-learning. Both provide contextualized learning, flexibility and active community participation of the learner. MALL is language learning that is aided by portable and personal handheld devices such as laptops, personal digital assistants (PDA), tablets, smartphones, and mobile phones (Hashim et al., 2017). Khubyari and Narafshan (2016) defined MALL as a teaching and learning activity that equips mobile phones or other mobile devices with wireless connectivity. Loewen et al. (2019) summarized the fundamental elements of

MALL as study flexibility of time and place, study continuity on different devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and laptops, easy information accessibility, and adaptability to personal study habits. However, despite the fact that mobile technologies can be very useful in language learning and teaching, educators and researchers should consider the real implementation by students, which may also encounter issues.

There have been a number of research presenting the potentials and issues of MALL in various language learning. Bahari and Gholami (2022) reviewed Technology-assisted language learning which includes MALL as one of the technological learning. The study reviewed the thematic affordances and issues in the learning implementation from 2010 to 2020. Solihin (2021) did library research on articles to review the affordances and challenges of MALL implementation in the framework of English for a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesian settings. The findings showed the benefits and issues of using MALL according to the view of teachers, students, and cultures. However, only a few studies discussed affordances based on the unique characteristics of mobile devices. Klopfer and Squire (2008) mentioned the unique properties of mobile technology namely portability, social interactivity, context sensitivity, connectivity and individuality. Thus, the current study reviewed the potentials and challenges that occurred based on empirical studies done by researchers. As many MALL studies have been conducted on various language areas, this research specified the studies that implemented MALL on English as a Foreign or a Second Language (EFL/ESL) learners. The potentials are then discussed in terms of the unique characteristics or properties of mobile technology.

METHOD

This study aimed to review the potentials and challenges of MALL implementation in ESL/EFL learning contexts. A literature review of 30 publications has been administered to collect the data. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. This meant that the study gave descriptive data on the issues investigated. The method of data collection used in this study was library

research. The research was done by conducting some processes, such as searching the article through keyword searches, analyzing the data, and describing the data based on the topic of the study. The articles reviewed were searched through the electronic database ERIC. The articles were published in the last five years (ranging from 2018 to 2022). The last five years of publications were selected since the most recent implementation studies mighto contribute as sources for future studies. Additionally, studies included in the review were empirical, meaning meta-studies are excluded. The researcher then analyzed the data. The data were taken from reported potentials and challenges of MALL implementation. They were then put into categorization according to the subthemes of the topic. The next step was to depict or describe the data as a whole.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
FINDINGS
MALL Potentials
Portability

Some studies demonstrated the portability of mobile devices for successful English language learning. The portability can break the boundary of learning in a limited area such as in formal settings. Hidayati and Diana (2022) reported that students accessed Duolingo and Hello English learned in numerous locations (home, classroom, coffee shop, garden, cafe, internet station, workplace, library, volleyball field, and, beach). Thongsri et al. (2019) supported this flexibility of place which they described as expanding learning space and time. The application in the study could provide daily vocabulary training that they can access from anywhere using their mobile phones. Xu (2020) gave students listening and speaking exercises outside of class hours. Using one of the most popular English-learning applications in China, Keke English, the intervention gave students opportunities to practice their skills outside school time. In relation to the opportunities of expanding learning space, the portability of MALL encouraged students to learn. Gonulal's study (2019) has indicated that portability can promote students' autonomy in learning. Rinanda et al. (2019) had students

implement an English Conversation application to improve their speaking skills. They discovered that students were motivated to practice more because they had the freedom to do the speaking activity whenever and wherever they wanted.

Social Interactivity

Social interactivity promotes interaction and collaborative learning which are considered the foundation of language learning. Wrigglesworth (2020) made use of Kakao Talk discussion for student interaction. Participation in the Kakao Talk discussions was found to be beneficial for their language learning by exposing them to new vocabulary items, linguistic forms, and reading engagement through active interaction. Social interactivity were also seen in studies employing the use of WhatsApp for students' discussions. Students perceived that participating in online discussions and group work allowed them to support their language skills (Hazaea and Alzubi, 2018). Another affordance of social interaction in MALL is collaborative learning. It was reported that the basic functions of WeChat allowed interactive communication which can provide an environment for collaborative learning between groups (Guo and Wang, 2018). Furthermore, the interaction that occurred in MALL also resulted from giving and receiving feedback among users and their importance in language learning. Ghorbani and Ebadi (2019) examined the impact of Telegram on grammatical proficiency among EFL learners. One of the factors that contributed to the achievement was the instructor's feedback, which served as a reminder of the correct usage of the language structure.

Context Sensitivity

Context sensitivity refers to the ability to gather data in a unique environment and location, including both real and simulated data. Some studies emphasized the outside classroom context provided by MALL and how it led students to manage to learn in authentic and real-life settings. Walsh (2021) reported that by providing a rich source of examples of language and activities that linked language to their personal world, mobile devices enabled classroom tasks to be authentic and real-life. In the study, students were required to use their mobile phones to utilize contexts that were familiar to the majority of them.

Moreover, Lin et al., (2020) implemented a contextual game with a storyline. Based on the findings, they revealed that students could apply their knowledge in the real world by studying in virtual environments. To provide unique and current data for real-life settings to support English language learning, providing authentic materials would be important. Kakao Talk discussion, in Wrigglesworth's (2020) study, put students to be aware of the issues. The study found that when discussing the issues as authentic materials, the students appeared to say that the discussions broadened their worldviews on the issues.

Connectivity

The connectivity provides the ability to connect to databases and users. Affordances of connectivity have been shown in MALL studies. Through their smartphones, students had access to spell checkers, dictionaries and grammar resources quickly. Moreover, to support managing databases, teachers can make use of an online learning management application. Xu (2020) employed MosoTeach, to post notices, upload learning materials, and conduct learning activities outside the classroom. Besides, Dağdeler et al. (2020) had students use a mobile application namely Collocat App. This application provided instant feedback to the learners. More importantly, MALL has connected teachers and students to support communication for good implementation. Communication can be done at any time for convenient learning. Ghorbani and Ebadi (2019) implemented online chat sessions at nights scheduled using WhatsApp. WhatsApp has changed into an interactive and reflective platform that has kept students in touch with their friends and teachers both synchronously and asynchronously.

Individuality

Individuality refers to the ability to provide for individuals' needs and facilitates personalized learning. MALL studies that have been reviewed showed that the learning facilitated students' needs to learn and explore on their own. According to Fang et al. (2021), the study demonstrated that mobile applications can be used to provide scaffolds for improving TBLT in communicative classrooms. Another unique scaffold that has been provided was in Liu's study (2020). The app, English Liulishuo, helps students understand the general idea of

the passage, find the details, and get the information they need. Furthermore, Duolingo, is even considered an application that is based on language acquisition (García Botero et al., 2019). More importantly, learners were given opportunities to select the materials or activities. For example, Web 2.0 allowed students to choose the activity and assessment type that best suits their needs and abilities (Osifo, 2019). Students also have the freedom to choose the difficulty level. The developed app allowed students to choose the level of difficulty (Kohnke et al., 2019; Zakian et al., 2022). Personalization can help students to adjust to their needs to acquire language knowledge.

MALL Challenges

Challenges in Usability

In terms of usability, studies reported several challenges that limit the capability of MALL in the implementation. Users had difficulties when using the apps. Osifo (2019) discovered that some students had the struggle to use the MALL apps and Web 2.0. Furthermore, the discussion chats seemed to be cumbersome and lengthy (Imamyartha et al., 2022). Because students had to spend a lot of time sorting through chats and interpreting large amounts of text, it was considered that communication through chats was ineffective. There were also reported constraints of the devices. For the majority of users, the small screen size of mobile phones became a problem (Wu and Miller, 2020). Additionally, students said that connectivity and power problems posed serious challenges to their motivation to learn (Imamyartha et al., 2022). Lastly, challenges of connectivity and availability have also been identified. Some of the difficulties encountered while using a mobile phone included slow and expensive internet (Soleimani and Pourrasa, 2021). Some applications were also found to be filtered or restricted in certain countries (Nami, 2020).

Challenges in Learning Process

The current study found that there were more challenges of MALL in terms of the implementation or how the learning process was carried out. Firstly, students still didn't perceive mobile phones as tools of learning which impacted their learning motivation. Mobile learning has not yet become the preferred and

main method of instruction for students (Guo and Wang, 2018; Metruk, 2020). Secondly, the lack of guidance and instruction from teachers regarding which mobile apps to choose for language learning and how to use them most effectively was another problem (Nami, 2020). Other concerns with implementing MALL were related to students' hesitance, lack of support, and interaction control. It was also found that students hesitated to use mobile phones for learning. Some students requested traditional learning and stated that they were hesitant because they felt uncomfortable writing on their phones as they did not receive feedback from the teacher (Al-Shehab, 2020). Another hesitancy or resistance to use the mobile phone was also shown in Sato's study (2020) in which some students prefer to choose paper-based. One of the other challenges that occurred in MALL is the lack of training, technical support and equipment and the lack of knowledge in using MALL by experienced teachers (Soleimani and Pourrasa, 2021). Lastly, informal settings led to the informal use of language. It was hard to control the use of informal language used on Instagram (Gonulal, 2019).

DISCUSSION

The studies have shown that MALL offers unprecedented portability in language education. Based on the findings, it is shown that MALL significantly extends the coverage of language learning by overcoming limitations of time and location. As mentioned by Wagner et al. (2016), the fundamental benefit of employing mobile devices in learning is that there are no time or place restrictions on their use. With the integration of language learning resources into portable devices, learners gain the freedom to engage with language study beyond the classroom or specific hours. Whether at home, school or public places, learners can access language learning apps, exercises, and interactive lessons instantly. According to Khubyari & Narafshan (2016), learners prefer reading via mobile phones due to the mobility and accessibility of mobile phones. MALL provides continuous learning, enabling learners to immerse themselves in language acquisition regardless of their location or the time, which then enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of their language learning process.

In terms of social interactivity, the studies portray that MALL revolutionizes language education by enhancing interaction and collaboration. Through mobile devices, learners can engage in interactive exercises and simulated conversations, providing a dynamic and engaging learning experience. Duman et al. (2014) concluded that MALL facilitated interaction across learning contexts. Furthermore, these devices facilitate real-time communication with teachers and other learners, creating collaboration and peer-to-peer learning. Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008) supported that students' collaboration can be facilitated by the use of mobile devices in language learning. Moreover, language learning apps enable learners to practice their language skills and receive immediate feedback. This interactive and collaborative approach tackles spatial barriers, allowing learners to connect in wider areas of society or community.

MALL also excels in providing students with authentic and real-life learning experiences. These resources expose learners to genuine language usage and cultural contexts, representing real-life communication situations. Jeong (2022) argues that using mobile devices can support learners to acquire communicative competence and engage them in authentic communication. Additionally, mobile apps often offer location-based features, enabling learners to practice language skills in context while navigating real-world environments. This authenticity enhances comprehension, speaking, and cultural understanding for learners to build confidence and competence for effective communication in diverse, real-life situations. MALL thus bridges the gap between classroom learning and the everyday language usage encountered in the world outside the classroom.

The studies have also shown MALL effectively uses connectivity to improve the study of languages. Due to the development of mobile technology and the extensive availability of the internet, language learners now have access to a wealth of language resources as well as a global community of other students and experts. Hashim et al., (2017) say that this kind of technology can supply learners with unlimited resources for language learning facilitation. A linked environment is provided by online platforms and language learning apps, which give users access to interactive lessons, live sessions, and group conversations with peers and

teachers. Students can easily connect to these resources at any time and from any location, promoting continuous and on-demand learning. Additionally, the connectivity enables real-time feedback, allowing learners to correct their errors and advance their language abilities.

In terms of individuality, with the help of MALL, learners are given the freedom to pursue language learning in their own styles. Each learner possesses a distinct set of skills, limitations, learning preferences, and comprehension rates. MALL enables students to personalise their language learning experience based on their own requirements and interests. Mobile learners have the potential to create a sense of individuality in their learning, which may enable them to enjoy a certain level of freedom and independence (Kim & Kwon 2012). They are able to create a unique learning experience by selecting language learning apps, resources, and tasks that fit with their interests and objectives. Students can create their own study plans, go over lessons again if necessary, and concentrate on the areas that need it.

MALL is not without its challenges, particularly concerning usability and the learning process. Usability challenges cover a broad range of issues, such as the various screen sizes and operating systems found in mobile devices. These challenges may come from the process of content designing. According to Kukulska-Hulme in Azeez & Al Bajalani (2018), the usability problem is brought on by the fact that mobile content is delivered on devices that weren't intended to be used for educational purposes in the first place. In terms of the learning process, students still view mobile phones as communication and entertainment tools rather than educational resources. Furthermore, some students still prefer traditional classroom-based learning, placing a premium on face-to-face interactions with teachers and peers. A lack of sufficient training and guidance on how to use language learning apps and tools on mobile devices is also a big obstacle. Additionally, Shadiev et al., (2020) identified problems related to the learning process, which are cognitive load, distractions, insufficient competence, prohibition, and unidentified location. To maximise the potential of mobile devices in aiding effective language acquisition, these usability and learning process issues must be addressed.

CONCLUSION

The MALL studies which have been reviewed in this research have shown the potentials of employing mobile phones in terms of mobile device unique properties which are the portability, social interactivity, context sensitivity, connectivity and individuality in a variety of benefits. The potentials has assisted EFL/ESL learners in maximizing the learning experiences. However, numerous issues were also found, making evidence that MALL is not without limitations. It occurs that the challenge comes in terms of the usability of mobile devices and the learning process. It is, of course, not easy to handle these challenges. Thus, analyzing the learning needs of ESL/EFL learners and carefully preparing the learning settings may anticipate the problems in the real implementation of MALL. Lastly, the described potentials and challenges in this study could be a reference for future MALL implementation research.

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