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Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) Applications for Interactive and Engaging Classrooms: APPsolutely!

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Abstract

Mobile Assisted Language Learning, a specialization of mobile learning, represents a new field of the educational system, which offers new possibilities of delivering content to learners and facilitates the learning process. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) or m-learning which is defined as learning with mobile devices that can be utilized in any place that is equipped with unbroken transmission signals[1] has created new opportunities and challenges for educational use. It introduced a new learning model combining new types of mobile devices, wireless communication services and technologies with teaching and learning. Recent advancements in the mobile world such as the Apple IOS devices (IPhone, IPod Touch and IPad), Android devices and other smartphone devices and environments (such as Windows Phone 7and Blackberry), allowed learning to be more flexible inside and outside the classroom, making the learning experience unique, adaptable and tailored to each user [2]. Creativity, learner autonomy, collaboration and digital practices of language learners are encouraged as well as innovative pedagogical applications, like the flipped classroom, for such practices in classroom contexts are enhanced. These developments are gradually embedded in daily life and they also seem to be heralding the sustainable move to paperless classrooms. Since these varied digital technologies are increasingly viewed as a main platform for delivery, we as educators need to design our activities, materials and learning environments in such a way to ensure that learners are engaged and feel comfortable. This paper presents how apps (for Apple devices) can be integrated into teaching and learning in higher education.

Current Approaches to MALL

The use of mobile devices in education has become common across all educational sectors and the range of research into the use of mobile communication technologies for the purposes of language learning has been diverse. This is motivated by a search for effective pedagogical innovations and educational applications of new media since classroom instruction needs to constantly adapt to new technologies and interests. As mobile learning has gradually gained popularity, several researchers have attempted to develop models and frameworks to explain where and how mobile learning fits within the context of education to support various kinds of learning. Pereira and Rodrigues [3] presented “the evolution of the learning models” where mobile learning is the most recent model, which reduces the limitations of the previous models.

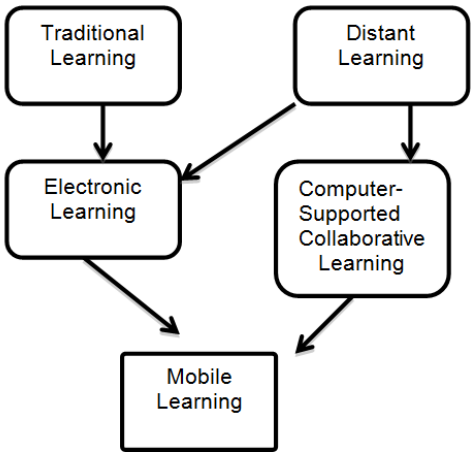


Fig. 1. The evolution of the learning models [3]

Naismith, Lonsdale, Vavoula and Sharples' report [4] stated that mobile devices can support traditional pedagogical approaches as well as contemporary approaches. In their literature review, Viberg and Gronlund [5] found that the theories and models applied on MALL mostly derive from previous theories of learning such as constructivism and social constructivism. With a constructivist approach to learning, learners actively generate ideas or concepts based on their current knowledge and build on what they already know as they are encouraged to collaborate with peers to do so. Project-based learning, a constructivist approach, allows mobile technology integration in meaningful ways so that learners can explore and develop content purposefully and engage in authentic problem-based, case-based and inquiry-based learning using the most efficient mobile applications and tools such as mobile investigations or casual games. A more recent development is Siemens' theory of "connectivism" [6] which is described as "..including technology and connection making as learning activities begins to move learning theories into a digital age". Combining connectivism with constructivist approaches offers learners an opportunity to achieve 21st century skills such as technology-mediated multi tasking.
Blended-learning approach [7] is another way to integrate mobile technology applications into classroom practice by using Learning Management System Apps or Personal Learning Environments such as blogs. The flipped classroom, where the sequence of activities or assignments is rearranged so learners watch teacher created videos outside the classroom so that they spend more time for practice in class, is conceptually grounded in active learning and student engagement theories and is made effective with MALL applications.
Given that mobile technology devices and tools are still rather new and developing, using an integrated pedagogy in ways that support engagement of learners should be the driving force behind our classroom practice.

MALL Apps in Language Learning

Mobile technology involves the use of portable devices that are also embedded in our daily lives, such as mobile phones, smart phones, tablet PCs and other hand-held gadgets and the fact that learners are already using communication facilities and technology-related activities such as content creation on their portable gadgets has contributed to teachers' efforts to integrate them into teaching and learning. These screen-based technologies are significant in educational technology as they provide many advantages like mobility of the learners and flexibility of the learning environment, connectivity and accessibility to materials, authenticity, creativity and collaborative learning. With MALL, learners are able to combine the advantages of the Internet with personalized and ongoing learning activities anytime, anywhere. Ally [8] describes mobile learning as "powerful support for effective learning and performance-based assessment".

Since the arrival of Apple IPhone in 2007 and the IPad in 2010, a wide range of MALL applications have been developed which are intended to enhance the learning process, create a learner-centred environment and focus on the ongoing process of learning rather than the end result. Learners increasingly lead tech-filled lives outside the classroom and mobile apps offer the ability to capture the full attention of the learners with full customization in regards to personal preferences and differentiation. There are a lot of apps available for carrying out a variety of tasks from media creation to productivity.

Appsolutely!

Showbie App

A systematic way of curating student work, such as assignments and projects, is the concept of digital portfolios where the culmination of a specific learner work can be represented and can even be used for either ongoing or summative assessment. It is a way of collecting evidence of learners' language learning progress since showing them how far they have improved over the course motivates them for their future learning. Showbie, a free workflow app and a cloud storage solution, allows the teacher to create a classroom and assignments for the learners, and learners are free to use any other app that is compatible with Showbie to do their work. Once they upload their work onto Showbie, annotations, voice notes, text notes and photos can be added by the teacher to give quality feedback.

Showbie app incorporates active learning into the learning process since learners become more motivated that they are able to determine which other app to use to demonstrate their learning. Their work can be showcased in the sense that selected student work can be dropped into the Showbie shared folder by the teacher for the class to express their views. Students work towards a goal and engage in hands-on activities at their own pace by exploring and applying content and presentation creation apps and digital video and audio recording tools that deepen their understanding of target language and produce creative results innovatively. The classroom activity becomes even more interactive when coupled with brainstorming and discussion of learners' interests outside the classroom setting, which provide means for learners to combine formal and informal learning.

Showbie, an innovation portfolio, is versatile; it is simple to navigate for the learners to share their work and both teachers and the learners are able to add notes in different ways so that communication is instant and learner reflection is also integrated within the process. It offers opportunities for digital differentiation and a differentiated learning environment that can bend to the needs of individual learning needs, for example voice note capability supports learners with weak reading and writing skills.

Quick Response Code Reader/Scanner Apps:

Creativity-fostered learning in higher education is enhanced by factors such as the classroom environment, increasing motivation to learn and critical thinking. Once learners are encouraged to learn to think in multiple ways, the right choice of app is needed to form communication and participation among peers. QR codes, created in the mid-90s in Japan [9], are two-dimensional barcodes, which can contain textual information, images, numbers, videos or links about a specific topic that can be scanned and revealed by a scanner or a reader app. Once a QR code reader or scanner app is downloaded on a smart phone or Ipad, this code, as indicated above, which is linked to our mobile technology blog, can be scanned. QR codes are fun, easy to create and use in the classroom as they promote creativity and collaboration, and offer ways to engage in academic activities. Utilizing QR codes and mobile devices allow learners to move through tasks at a more individualized pace. One idea of a task-oriented activity is that learners can work in differentiated groups in terms of their levels of ability and can be given a language-learning task to complete. However, they need to scan a barcode to receive directions on how to complete it. In this way, each group can be provided with instruction specific to their level or weaker language skill; one group can snap a QR code, which can take them to a reading text with a focus on certain vocabulary, whereas the second group can scan a different code and practice the same vocabulary through a link such as SpellingCity.com. A third group can focus on a given situation in which they need to create a conversation or presentation using the specific vocabulary that can lead to learner-created video/audio recordings.

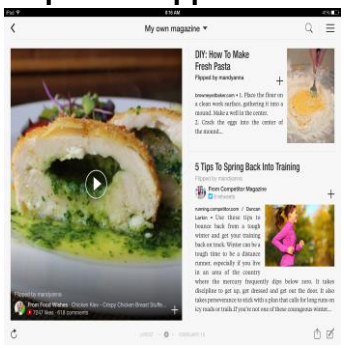
QR codes can also be generated by the learners themselves; they can write about a given task in pairs like a real-world problem and find relevant pictures online so that these pictures can be used to generate QR codes which then can be turned into an activity to do or a game to play in support of the target language skill. At a higher level, they can produce videos and get involved in storyboarding. A QR code e-book, pamphlet or magazine can be created by the learners in regards to project-based learning which may be linked to digital content and learner-prepared presentations. This gives the learners the power to interact rather than being passive as they take an active role in their own learning.

CBB (Creative Book Builder) App

Creative Book Builder app allows learners to create professional looking e-books, which can be exported to iBooks or read by any ePub reader and shared with others through digital storage files such as Dropbox, Google Docs or Showbie app. The ability to publish to a real audience is powerful for language learners as this audience can also be outside the classroom. Learners can work on multiple projects at the same time and make use of a range of tools such as adding images, audio and video clips, web links, Dropbox files, Quizlet quizzes, Educreations tutorials and even QR codes. Unlimited number of chapters can be created and organized into different sections.

CBB app can easily be integrated into the classroom with a task-based learning approach that focuses on learners doing meaningful tasks related to everyday life using the target language. Projects allow learners to make personal connections with peers and engage in decision-making and higher-level thinking. Through projects, learners become active participants as they work together on a specific task and they are given some choice and control over the classroom environment. A motivating way to engage learners in content creation is to produce an e-book by writing collaboratively. Learners can be asked to work in pairs or in groups and brainstorm and decide what their book will be about, how many chapters they will have and who will contribute to which chapter. Their contribution may be writing their own narrative, designing an effective illustration with a text, recording an audio, embedding a student-created video or keynote, or adding a table with their own survey results. In their groups, they can decide on the sequence of content and make corrections. By researching, collecting information and discussing, they will learn from each other, get inspired, build confidence and also have a chance to learn at their own pace.

Flipboard App



According to Jones-Kavalier and Flannigan [10] digital media literacy "… includes the ability to read and interpret media, to reproduce data and images through digital manipulation, and to evaluate and apply new knowledge gained from digital environments". Flipboard app is one of the customizable information aggregators or personal magazine apps that can be used in the educational classroom to actively engage learners. With this app, learners can create their own personal customized magazine, and decide what web content to include in their magazine. It is a fun way to curate content and collect it in a personalized magazine, especially when it is related to personal interests like adventure and travel.

One of the most common ways that educators can use Flipboard app is to inform learners that they will be working together on a class project and they need to collect information about a certain topic. Getting learners to create their own individual or class magazine is where learning is modified. Once the learners pick some content to get started and bookmark any page online to add it to their magazine, Flipboard turns these into a magazine style document, which is constantly updated with news and information. It also allows learners to create shareable portfolios on social media

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