BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Mobile assisted language learning across educational contexts*

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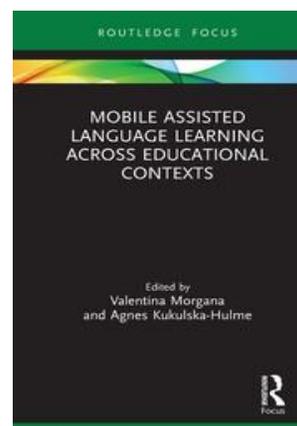
Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) has long been researched from different perspectives, including its impact on second language learning, considerations relevant to its design, and end users' perceptions and evaluations of the technology. The concept of MALL has evolved to reflect emerging technologies, which have positively impacted the feasibility of implementations in an educational context. Following some researchers' examples in exploring the state of the art of MALL (such as Burston, 2013, 2014a, 2014b), Arvanitis and Krystalli (2021) synthesized publications dedicated to MALL from 2010 to 2020 to preliminarily present the current conditions of the field. The result revealed that there is an ongoing effort to explore both the context in which MALL is used and how well it meets users' needs. In a similar vein, in the book *Mobile Assisted Language Learning Across Educational Contexts*, the editors Valentina Morgana and Agnes Kukulska-Hulme assemble a collection of studies by a group of well-known researchers of MALL to inform further research into this area. The book represents a cooperative effort to provide a broader integrated and rigorous perspective on the formal and informal integration of MALL in the educational context at various levels.

The first chapter by Morgana titled *Mobile Assisted Language Learning Across Different Educational Settings: An Introduction* starts with a short introduction of MALL conceptualization by noting that a decade ago, there was no clear understanding of how to usefully deploy MALL for education. Yet now, through technological affordances and emerging technologies, MALL has been effectively employed in multiple contexts with more on-the-spot learner engagement and inclusivity of various users. In the first part of the chapter, Morgana takes the reader on a journey highlighting the developmental path of MALL and noting emergent MALL features and its rising popularity. She makes special note of MALL's evolution from a portable content delivery tool to its employment in wider contexts (both informal and formal) for improving users' interactions. She also points out that access to current mobile technologies and devices as well as affordability can be an issue in some contexts. Morgana rightly notes that while at first glance one might conclude that MALL does not offer anything truly innovative—as reading documents from a screen on a mobile tool is not that different from reading a printed page—this is an overly simplistic perspective.

When one looks at the broader functionality offered by mobile devices, MALL can shift the learning paradigm in truly revolutionary ways.

Mobile devices not only offer access to a whole world of information resources, but they also allow for multimodal engagement between material and the learner and offer enhanced engagement through access to broader social networks. From a user design standpoint, MALL exploits elements of game theory to improve engagement. These features allow MALL to greatly impact the effectiveness of a curriculum and go well beyond a simplistic comparison of pixels to ink. In the chapter, the evolution of MALL has been well presented, including its future potential and recent development trends and methods. Some research theories foundational to MALL studies are mentioned in relation to the integration of theory with practice for qualitative and quantitative MALL studies. In relation to sociocultural theory, affective perspectives of MALL regarding the emotional and behavioral constructs of mobile learning could have been mentioned as a complementary theoretical scheme. Current research trends are now inclusive of the topic of personalization and the impact of making space for learner autonomy and preferences in MALL implementations. Having said that, the author reminds us of the fact that studies of MALL are still in initial stages when it comes to exploring its impact among different demographics. Young learners, particularly teenage language users (aged 13–17), are still under-researched. This is significant since the bulk of recent studies revolve around university-level users, excluding both youth and older adult learners. The author could have highlighted the fact that future MALL research needs to include the entire age spectrum of users, especially as the book contains an entire concluding chapter about lifelong learning perspectives in MALL. This is particularly relevant as MALL has already extended to informal educational contexts and, as a result, the borders of MALL practice are now more open to older/non-traditional learners. The COVID-19 pandemic has especially shown that a digital presence not only is beneficial but also can be vital to the wellness of people of all ages when normal social discourse is severely impacted. The introductory chapter ends with brief and clear summaries of subsequent chapters.

In the second chapter, titled *Unreported MALL Studies: What Difference Do They Make to Published Experimental MALL Research Results?,* Burston speaks to the ubiquity of technology-facilitated learning across disciplines and the potential risk of topic myopathy when conducting a literature review. The author laments that, despite the copious number of MALL publications, only a small portion of them are cited as primary works and the rest remain unreported and effectively silent. This selected culling results in incomplete data and can skew the numbers when looking for trends during analysis. Burston offers a great explanation of exclusion criteria and their effect on the number of referenced studies. He also notes that technology-mediated learning occurs across a wide array of topics which include but go well beyond language learning and that if the point is to understand how mobile technologies can be used to enhance learning, it is worth the effort to look at mobile technology implementation across disciplines. This critique seems rational when Burston offers his own detailed review of published MALL meta-analyses and studies, especially the experimental studies, and clearly demonstrates how including overlooked data changes the results of those meta-analyses. Specifically, he looked at 2,928 MALL studies published between 1994 and 2019 and found that the primary work citations were mainly recursive and "manually consulted" (p. 26). His search for omitted relevant studies included the use of less obvious but relevant terms like "m-learning." Burton's observations open the discussion of the complexity of mobile assisted learning and its diverse applications. He does point out that there could have been an affordance issue that resulted in limited access to certain papers. Affordance limits can impact the labor available for the rigorous search and bibliography mining required to identify some of the papers. Political and technological constraints can also limit researchers' access to some publications in certain contexts. This criticism mostly depends on the specific research culture and contextual resources which can inadvertently yield a skewed view of MALL due to unreported research.

Chapters 3 to 6 highlight different contexts in which mobile technology and its affordances contribute to an enhanced learning experience. In Chapter 3, Bortoluzzi, Bertoldi, and Marenzi present a case study highlighting how MALL can aid in coordinating storytelling in the context of teaching language educators. They open up the chapter with a brief project introduction where MALL is implemented in the professional

actions of teachers as narrators' storytelling for young non-native learners of English. The authors clearly state the benefits of digital access to resources for improving the teacher's agency in storytelling. The chapter addresses the context in MALL practices where mobile devices are employed in formal educational settings (online) and the impact of their use carries over to informal settings outside the classroom such as live in-library book reading events (offline). They also note how mobile resources enrich the learning process through encouraging multiliteracies and user-focused methodologies. The benefits of mobile assisted language teacher education (MALTE) are clearly illustrated in the chapter, but it leaves unanswered how Zoom storytelling compares experientially to live storytelling from both the narrator and listener experience.

In Chapter 4, the authors, Morgana and Pavesi, talk about reading for pleasure through e-books. They point out the general educational benefits of extensive pleasure reading practices and how mobile devices facilitate reading through the enhanced access to graded readers and global digital bookshelves afforded by e-books. The authors undertake a comprehensive review of extensive reading (reading for pleasure) and a defense of how e-books could be more beneficial for language learning than traditional readers given technology-specific features such as the tracing of students' progress, accessibility to multimedia affordances such as glosses and online dictionaries, and access to global library resources.

Chapter 5 features Griggio and Pittarello's showcase of the eTandem project at the University of Padova Erasmus. This project involved using multiple platforms accessible through mobile devices to curate a pre-orientation virtual cultural and language exchange among international students.. Erasmus' eTandem features not only one-to-one encounters but also many-to-many interactions which are designed within a multicultural and multilingual community on Facebook and Moodle to facilitate more successful foreign exchange programs. Like the MALTE program in Chapter 3, eTandem exploits mobile technology to facilitate learning in multiple contexts and across cultures. The chapter is light on quantitative analysis of the program benefits. Selected self-reports indicate that users were enthusiastic about the program, but it is assumed that these reports reflect general impressions. In general, this project exemplifies the digital competencies and empowerment which can occur for 21st-century students when learning through new media using digital and emerging mobile technologies and platforms.

Finally, in Chapter 6, Ilic presents a mixed-method study of Japanese students using technology for EFL collaborative homework. This chapter aligns closely with Chapter 4 and 5 in highlighting the value added by using mobile technology. Here Ilic explores differences in communication when students engage with each other and collaborate using mobile devices as opposed to fixed location computers. The mobile options are highlighted as being more effective in terms of encouraging collaboration, reflection, and accessibility. There is an excellent portrayal of workflow design and how good design can necessarily stimulate collaborative communication. The experiments mentioned in the chapter illustrate three points. First, mobile devices afford short visits at users' convenience, and this can provide more opportunities for reflection. This makes sense when one considers that users of mobile phones are used to shifting among literacies, contexts, and forms often within seconds. The second point concerns the use of peers as teachers. Collaborative patterns easily emerge in a mobile context as using this technology is convenient and familiar to the learners who are predominantly well-versed in the use of social networks. The third is the functionality of a mobile phone as a symbol and cognitive reminder. The chapter concludes with an argument that the functionality and ubiquity of mobile phones provide observed positive effects on collaborative work when compared with the stationary computers used for the same assignments.

The last chapter is a comprehensive conclusion by Kukulska-Hulme. She does a careful analysis of MALL research, both past and present, through a collection of literature reviews citing Chapter 2 by Burston. The author of this chapter shares similar concerns with Burston and recommends concerted efforts to expand the boundaries of MALL research. Kukulska-Hulme provides an outline of dominant themes that emerge from the book: breaking down barriers, unfettered flow of information, frequent interaction and reflection, enjoyment and the perception of personal gains, and the multiplicity of technologies, methods, and modalities. She concludes the chapter on a promising note by writing that through exploiting the potential

of innovative technologies and adaptive pedagogies, MALL studies will be more inclusive and solid in regard to user experiences, functionalities, and learning designs. This in turn will better inform pedagogy.

The book presents a well curated core collection of MALL considerations that are useful for understanding the current state of research, areas for improvement in the methodology during a literature review, case studies illustrating the utility of technology for enhancing education and the advantages offered specifically by mobile learning tools. This edited volume is a valuable contribution to the field of MALL that both challenges our understanding of the scope of technology-facilitated learning and illustrates successful implementations of technology for language learning. The book would have been more complete if it had addressed the roles of artificial intelligence, intelligent tutors/chatbots, and game theory principles that can be used to improve users' experiences of MALL.

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