

Chapter 27

Students' Perspectives on Using Online Sources and Apps for EFL Learning in the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning Context

Bin Zou

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

Xinxin Yan

University College London, UK

Hui Li

Shandong Liming Polytechnic Vocational College, China

ABSTRACT

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has been developed rapidly and integrated into language learning in various levels in recent years, particularly for the young generation. Many previous studies reveal that young learners have autonomous learning in using online sources or apps in the MALL context. However, not many studies in China have examined Chinese students' use of MALL. Therefore, this chapter investigates how Chinese college students perceived their use of mobile devices for English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. It was based on two small studies and focused on using online sources and mobile apps for EFL learning on learners' mobile devices. Participants were 166 students from 21 universities in China. Research tools consisted of questionnaires and interviews. The findings demonstrate a high motivation among the participants in using online sources and apps for EFL learning on their mobile devices. The results also showed the impact of different regions on students' attitudes toward MALL. Mobile apps that are related to EFL class context could enhance students' EFL learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the ownership of mobile devices among college students has increased at an impressive rate, mobile assisted language learning (MALL) has been widely applied. The youth mobile media consumption is believed to be the most rapid broad adoption of communication technology in recent history (Squire & Dikkers, 2011). Thus, MALL has opened a new opportunity and direction in language learning and teaching (Balance, 2012) and students may be willing to adopt MALL which may reinforce learners' autonomous learning on their mobile devices (Reinders & White, 2016; Chen, Y., Carger, C. L., & Smith, T. J., 2017). The widespread ownership and increasing demand of mobile devices among Chinese students implicates their strong awareness of mobile technology. However, it is known that mobile devices are regularly used by students as tools for communication and entertainment, for instance accessing music, games, websites and social networking. Although mobiles have been widely acknowledged in delivering learning by researchers, it is still unclear how students identify them as learning tools and in what way they utilize technology for learning. This study seeks to investigate Chinese students' perceptions of using mobile devices for English practices. It aims to understand whether they are interested in MALL and how they use such devices for English practice both inside and outside class.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid development of mobile technologies and various mobile products have enabled people to access information anytime and anywhere without limitations. Just as pencil and paper changed the means of learning, researchers saw signs of how mobile devices could enhance the existing learning approaches, both within the classroom (Viswanathan, 2012; Wagner, 2005) and outside school (Squire & Dikker, 2011; Kukulka-Hulme, 2006; Wang, Zou & Xing, 2014). On the one hand, it renders learning to be more learner-centered rather than teacher-led, which could challenge some traditional modes of teaching. On the other hand, it is also reported that students will become more enthused and motivated in engaging classroom learning (Bibby, 2011).

For current university students who are widely known as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2007), technology can be easily mastered and then exploited into learning. Based on such features of the new generation, relevant shifts of education approaches are expressly needed by many educators for producing higher learning efficiency (Alexander, 2004; Prensky, 2007; Wagner, 2005). In order to promote the use of mobile devices in language learning, clear understanding about what learners' perceptions about MALL and how they use such technologies appear to be the most essential. A survey done by Kim et al (2013) explored 53 students' views of mobile learning who graduated in three TESOL classes at a U.S university. The findings from the study showed students' positive reactions to the use of mobile technologies in language learning. It suggested the potential capability of mobile devices to *provide students new learning experiences and more learning opportunities* for them outside the class (Kim, D., Rueckert, D., Kim, D.-J., & Seo, D., 2013, p.64). Similarly, Leis, et al. (2015) indicated that when students were encouraged to use MALL, they could foster their autonomy in using mobile phones for EFL learning. They then recommended that both teachers and students should be encouraged to use mobile phones for EFL teaching and learning to stimulate students' interesting in doing more EFL practice. Wu and Marek (2016) in their study found that MALL can help students enhance cross-cultural communication and students therefore are willing to participate in the MALL context with others. Liu (2016) also suggested

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