The Impact of Mobile Resources on Enhancing Lifelong Learning Among Chinese Undergraduate EFL Students:
A Gender-Based Exploration

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online education, including mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Extensive research has examined various aspects of MALL; there remains a gap in understanding the preferred mobile resources that promote lifelong learning ability, particularly in relation to gender differences. This study focuses on Chinese EFL learners' preferences for mobile resources in promoting lifelong learning. Employing a quantitative questionnaire, the researchers examine the relationship between mobile learning efficacy and lifelong learning ability. The findings indicate no significant differences in mobile resource preferences among male and female students. However, a moderately positive relationship between mobile learning efficacy and lifelong learning ability was discovered. Notably, this study identifies that Chinese EFL students preferred mobile resources that may act as a platform to enhance mobile learning efficacy and support lifelong learning.

KEYWORDS

Gender Difference, Lifelong Learning (LL), Mobile Learning Efficacy (MLE), Mobile Resources Preference (MRP), Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

INTRODUCTION

The field of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has rapidly expanded over the past decade, integrating mobile resources into language learning (Rajendran et al., 2020). While previous research has extensively explored various aspects of MALL, a critical research gap remains in understanding

how MALL resources can effectively promote lifelong learning (LL) values among Chinese undergraduate EFL students.

This research gap is of paramount importance due to the transformative impact of LL on individuals' personal and professional growth. LL is crucial not only for enhancing employability but also for fostering active citizenship, social inclusion, and continuous personal development (Rajendran et al., 2020). However, despite the recognized potential of MALL to promote LL values (Ermerawati, 2019), there exists a need to investigate the specific MALL resources preferred by Chinese undergraduate EFL students in advancing their LL abilities.

This study bridges this research gap by shedding light on the MALL resources that resonate with Chinese undergraduate EFL learners' LL goals. By examining the preferred MALL resources that contribute to LL values, this research contributes significantly to the existing literature on MALL. The investigation not only offers insights into effective language learning strategies, but also provides practical implications for educators and curriculum designers aiming to harness the power of mobile technology to foster sustainable and impactful English language education. Furthermore, in a dynamically evolving educational landscape, this study empowers educators and learners to leverage MALL resources effectively, thereby enhancing the overall mobile learning experience for Chinese EFL undergraduates. Particularly in the context of the post-pandemic era, findings of this research offer a timely perspective on combining pedagogical approaches with mobile technology, ensuring that English language education remains adaptive, relevant, and capable of cultivating LL abilities.

MALL in China

The number of English learners in China tops the list due to its large population, and China's active participation in globalization creates the need for more efficient English education (Shan & Li, 2020). While most Chinese students are skilled at reading and grammar, they are still weak at listening and speaking due to a long-time of grammar-oriented teaching concept (Fan, 2019; Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022). In Chinese EFL education, information and communications technology (ICT) has been increasingly explored. With greater accessibility and awareness of how to use ICT, Chinese policymakers have recognized ICT's role in supplementing college English education (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015; Wu, 2019). According to Hao et al. (2017), China is now playing a leading role in smartphone ownership and mobile internet access, which enables language learners in higher education to increasingly use out-of-class self-directed learning facilitated by mobile technology (Lai et al., 2022). Li et al. (2022) provides a systematic review of the findings of 23 studies published between 2015 and 2020 on MALL in Mainland China, which suggests the need to develop sound MALL pedagogies associated with sociocultural aspects of language learning in relevant contexts.

Although mobile technologies are widely accessible, they have not been extensively studied as language learning tools through an academic lens in China (Wang & Cui, 2016). In the context of higher education in China, MALL research received the most publications in 2019 (Li et al., 2022). It was found that vocabulary has received the most emphasis (Kuimova et al., 2018) and English is the most investigated MALL language (Shadiev & Yang, 2020). In addition, an informal context was the most popular educational setting for MALL practice, mobile phones/smartphones were the most used devices, and WeChat was the most used and popular tool and application (Li et al., 2022).

To date, research in this area has generally involved learning strategies combined with mobile devices or applications (Gao & Shen, 2021) and the integration of mobile resources with a certain language (García Botero et al., 2019; Zhou, 2021). For instance, Kan & Tang (2018) claimed that MALL is a worthwhile research gap due to the increasing ownership of mobile devices among the world's largest English-learning population. Moreover, China's Ministry of Education encourages using technology to promote instructional efficiency in collegiate English language education (China Ministry of Education, 2016). Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine how learners in China use mobile devices to support their English language learning and how mobile learning resources can be effectively incorporated into teaching to promote students' learning efficacy (Kan & Tang, 2018).

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