

Chapter 3

A Digital Future of Diversity, Connectivity, and Sustainability: Critical Review of MALL in CSL/ CFL Education (2013–2021)

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ABSTRACT

In a mobile society where information and knowledge become accessible to anyone, anywhere, and anytime on the internet, online education has been transformed fundamentally. By the end of 2020, Mandarin Chinese was taught to over 20 million people in over 180 countries around the world. By critically reviewing 15 recent studies from 2013 to 2021 on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in teaching and learning Chinese as a second or foreign language (CSL/CFL), this chapter emphasizes the need for pedagogical diversity in goals, practices, and context. In the second theme of ‘connectivity’, the new theory of online education connectivism is applied to evaluate the official Chinese language learning mobile app named ‘e-Learn Chinese’. In the final theme of ‘sustainability’, it demonstrates an ecosystem of MALL through an ecological perspective based on a critical discussion of the mostly reviewed ten mobile language learning apps, which could innovate sustainable pedagogies in a life-long learning society.

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INTRODUCTION

In this digital age, rapid social and technological changes have transformed the process of teaching and learning from social constructivism to connectivism. Proposed by Siemens (2005), in contrast to traditional educational theories and approaches, online education of connective knowledge is becoming more interactive, complex, and diverse. This is achieved through a network of entities such as individuals, groups, and communities. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is one of the dominate trends of such information change that have been discussed widely in language education (Viberg & Grönlund, 2013). In particular, online learning of Chinese language is growing vigorously across the world (Ministry of Education, 2021). As the Chinese society is experiencing social, cultural, and economic growths, a better understanding of how MALL provides both opportunities and challenges is of crucial importance in the post covid-19 era. MALL in Chinese as a Second or Foreign Language (CSL/CFL) is regarded as a dynamic, complex, and diverse area (Gong et al., 2020; Tong et al., 2020). Previous studies suggest that teachers and learners view MALL as a supportive tool in facilitating Chinese language learning. As Ho (2018) argues, online and offline learning should be seen as a continuum rather than separate practices. Mobile-assisted education complements traditional educational approaches in such a way that it facilitates autonomous learning beyond classrooms (Jureynolds et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021).

In the field of CSL/CFL education, however, MALL has only been the subject of interests recently. One reason might be that there is a lack of interdisciplinary continuing professional development (CPD) in teacher development including technological training programs or courses for language teachers (Tong et al., 2020; Zhou, 2020). Therefore, this chapter has two clear aims to link theory and practice in this newly developed mobile assisted language education. It provides an outlook of the field from the current literature and app market. The first part of this chapter is about theory. It hopes to provide language teacher educators a broad understanding of current development of MALL in CSL/CFL by discussing recent studies and trends in the 21st century. The second part is about practice by addressing the current gap of lacking discussion of popular mobile apps in their educational potentials and constrains. By evaluating different mobile apps, it hopes to seek future applications of mobile technology in language education to help building a life-long learning society.

In the first part on literature review, this chapter offers important innovative insights into an overview of the most relevant and recent journal articles through data visualization tools. After manually searching and selecting from main academic databases such as Scopus, 15 articles were chosen from various international scholars

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