

MALL IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN POST-COVID 19 ERA: IMPLEMENTATIONS AND ANTICIPATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is the most recent learning tool in the language education through which applications and websites are used to facilitate students learning. The spread of Covid-19 pandemic forced the educational institutions to adopt MALL and to use it to replace face-to-face teaching. Such unpredicted, quick move to use mobile technology brought a lot of opportunities for MALL adoption in educational institutions especially at those in the developing countries. This study aims to explore the EFL teachers' perspective on how MALL is being implemented in context of EFL in higher education after the pandemic period. The method of the research was the qualitative method with a sample of four EFL teachers in a public university in Oman. The findings revealed that the respondents have a positive perspective towards using mobile technology in teaching EFL. Moreover, the analysis of the findings showed that mobile devices are being used in class to play educational games, translate key vocabulary, learn the pronunciation of new words. They are also being used to communicate important notices and receive feedback through social media applications. The study also discussed how EFL teachers envision the future of MALL in higher education. This study has a key contribution to assist the education providers, curriculum designers and EFL teachers maximize the use of MALL in EFL context and reveals possibilities of incorporating mobile technology in EFL context at the universities in Oman.

KEYWORDS: EFL, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, Higher Education Institutions, Oman

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades of the 21st century, technology has been utilized in all aspects of our lives including education. Since 2007, it has become more powerful after smart phones, tablets and e-book readers became available to be used for various purposes in different fields. In the field of education, using such devices to enhance learning and teaching process has become the focus of research. Portability, connectivity, recording sounds and taking photos and videos are some of the characteristics that offered new practices to teaching and learning (Kukulka-Hulme, 2006). These characteristics and features of such mobile devices were found effective in the field of language learning as it helped develop listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills, as well as vocabulary and grammar (Al Hosni, 2016; Al-Shamsi et al., 2020). The outbreak of the COVID-19 in 2020 affected all aspects of our lives. The UNESCO (2019) reports revealed that the pandemic had an impact on all educational systems worldwide and led to the closure of educational institutions in 130 country-wide in May 2020. According to the report by the United Nations (UNESCO, 2020) higher education institutions

started to use mobile technologies to continue the scheduled academic activities in all educational institutions worldwide. Thus, institutions of higher learning in developed and in developing countries started to adapt programs and applications as distance-learning tools and Moodle was one of the platforms that was wildly adopted during the outbreak of COVID-19 (Ziraba et al., 2020). Mobile devices were used to perform several tasks that, in turn, led to achieve many educational objectives. Moreover, the availability of the internet and the existence of Google Docs, Google Hangouts, Skype, Wikis, and other tools have made education more collaborative, interactive, and efficient (Sarker et al., 2019). Using a mobile phone, teachers and students can use YouTube to watch educational content, Zoom and Google Meet for video conferencing, Safari to browse Internet (Khalil et al., 2020). Although there was a wide, rapid expansion of educational technology before COVID-19, the pandemic has altered the methods of teaching and learning (Hoq, 2020). There has been a remarkable progress in the usage of online tools i.e., video conferencing, virtual tutoring, webinar etc. during the pandemic.

This study explores how EFL teachers are implementing Mobile-assisted Language Learning in the context of higher education in post-COVID19. Specifically, this research addresses the following questions:

How do EFL teachers use Mobile-assisted Language Learning to teach EFL at the university in Oman after the pandemic?

How do the EFL teachers envision the future of MALL in universities in Oman?

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method was used in this study to explore the implementation of MALL in EFL teaching at the public universities in Oman. The semi-structured interview was the method used to collect data and the sample was four teachers who have been teaching EFL in the English Language Centre at one of the public universities in Oman.

A pilot version of the interview questions was sent to a university professor who suggested some amendments to be made in the phrasing of some questions. After attaining agreement on the validity and relevancy of the items through a pilot test, the face-to face interviews were conducted and recorded. The sample was purposefully chosen as the informants have rich experience in the field of EFL and have been teaching EFL there during the last six years. Thus, they were ideal candidates to provide data regarding the implementations of MALL in EFL teaching after the pandemic since they have experienced teaching EFL there before, during and after the pandemic. This also would help explore the various uses of MALL and the future of MALL in the context of EFL at the university.

DISCUSSION

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews are thematically analysed. The findings and the emerging themes will be discussed under the research question they address.

1. How do EFL teachers use Mobile-assisted Language Learning to teach EFL at the university in Oman after the pandemic?

The informants provided examples of how MALL is being implemented after the pandemic. Several ways to implement MALL inside and outside the classroom have been mentioned by the informants:

Educational Games

It was reported that some applications such as KAHOOT are used to make learning more fun. Playing games to learn English was mentioned by all participants and was considered one of the effective ways to make learning English language easier and more joyful. Many studies explored the effect of such applications on students' performance and learning. For example, it was found that Kahoot provided the students with opportunity to engage more deeply with content materials and improved interactions with instructors and peers due to its collaborative nature (Sprague, 2019). Moreover, it has also been largely explored and found that it improves students' vocabulary knowledge (Dickinson, 2019). Findings of recent studies conducted in the EFL context at a university in the United Arab Emirates suggest that gamified digital platforms could be incorporated as part of the teaching pedagogy to retain students' attention, increase participation, and provide students with an enhanced enjoyable Learning experience (Alawadhi & Abu-Ayyash, 2021). Therefore, having such platforms in higher education might be beneficial.

(a) E-learning Platform

"During the pandemic, the campus was closed, and the faculty members and students downloaded the Moodle application". This, according to the participants, offered many services to the students. They use their phones to apply for postponement of study, appeal, or upload their forms in addition to doing the regular tasks related to their learning on the Moodle platform.

(b) Social Media Application

All the participants mentioned that they use social media application, specifically WhatsApp to disseminate important notices and to exchange feedback. Two participants mentioned that they receive messages from their students with regard their marks and enquiries about some topics which had been discussed in class time. According to one of the participants: *"students interact more using such applications in their mobile devices as they are always using them to do different tasks in their everyday life."*

2. How do the EFL teachers envision the future of MALL in universities?

All the participant believed that mobile devices are beneficial in EFL teaching. They expressed how MALL was a powerful tool for language teaching and learning at university level during the pandemic. All the participants indicated that many teachers continue to use MALL after the pandemic. They expect that MALL becomes an essential element that is formally incorporated in the higher education system.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study encourage and support education providers, curriculum designers and EFL teachers maximize the use of MALL in EFL context at higher education. Studying the possibilities of incorporating MALL formally in the future in EFL context at the universities is recommended. Moreover, exploring ways to incorporate gamified digital platforms as part of the teaching pedagogy could help to attain the advantages of using digital games in EFL teaching in higher education in Oman.

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