Journal of ELT and Education (JEE), *1*(1), December-2018, Page: 61-69
ISSN (Print): 2618-1290, ISSN (Online): 2663-1482, ISSN-L: 2618-1290

USE OF MALL AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL IN BANGLADESH: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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[**Citation:** Khatun, M. & Shiblu, M. N. H. S. (2018). USE OF MALL AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL IN BANGLADESH: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY, *Journal of ELT and Education*, *1*(1): 61-69.]

Article History:

Received: 08.10.2018

Revised: 18.11.2018

Accepted: 19.12.2018

Published: 31.12.2018

Abstract

This study aims at highlighting the educational shift of the 21st century with the emergence of MALL as new language learning approach. Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) is regarded as a newfangled approach of educational technology to teach and learn a language. Hundred students of different subjects and ten EFL teachers were the key participants for the study who took part in the questionnaire survey and discussion segment. The study has depicted the imperativeness of the use of mobile devices among both EFL students and teachers at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh. As far as EFL is concerned, vocabulary knowledge is regarded as its vital part. Hence, the main focus of the study is to explore how EFL students exploit their mobile devices to acquire different skill of English language, and how EFL teachers use their mobile devices to teach them as well. Thus, the data were collected by means of students' questionnaire and a focus group discussion (FGD) among ten teachers. The findings reveal positive attitudes towards the importance and use of mobile devices from both teachers and students. In addition, MALL is proved to be effective in enhancing EFL students' vocabulary acquisition.

Keywords: *MALL, mobile phone, EFL, learner's attitude, improvement.*

1. Introduction

Mobile phones have great educational value since Chickering and Ehrmann (1966) coined the term Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The various features of smart phones give access to lot of options to present instructional materials in interesting ways. The students and the teachers also accepted the idea of using mobile phones in language learning and teaching respectively. The digital age is characterized by the rapid growth of information and communication technologies. Among all communication mediums, mobile devices as cell phones, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), smart phones and tabs currently are the most powerful ones. So, the educators aim at the developing of teaching and learning through the various uses of mobile devices. Mobile device is the best choice to connect the world within very short time. So, this chapter 1 discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, justification of the study, research question, and definition of the terms, outline of the thesis, limitations and finally a conclusion. We live in a world of technology these days where varied technological innovations is changing the way we live, learn and work. The innovations in telecommunication are more notable. In 2017 over 4.43 billion people were using mobile phone

which has increased into 4.57 billion in 2018 (statista.com). So, it can provide a great educational value in ESL/EFL learning and teaching. As language is more time and space constraints, the system of learning and teaching should be free of such constraints. Using mobile phone can make a great opportunity in ESL/EFL learning and teaching anywhere and anytime. Mobile devices are not substitute for existing learning and teaching devices, rather it is an extension for learning and teaching in a completely new environment. As English is not our native language, we face different types of problems while learning and teaching this language. Mobile devices are the best technology to be found which can give instant access to the material to be needed in learning and teaching English. At present students use mobile devices very frequently in their learning process. They can easily learn a skill through their access to mobile phone. So, this study concentrates on finding out the impact of MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) on English Language Teaching at the tertiary level of education in the context of Bangladesh.

2. Objectives

The principal objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of MALL in EFL teaching and learning at the tertiary level of education. The other crucial interest is to find out more about the ways in which those who are engaged in teaching and learning– teachers and students use mobile technology in their daily learning practices. In fact, we attempt at raising the interest on how this new wave of technology can be beneficial for both teachers and students so as to work with these devices not to work against them, which is the current challenge to be undertaken. In other words, this study seeks to provide a guiding line for future activities and educational practices in the field of MALL.

3. Literature Review

MALL intervention is useful for all learners irrespective of their age. McCarty et al. (2017) present the potential impact of mobile technologies on L2 teaching and learning, particularly from a socio-cultural perspective. It emphasizes how the mobility of the connected learner can allow for transformative pedagogical approaches as compared with the fixity of computer-based L2 learning. Although this book accepts the shorthand usage of 'MALL' in the disciplinary development of technology-enhanced language learning (TELL). The emphasis in CALL and MALL appears to be on the technologies that assist learning, whereas 'mobile language learning' is closer to emphasizing the mobility of the learner when freed from the constraints of fixed places and times. With regular classrooms, computer labs, or home computers, the flow is toward a fixed location before learning can take place, whereas with Internet-connected mobile devices, the flow can be through learning experiences, more fully and immersive, closer to ubiquitous learning. Mobile devices have brought a vast number of learning possibilities which are convenient and compatible to the mobile lifestyle. Mobile technology can support quick feedback or reinforcement; immersive experiences such as mobile investigations or games; situated learning in an authentic context; access to information while moving around a specific environment; information sharing in collaborative learning; record keeping in informal and lifelong learning; and coordination of learning and resources. Mobile devices are best viewed as mediating tools in the learning process during which the learners, teachers and content interact with each other. This study of Kukulska-Hulme et al. (2009) says that prior studies in MALL could be divided into two broad categories: content-based (essentially developing digital learning materials for mobile access) and design-oriented (essentially out-of-class, often authentic and/or social mobile learning activities). Studies related to content development usually focus on more formal contexts, i.e. pushing or pulling of relatively structured, often de-contextualized, learning materials, that are related to language learning courses. Those that are concerned with design oriented issues tend to refer to the 'informal' nature of mobile learning. Several other researches also analyzed the development of mobile assisted language learning, particularly for second language acquisition, with oral communicative skills being one of the experiment components to further validate the usability of this Mobile Assisted Second Language Learning (MASLL). In short, it is feasible that mobile phones could be useful learning tools for learning, provided the setting of the learning

environment can be defined for its purpose; and can confined into a cohesive MASLL environment which supports and motivates learning as a whole.

4. Methodology

This study is concerned as a qualitative study with the goal of exploring the opinions, beliefs and attitudes of the students and teachers at the tertiary level towards the use and impact of mobile devices to teach and learn English in the EFL contexts. The method adopted in this study is observation method and data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are collected from hundred students of tertiary level education from three different subjects and ten EFL teachers who are very much accustomed to technology. They were asked some questions to know their involvement and impact of using mobile phone in their teaching and learning. The data were collected in different ways through questionnaires from the students with the cooperation of their teachers through a focus group discussion (FGD). For making the questionnaire and discussion successful, the researcher had to go through different literary articles, journals, website, critical composition etc. which are the secondary sources of data. Regarding instrumentation, a questionnaire was given to the student-participants. The responses of the participants proved their involvement and impact of the mobile devices on the English Language Teaching at the tertiary level of education. In the focus group discussion of the teachers, the answers were recorded through a voice recorder for further evaluation of the participants' responses to the asking questions. Researcher analyzed the response time and again for better judgment. While collecting the data students were asked to sit in their classes. Then they were asked to answer above questions from the students' questionnaire in the printed sheet of questionnaires. After that, the teachers were seated for the focus group discussion in which they were asked five questions and their voice was recorded. And finally, their multiple, written and oral responses were evaluated very carefully. The responses and recorded discussions were transcribed, summarized and broken into units for data analyses.

5. Findings: Presentation and Discussion

The aim of this research is to explore the impact of Mobile-assisted Language Learning approach on English Language Learning at the tertiary level of education. This implies investigating how both teachers and students use their mobile devices and evaluate their usefulness in the teaching and learning process.

5.1. Results of the questionnaire

Question 1: Specify your gender.

Table 01: Student's gender

Option	**Number**	**Percentage %**
Male	50	50%
Female	50	50%
Total	100	100%

This table shows that the number of male and female participants is equal. This equity is kept to know if there is any impact of gender on using mobile devices. To have a clearer idea about the impact it is necessary to know everything from both male and female. Same ratio of male and female will make it easier to the different impact of using MALL at the tertiary level of education.

Question 2: Specify your current level of knowledge in English

Table 02: Student's current level in English

Gender	Excellent	Good	Average	Less than average
Male	6	34	10	4
Female	4	28	13	1
Total	10	62	23	5

The result presents that all the participants knew their level in English. The majority mentioned their level of proficiency as good. Others showed that they have an average level in English. The least percentage of students showed that their level is less than average. In addition, the current level of the students allows the study to rely on them since more than half of the students claimed that their level in English is between good and average.

Question 3: What do you usually do with your mobile phone?

Table 3: Most frequent activities rank

Gender	Social Networking	Entertainment	Learning
Male	29	10	9
Female	27	13	11
Total	57	23	20

From the above table we can see that most of the students like social networking activities in mobile devices, 23% of the participants use their mobile devices for enjoying their time with entertainment activities, and learning English is placed at the least preferred state. That means social-networking is the best choice of the students. By doing social networking students can learn English, as they mostly use English to get direction and communicate with the friend of different corner of the world. So, in this way they are learning English indirectly and unconsciously.

Question 4: Why do you prefer mobile device for learning?

Table 4: Advantages of learning through mobile phone

Gender	Anytime-anywhere	Practical Use	Low Cost
Male	44	4	2
Female	35	7	8
Total	79	11	10

As can be seen from the table, with regard to the total number of the respondents, the majority prefer mobile devices for the "anytime-anywhere" advantage. They voted it as the highest one. As computer cannot be carried out so students prefer mobile device for its access to any place when needed. Next, practical use is rated as the second advantage, and the advantage of low costs of the mobile device as the last one. The respondents did not mention other advantages. That means MALL is much preferred than CALL nowadays for it's anytime-anywhere access and portability.

Question 5: What are the challenges in learning via mobile devices?

Table 5: Challenges in learning English with mobile devices

Gender	Technical Challenges	Costs	No Challenges
Male	11	5	35
Female	11	8	31
Total	22	13	65

Above table shows that majority students find no challenge in using mobile device. The tertiary level students are really smart and very much accustomed to new technology. So majority of them don't feel any challenge in using mobile devices for learning. The technical challenges such as screen size, and battery storage were identified as a barrier to mobile learning. Other challenges such as internet connection were not mentioned; however, few years ago, it was regarded as a major problem. One can say that with the arrival of the 3G the issue of internet connection was almost solved. So, this is not a challenging tool for the tertiary level learners.

Question 6: How often do you use your mobile device to learn English?

Table 6: Frequency of using Mobile-assisted Language Learning

Gender	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Male	6	36	4	4
Female	9	39	2	0
Total	15	75	6	4

As indicated in above table, more than half of students (75) claimed that they used their mobile devices for learning purposes most often. However, some students reported that they never used their mobile devices to learn English. Here, unreliability, as an educational barrier, and some technical disadvantages (as reported in Q5) were raised by the students who did not use their mobile devices for academic purposes. So, in addition to the results of Q5, it can be concluded that students learn English incidentally through their mobile devices.

Question 7: When do you use mobile device to learn English?

Table 7: Times of Mobile-assisted Language Learning

Gender	When Needed	Free Time	In Class	Before Sleep
Male	25	11	8	6
Female	30	9	4	5
Total	67	20	12	11

The above figure demonstrates that 67% of the respondents access to Mobile-assisted Language Learning activities whenever the opportunity arises. While the same percentage of respondents claimed that they use their mobile devices to learn English whether in their free time or while waiting and the least percentage before sleeping. That means most of students are likely to use MALL whenever the opportunity arises.

Question 8: Which aspects of English Language you intend to improve when using mobile activities?

Table 8: Language aspects improve through mobile devices

Gender	Vocabulary	Listening	Grammar	Speaking	Pronunciation
Male	35	3	4	6	2
Female	37	3	6	4	0
Total	72	6	10	10	2

Therefore, learning English through mobile devices can enhance the students' skills. Thus, students were asked to identify the language aspects that they intend to improve when using their mobile activities. Not surprisingly, more than half of the students reported that they used their mobile devices to enhance mostly their vocabulary and listening skills. This explicates their choices in the activities provided in Q4, in which they ranked songs and mobile dictionaries among the most frequently used applications. Listening also is ranked as the second skill to be improved. Grammar and speaking are much less interesting. Two participants added the aspect of pronunciation. So, learning new vocabulary is the first choice of the students.

Question 9: How would you evaluate your level before and after learning English through your mobile?

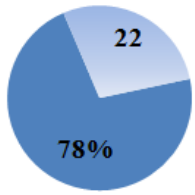


Figure 1: Level of improvement when learning with mobile

In above question students were asked to evaluate their level before and after using the devices as learning tools. More than half of students reported that their level has improved after assisting their knowledge of English through mobile devices. So, the mobile activities have contributed to positive feedback.

Question 10: If you do have any comment with regard to the study, please feel free to write.

The last question was an open-ended question which was issued with regard to gathering the students' additional comments concerning the study. The majority of students were advocates for Mobile-assisted Language Learning; positive feedbacks were received. Some students said that teachers should use and allow the use of mobile technology inside the classroom due to the unlimited advantages they provide, such as availability, and portability. Other students claimed that the devices motivate them to learn.

5.2. Results of focus group discussion (FGD)

A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted among ten teachers as another data collection tool to discover if EFL teachers in Bangladesh use their mobile devices as a support and teaching tool to improve their teaching style. Moreover, the discussion aimed at exploring the teachers' perceptions about the usefulness of the mobile devices in acquiring various skills of English language. Five open-ended questions were the main focus of the discussion. The first two questions investigated the extent to which the teachers use and allow the use of mobile technologies inside the classroom. Third and fourth questions aimed at reporting the activities the teachers use to teach the different EFL skills, especially vocabulary acquisition. Finally, the last question was devoted to teachers' perceptions towards the importance of MALL in EFL teaching and learning.

Issue 1: Do you use your mobile device as a tool to improve your teaching style? If yes, how you do so?

The question aims at exploring the extent to which EFL teachers are aware of the use of their mobile devices in the teaching process, and the kind of activities they use. The findings revealed that teachers are familiar with mobile technologies; the teachers use their mobile devices as tools to improve their teaching styles. Hence, one concluded that mobile technologies penetrate not only students' learning process, but also teachers' teaching style.

Issue 2: To what extent do you allow your students to use their mobile devices inside the classroom?

The question is asked to know whether EFL teachers tolerate the use of mobile devices inside the classroom, and within their courses. Among all teachers the seven interviewees claimed that they 'usually' permit their students to use their mobile devices inside the classroom for academic purposes which show that, the teachers support the use of mobile technology within the formal setting. Others support using it outside of classroom.

Issue 3: How do you consider the use of mobile devices as tools to teach the different language skills, namely vocabulary acquisition?

It is significant to measure EFL teachers' attitudes towards the use of mobile devices as teaching tools to teach the language skills. The teachers agreed that mobile devices are beneficial educational technology tools that offer the students a wide range of opportunities to develop the four skills. However, one can remark that some interviewees used the term "smart phones" to refer to mobile devices, which is a general misconception spread among many authors.

Issue 4: Are there any specific mobile activities you use within your course?

The teachers are asked to identify if there are any MALL activities they usually use within their courses. In this regard, the most of interviewees opined that they implement the use of mobile devices within their courses; however, the implementation is still restricted to an unlimited number of mobile activities such as 'checking meaning' and 'definitions'. On the contrary, two interviewees opined differently regarding the implementation of mobile activities in the EFL

courses. In both cases, this may be due to the fact that teachers are not aware of the unlimited activities that can be produced and delivered through the various mobile devices.

Issue 5: Do you think that Mobile-assisted Language Learning is important to teach English as a Foreign Language in general and vocabulary in particular in the future?

In addition to measuring teachers' attitudes towards the use of mobile devices as teaching tools, this question aims to know how EFL teachers consider the importance of MALL as a language learning approach. All the interviewees share the similar idea that mobile technology has become an imperative way in teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language. Some interviewees reported that mobile devices are already available and motivate students, which are two advantages to exploit. On the other hand, some interviewees shed light on a significant point in using mobile technologies; that is, the importance to "know the exact use" of the devices so as to guide both teachers and students to exploit this new kind of educational technology.

6. Recommendations

Mobile technologies, including laptop computers, smart phones, game consoles, MP3/MP4 players, and so many other handheld devices, become an essential part of both students' and teachers' routines which can be the best solution for implementing ICT in classrooms; that is, they provide spontaneous usage from both teachers and learners. Hence, it is pivotal to raise awareness on the part of all EFL practitioners so as to know how well invest in these digital devices. For that, the current study suggests the following remarks:

a. Teachers may benefit from the widespread ownership of handheld devices among their students by considering using MALL activities that fit the students' devices and direct their students on choosing the appropriate learning materials.

b. As long as vocabulary is concerned, teachers can exploit the unlimited number of MALL vocabulary activities (games, puzzles, word guessing games) to implement them within courses and encourage their students to use them.

c. As both traditional vocabulary learning and mobile vocabulary learning have their innate advantages and disadvantages, a blended approach is recommended for learners to meet their particular needs

d. As far as MALL activities are concerned, designers should pay enough attention to design activities that build learners' language skills, so as to satisfy the different learners' needs.

e. Thus, it would be appropriate to create research laboratories that couple between computer specialists and applied linguists in order to create programs and mobile applications which are compatible with language curriculum.

f. Finally, the researcher suggests adding a module which would be devoted to train learners on using and implementing mobile devices in the teaching and learning process. The program of this module can be planned and prepared by the suggested research laboratory and the content would be constantly updated as technology always is.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, both EFL teachers and students are concerned with using mobile devices as new educational tools in an appropriate manner so as to achieve better pedagogical results. The findings of the study disclosed that every student of tertiary level of education has at least one mobile device which proves the ubiquity and availability of mobile devices as two main features to exploit. Students evaluated the mobile devices in terms of both affordances and challenges. The anytime-anywhere advantage and portability were identified as the main features of mobile devices. These findings are consistent with findings found in literature. For example, on one hand, Kamalian and Sayadian (2014) claimed that, "the significance of mobile learning lies in the fact that learning is delivered to a person, at a specific time and in specific place while using electronic devices" (p. 101). On the other hand, Kukulska-Hulme (2006) reported that, "small screen-size, short battery life and limited memory were reported as significant problems" (p. 649). Reliability issues and educational barriers were other challenges that hinder MALL; that is, reduce the time spent on mobile devices.

Moreover, MALL is such an approach which helps to increase learners' vocabulary at its level best. And it facilitates the language learning process. The findings match with many previous studies such as Basoglu & Akdemir (2010) compared undergraduate students' vocabulary through using mobile phones and traditional learning technique (flashcards). The study held that using mobile phones as a vocabulary learning tool is more effective than one of traditional vocabulary learning tools. However, the MALL approach of language learning is to some extent failed in the classroom activities because of the traditional teaching methods. The teachers do not allow students to use their mobile devices in the classroom and as most of them face technological challenge in using mobile devices so that the MALL approach is enhancing in a very sloth way. To conclude, this study was consistent with the previous researches of MALL. In brief, results indicated the widespread ownership of mobile devices among both teachers and EFL students. In addition, MALL was found to be effective in enhancing EFL students' language skills, especially their vocabulary acquisition. The study delivered that MALL vocabulary activities penetrate both teachers' and learners' own teaching and learning process.

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