



## MOBILE ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

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### Abstract

The practicality and popularity of mobile devices have given them one of the leading roles in language teaching as in the other fields of everyday life. Learners have an access to knowledge no matter where they are and what they are doing. Considering the fact that our age is based on multi-tasking, we can understand the reason for the wide usage of mobile devices among our learners. This study investigates the attitudes of prep school students and the teachers towards the use of mobile devices in learning English. Sixty learners at İzmir Institute of Technology Summer School participated in this study. Data were gathered by an open-ended questionnaire. This study was done to suggest an alternative to teaching English traditionally at foundation courses in order to trigger the motivation of the learners. The results of the study reveal that learners use mobile devices, especially mobile phones, to learn new vocabulary items and for translation. The teachers are mainly against the use of mobile devices in the lesson if they are used for games and social media. The article aims to indicate that the integration of mobile devices into teaching makes learning process more productive and motivating both for learners and teachers.

**Keywords:** Mobile-assisted language learning, motivation, mobile devices.

### INTRODUCTION

Mobile assisted language learning (MALL), in broad terms, is the integration of mobile devices into language learning process. MALL is not easy to define in one way as it has been one of the most sophisticated fields, which is growing at an accelerating rate. Another factor which should be taken into account is that in today's world language learning cannot be restricted to the walls of the classroom with limited hours. Actually, that must be the situation if we are trying to establish learner autonomy in our classes. The continuity of language learning is easier since knowledge is accessible through the internet.

When we enter the classroom, we see the students with their best friends sitting hand in hand; mobile phones or tablets. Nowadays, students are consulting their mobile devices more than their teachers. If they cannot find what they are looking for on the screens, then they ask for their teachers' help. The practicality, mobility, and the accessibility of the mobile devices inevitably create this situation. Huang et al. (as cited in Viberg and Grönlund, 2012, p.1) point out the advantages of mobile technologies such as "flexibility, low cost, small size, and user-friendliness". Especially, in language learning, students are exposed to the language they are learning, which is English in this case, every time in their daily life. While they are playing computer games, using the social media, following the instructions in a manual, doing their homework, etc., students are not surrounded with the walls of the classrooms. Thornton and Houser (2005, p.218), in their study, explain that "in many educational institutions around the world, the amount of class time is very limited." In the light of this, they conducted a study in order to investigate the students' attitudes towards the mobile device usage. They believe that because of the limited class time, language learners cannot get involved most of the activities required by the process of language learning. For such a purpose, the use of mobile devices is an alternative to enable students to be exposed to educational activities. The results of their study show that students have a positive attitude towards the use of mobile devices. In addition, students support the use of mobile devices to be informed about their classes. The educational materials designed for the mobile devices are also welcomed by



the students joined the study. The investigation supports the idea that mobile devices are practical tools in language learning when we think that the class time is not enough for the students to be exposed to the required educational activities ranging from communicative tasks to reading texts. When the learning still goes on outside the classroom, the process becomes more meaningful for the student as well. As Vavoula suggests when students' everyday activities and the learning process are integrated, it becomes easier for them to achieve their goals (as cited in Geng, 2012).

Considering the flexible nature of MALL, we can see that learners get more free and autonomous in their learning process. Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler (as cited in Song, 2010, p.3) point out that "learning is becoming more personal, yet at the same time more connected to the surroundings and with more potential for connected, collaborative activity." When the student is in collaboration with others, the learning process becomes more meaningful. "Among the most noted affordances for MALL is ubiquitous access to learning anytime at any place that the user has reception" (Nah, et. al., as cited in Jalalifarahani and Ghovehnodoushan, 2011, p.527). The idea of learning English anytime, anywhere with the use of mobile devices can motivate the students due to the fact that they feel that they have the responsibility of their own learning process, which makes them feel that they have the authority over the process. Thornton and Houser (as cited in Jalalifarahani and Ghovehnodoushan, 2011) conducted a study focusing on using mobile phones to teach English at a Japanese university. In this study, they sent mini-lessons to students via email three times a day. After period of time, students were compared to the group having the same lessons through the Web and on paper. According to the results, students having the lessons by SMS had higher scores compared to Web and paper group. Furthermore, the attitudes of the SMS students were positive believing it to be a beneficial teaching method. Another study conducted at Griffith University in Australia indicates that the use of text messaging related to classes has positive effects on students (Horstmanhof as cited in Geng, 2012). This study was about creating an alternative way for the communication between the lecturers and the freshmen. Apart from educational activities through mobile devices, the needs for communication can be the subject of the studies. This is quite reasonable as it is easy and practical to use mobile devices to be connected with the community you live in. In addition, the feeling of belonging to somewhere in the group makes the individual happier and secure. This also helps instructors establish a bridge between the students and him/her, which makes the learning/teaching process more productive and relaxing.

One of the most common reasons for the use of mobile devices in learning a language is to learn the meanings of the new words students see in a text. If their mobile devices, mostly mobile phones are in their hands, they prefer to use them with the function of dictionaries instead of using a printed dictionary. As well as an easy access to the usage and meaning of new words, the knowledge about the grammatical structures is provided with small taps on the screen. However, all these do not mean that mobile devices can function as the main source of the learning process. They play a significant role in students' practice and revision process, which is required for the retention of the items they learnt. Spoon-feeding the students in the traditional classroom atmosphere does not provide students with the language skills they need.

Considering these, I surveyed a group of students at the foundation program at the university so as to learn their attitudes towards the use of mobile devices in learning English.

## **METHOD**

In the present study, 60 students at Izmir Institute of Technology School of Foreign Languages Summer School were selected. Their English proficiency level was A2. Data were gathered by an open-ended questionnaire.

## **FINDINGS**

According to the results of the questionnaire, 98,3% of the students use the mobile devices for English. One of the students answers this question as not having a smart phone. They use mobile technology especially to learn the meanings of the new words. Dictionary applications are the most popular ones students use during the lesson. For the new vocabulary items and translation, 87,7 % of the students consult their mobile devices instead of asking their teachers. The questionnaire indicates that 33,33% of the students sometimes use English



when using mobile phones while 21,6% claim that they never use English. The percentage of the students saying that they always use English is 26,67% and 18,33% say often to the question. The questionnaire points out that 76,66% of the students use mobile phone to learn English after school whereas 18,33% of the students claim that they do not use their mobile phones for English learning purposes. 3,33% of the students sometimes use their mobile phones to study English after school. The answers to the question about which purposes they use their mobile phones after class hours show that 39,6% of the students use them to improve their English while 60,3% use them for other purposes such as music, social media and playing games.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As it is observed, the findings of this study show that students use mobile devices in vocabulary learning and translation. Instead of consulting their teachers during the class hour, they use their mobile devices as a dictionary serving as a translator for the sentences or structures in English.

The questionnaire shows that the majority of the students use their mobile devices for social purposes such as music, social media, and game after class hours compared to purposes to improve their English. This can indicate that the teaching materials to be used after class hours can be adapted for mobile devices and be shared with the students in order to attract them for educational purposes. Vocabulary exercises in a game-based context can be developed to make the learning process more efficient and student-centered.

Future research should examine the efficacy of teaching materials for the new vocabulary items adapted for mobile assisted language learning in comparison with the printed materials used in the classroom. It can be inferred that the materials adapted for the mobile devices to be used both during and after class hours have a more positive effect on the learning process compared to the use of printed materials.

As a final note on the limitations of the study, a further research related to the attitudes of the learners in learning vocabulary through mobile phones can be conducted at a larger scale to get a deeper insight.

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