Chapter 7

EFL Learning Beyond the Wall with MALL: College Students’ Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports an exploratory study that examines Yemeni college students’ perceptions of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), using their mobile phones, in their informal learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The sample population comprised 150 EFL college students. Data were obtained through a questionnaire based on technology acceptance model (TAM). The findings revealed that EFL college students had positive perceptions towards utilizing MALL for informal EFL learning. Most participants maintained positive perceptions on the two constructs of TAM: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. They believed that utilizing MALL furthered their EFL learning. Therefore, policymakers, curriculum designers, and educators are recommended to capitalize on using mobile phones for informal autonomous EFL learning in a way that can serve the objectives of formal EFL learning.

INTRODUCTION

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is progressively gaining momentum, thus, impacting many aspects of language teaching and learning (Beatty, 2010) as well as intercultural awareness and understanding (Schulze & Smith, 2017). In
today’s Information Age, students are considered digital natives (Prensky, 2001), presumably inclined and eager to take advantage, to the utmost, of the information and communication technology (ICT) in their learning in general and in their learning of English in particular. In Yemen, English as a foreign language (EFL) is formally taught as a school subject, starting from the 7th grade to the 12th grade—three to four periods of 45 minutes per week. At the university level, EFL is a requirement for all non-English majors as well as a major of study (Alotumi, 2018). In such an EFL context, students’ exposure to English is feasible mostly in formal settings such as school, institute, or college. However, in informal settings, through CALL, EFL learners can avail themselves of the authentic and non-authentic English language materials available online or offline (Hsu, Hwang, & Chang, 2013; Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Shinagawa, 2011; Sutherland, Robertson, & John, 2009).

With the recent technological developments that are characterized with mobility, connectivity, and affordability, a new form of CALL has come into existence, namely, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Nowadays, most learners do have high-end smart phones or other mobile devices that are powerful, efficient, and with many affordances that could facilitate and enrich informal learning beyond the classroom due to “the wealth of digital resources and informal learning opportunities available” (Pegrum, 2014, p. 26). Made viable through mobile devices, MALL associates itself with ubiquity of language learning as Kukulska-Hulme, Lee, and Norris (2017) assert, “the use of mobile devices also potentially extends learning beyond the classroom setting” p. (217). In other words, transcending the enclosed space and limited time of classroom is what makes MALL intriguing. In this regard, Burston (2014b) underscores, “MALL can make significant contributions to improving language learning, most particularly by increasing time spent on language acquisition out of class” (p. 17). However, such premise needs to be scrutinized across different contextual settings in general and informal EFL learning in particular, for the proliferation of mobile technology renders both opportunities and challenges. Besides, its benefits for language learning are not guaranteed (García Botero, Questier, & Zhu, 2018; Burston, 2014a; Godwin-Jones, 2017; Pegrum, 2014). Accordingly, students’ readiness for MALL should be assessed first and foremost (Al-Emran, Mezhuyev, & Kamaludin, 2018).

Keeping abreast of technological developments that have made ubiquitous learning attainable, numerous studies investigated user acceptance of mobile learning in different postsecondary contexts (Aburub & Alnawas, 2019; Al-Emran et al., 2018; García Botero, Questier, Cincinnato, He, & Zhu, 2018). Moreover, several studies examined the acceptance and usage of MALL for informal English as a second language (ESL) learning (Wan Azli, Shah, & Mohamad, 2018; Mekhzoumi, Hamzah, & Krishnasamy, 2018; Soleimani, Ismail, & Mustaffa, 2014) and for informal EFL learning (Chung, Chen, & Kuo, 2015; Gamble, 2017).
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