

Mobile Assisted Language Learning and Its Insights in Teaching Academic Writing: A Literature Review

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Submission date: 15-Jun-2020 06:51PM (UTC-0700)

Submission ID: 1344570229

File name: BAIN_FNL_IIM-DENIK_EFL-MALL-IN-WRITING-Review-1.docx (37.83K)

Word count: 5900

Character count: 33162

**Mobile Assisted Language Learning and Its Insights in Teaching Academic Writing:
A Literature Review**

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Abstract

² This review paper discusses the role of mobile learning within teaching academic writing skills to ESL students. While MALL experiments have been undertaken to develop the writing skills, academic writing has never really been touched. Several topics are discussed such as developments in instructional technologies, the concept of MALL, the recognition by ESL students of issues in academic writing, methods used in academic writing and pedagogical strategies used in MALL. Through the conversations, mobile learning is shown to be incorporated into scholarly writing by combining it with many writing methods that balance the

pedagogical advantages of mobile apps. It can be learned from previous research and debate that the value of mobile learning in teaching academic writing in ESL is strong.

Keywords: Academic Writing, MALL, mobile learning, teaching, writing, academic essay

INTRODUCTION

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is increasing in popularity worldwide, especially in Europe, the United States and parts of Asia (Mastura et al., 2011). While the meaning is still evolving and vague (Traxler, 2007), it is used by many because of its portability, accessibility and the sheer fact that almost everybody owns a smart cell phone (Samsiah et al, 2013).

While mobile learning has its drawback compared to a computer, there are several reports on the use of mobile learning for basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, grammar and vocabulary (Howlett, 2019; Guerrero et al., 2010; Suneetha, 2013; Lee & Kim, 2013). However, there are not many articles on how to teach writing skills using mobile instruction. This can be seen distinctly as Burston (2013) published a bibliography containing 345 articles from 1994 to 2012 on Mobile Assisted Language Learning. More than 5% of the 345 publications used MALL to develop the writing skills.

This paper examines the value of mobile learning by exploring a few issues of teaching academic writing skills for ESL students. First, is to see the improvements in digital technologies and see how virtual learning has developed. MALL is then described, and its features are listed in order to see the suitability of writing classes. The paper would then like to describe what are the problems faced by ESL or EFL students in academic research. All various methods that can be used to teach academic writing are described and last but not least, the pedagogical benefits of mobile learning are also discussed to see how well it can complement the writing techniques.

Educational technology can be any tool which helps the educator and the learner to deliver and obtain knowledge (Humes&Raisner, 2010). It is all shifting as both curriculum and technologies are evolving and this can be easily seen by the short history of developments in digital technology that lead to mobile learning.

Learning was largely confined in the classroom during the early 19th century, where teachers depended on various methodologies and abstract conceptualisation. Little by little,

technology was adopted in which teachers implement computers, overhead projectors and silent films as part of their instructional resource. Technology started to evolve exponentially after television was introduced through the 1940s, in which learning started to become more realistic and fascinating. Headphones became popular in the 1950s to encourage the study of second languages. Later, in the 1970s, use of recordings as school tools was found to be helpful in enhancing the ability to talk and listen.

Technology was a game-changer of education technology but was not used for educational purposes until the late 1960s (Gündüz, 2005) as the technology-to-student ratio is incredibly small. Computers were only used in many classrooms in developing countries in the early 1980s and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) software is already present on the market by this time (Gündüz, 2005). CALL encouraged studying to become more student-centered as students can use home computers to do additional work and study at their own pace anything they want.

The incorporation of information and communication technology (ICT) was then developed, as Ybarra and Green (2003) noted that in studying languages, students require additional language support. ICT encompasses a number of technologies and is used for the communication, development, distribution and management of information (Melor et al., 2013).

There are various numbers of ICTs that can be used in the teaching and learning cycle based on a report by Nomass (2013), and it is separated by all the four skills. Of example, ICTs such as laptops, CD players, computer-based reading systems, multimedia applications, Web searching, online dictionaries, and many more can be used to support learners. Nevertheless, owing to the poor capacity and high cost of accessing internet access in some developing countries, ICT is still not fully developed (Melor et al., 2013).

There are other types of ICTs, but of all these, mobile devices are considered to be a more effective method for advancing education (Valk et al., 2010), as approximately 90% of students under the age of 18 have access to mobile technology. Therefore it only makes sense to switch to smartphone aided language learning for instructional technologies. Sharma & Kitchens (2004) accepts this as quoted in Norazah et al (2010), arguing that the transition is unavoidable as new devices have many special facilities. Samsiah et al. (2013) also noted that MALL is increasing increasingly as learners can access it anywhere and at any time without the educators' control, allowing learners more autonomous. This proves to be an asset as Suneetha (2013) said

the independence experience may enable students to pursue their learning process on their own for future purposes. Some scholars, however, question its efficacy because the thrill of using mobile devices may be short-term (Samsiah et al., 2012). Additionally, not all instructional experiences are appropriate for use of handheld apps. Even now, interactive learning may be a good attribute as the context of the classroom alone can not fulfill the language learning needs of the students (Surina&Kamaruzaman, 2009, as cited in Ehsan et al., 2014).

Digital learning is now very much part of the infrastructure of schooling and can be seen in many different subjects. Mobile learning has also been shown to be effective in developing language skills (Azar & Nasiri, 2014) also in prose, based on many previous studies.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

The article would like to discuss the concept and features of MALL in education before moving into the potentials of mobile learning in literature. MALL usually involves studying with the aid of portable technology such as cell phones, PDAs, iPods, iPads and other related gadgets that may impact language learning (Valarmathi, 2011; Suneetha, 2013; Azad Ali, 2014). The use of laptops in a MALL sense based on Viberg and Grönlund (2012) is not recommended because only "lightweight" computers are used. While mobile learning and MALL are widely regarded as the same thing, Valarmathi (2011) noted that MALL is in reality a subset of Mobile learning (m-learning) and CALL. Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) also discussed this topic as cited in Gholami and Azarmi (2012); they said that "MALL differs from CALL in its use of personal, portable devices which allow new ways of learning, emphasizing consistency or spontaneity of access and interaction across various use contexts".

Mobile learning has many apps that are helpful in our modern world and in several ways benefit the students. Here are some of the features listed below:

1) Versatility

The scale and weight of mobile devices is different from each other and it can be quickly transferred and transported. The portability of the software helps students to use it anywhere and anywhere; including outside classes and lecture halls, such as in cafes, hobby shops, vehicles and more (Sharples et al., 2005; Norazah et al., 2010).

2) Ubiquity

Mobile apps can be used anywhere and everyone appears to be using them, including in third world countries such as Iraq and Iran. This is confirmed by Samsiah et al. (2013) who said that handheld apps are considered a worldwide trend where it is even known to be used by children as young as 2 years old.

3) Interactivity

Mobile learning encourages interactivity as it helps learners to interact with each other across many different apps without caring about the space. Communication between learners is significant, as it is an educational method (Norazah et al., 2010).

4) Wireless Networking

Smartphones now incorporate cell communication, video, and multimedia features. It is one of the most essential apps because it helps learners to have direct internet access without any other computer or cabling. This integration allows new approaches to lifelong learning (Sharples et al., 2005).

5) Interactivity

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6) Accessibility

Teachers can use the principle of accessibility in their lessons to enhance their pedagogical practices (Samsiah et al., 2013). Accessibility has enabled learners to revisit and focus on the information they have gained to form a new kind of information (Norazah et al., 2010). Not just that, learners can guide their learning process, because they can access and build knowledge on their own (Suneetha, 2013). Beyond that, transparency helps learners to get knowledge and answer basic questions almost instantly.

7) Privacy

Many people have their own mobile devices and thus there is no need to share. The learners can use their data on their own, without feeling ashamed of their current learning level. In addition, because of a sense of privacy, the learners may communicate more with their computer (Samsiah et al., 2013). This is backed by Zhang (2003) who said that learners should feel protected and inspired by the safety of these apps.

Also among ESL learners, evidence suggests a favorable view of MALL among tertiary students (Ehsan et al., 2014). Additionally, depending on the meaning and function, when integrated into writing practices, MALL may be of value to learners. Although there could be some difficulties in terms of scale, longevity and reliability, the trainer should use the best pedagogy to make use of the mobile devices. This is valid because mobile apps can be regarded as an addition, rather than replacing traditional teaching and learning resources (Samsiah et al., 2013).

Pedagogical Advantage in Mobile Learning

When an instructor ineffectively uses some form of technology, students will learn in a passive manner (Humes et al., 2010) that could produce a negative outcome. Consequently, Gilakjani et al. (2013) indicates that by using technologies "to model their instruction with" (p. 49) a pedagogy or philosophy structure is required. Norazah et al. (2010) also continues to suggest the use of learning ideas includes technology-based media. Mobile apps may also use the same methodology to ensure effective learning is completed. Without getting through pedagogical ideas that can be used in MALL, it is important to recognize the reasons that lead to successful learning:

- Learner centered: it is built from the experience and abilities of the students themselves; encouraging them to think on the basis of their prior knowledge.
- Knowledge centered: The learning cycle derives from proven knowledge that has been inventively learned using multiple approaches.
- Centered evaluation: The learners are evaluated appropriately on the basis of their skill, and the evaluation will include identification and further guidance.

- Centered on the Community: an successful learner may form a group to exchange information and to help others who are less willing to study (National Research Council, 1999, as cited in Sharples et al., 2005).

These variables will suit several different forms of learning methods used in MALL. According to Thomas (2007) as cited in Supyan et al. (2012), when integrating mobile devices into learning, there are few forms of learning that can be used as the basis. Next is behaviourism, since this philosophy incorporates feedback and validation that can be supported by certain system implementations. Additionally, constructivism-this philosophy involves several models, using multiple platforms and immersive settings. Each of these can be made available via mobile devices. The third method is studying placed where students learn related to the field of study within the community. Thanks to the portability function of the smartphone, while still in context, learners can search for answers or information. Finally, interactive learning should also be used, as it facilitates the development and exchange of information between students and teachers. This suits better with mobile apps, as it is both open and omnipresent; enabling learners to capture and communicate with each other instantly. The following methods were also illustrated by Samsiah et al. (2013).

- 1) Mixed learning—this is where students will learn from each other and online with the professor, ideal for students to connect with mobile devices or even to take on assignments after class.
- 2) Social learning—this form of learning can also be assisted by mobile apps, as it can be used as a platform for communicating with people. Engagement with the app will go to multiple levels to allow the learning experience.
- 3) Experiential learning— due to the versatility of the app, learners may feel a link between the school and other events. This is a type of informal learning and for more learning, it can be taken into the classroom.
- 4) Problem-based learning—this form of learning happens where the learners continually study and interact with the curriculum to solve the teacher's problem.

Learners may use smart apps to address the challenges through their mobility, connectivity and wireless network. Nonetheless, Sharples et al. (2005) stated among all forms of

pedagogy, focused on reasons for successful learning, that these results support the social-constructivist approach where learners develop their own knowledge through experience and by reflecting on their context knowledge (Gilbert, 2010). Sharples et al. (2005) continues to suggest that "it requires not only a cycle of ongoing personal growth and improvement but also the capacity for swift and fundamental intellectual change" (p. 3). Dawood (2013) also suggests that social learning is better supported by constructivism, as it encourages the full potential of computing technology.

Flipped learning is another type of teaching which is gaining interest. According to Lage et al. (2000) as quoted in Bishop and Verleger (2013), the flipped classroom is "inverting the classroom where activities that have usually taken place within the classroom now take place outside the classroom, and vice versa" (p. 32). It is a rather student-centered learning approach focused on cognitive and social constructivism. By shifting the distribution of information beyond the classroom window, students can use the time in class to debate in smaller groups and participate in other relevant activities (Bishop & Verleger 2013). Based on those pedagogies listed, educators are able to customize their mobile practices so that they accommodate all aspects of learning styles in writing classes.

Issues in Academic Writing

One of the biggest obstacles for higher education students is pursuing academic learning. This form of writing is usually serious and students need to justify their points in a specific voice. On the basis of their course, students must take academic writing as a topic in order to acquire the required academic writing skills and prepare better for their thesis. This is also used for course reviews or for editing academic papers (Lai, 2010).

Because of this, it is important to know what the problems in this field are. Caldwell (2012) addresses several academic issues facing international students. The first question is the lack of students' knowledge of academic learning. These are typically poorly formatted, have syntax and orthographing mistakes, lack of punctuation, sentences are not varied and the whole text is not well ordered and lack clarification (Mustafa & D'Auria, 2019). Lai (2010), however, stressed that the lack of structure and consistency in academic writing is also an concern for native English students. This is because it is not due to a lack of language skills, but to a lack of

adequate training in critical thought skills that make it difficult to write (Lai, 2010; Wijitsopon, 2019).

Many people struggle to offer a specific emphasis in their writing so it needs to be more cautious and thorough when thinking about academic writing (Wijitsopon, 2019). Students must know what the logical steps are before the conclusion can be reached; therefore logical thinking is necessary to link ideas correctly and shape a coherent argument (Lai, 2010).

Caldwell (2012) also pointed out plagiarism as a big issue as pupils are unable to reference plagiarism correctly and unknowingly. Lai (2010) states that students have limits when voicing ideas and feelings in English. It extends in particular to those whose English is second or international. Students who excellence orally in English are also a concern as they believe they can generate strong writing through excellence in conversational skills.

It must be remembered, however, that not all academic writing problems come from students. Caldwell (2012) states that no clear form of academic writing is ideal. Teachers and educators must also create their own curricula and teaching to suit their students ' needs, which could lead them to teach with undefined objectives. In turn, this will lead to students struggling to fulfill their academic writing needs.

Another problem for educators is how they do not have enough time to offer meaningful input or advice for students to improve. Since there is no common strategy of teaching academic learning, it is useful to know the specific methods used to build further activities using mobile devices of written classes.

Academic Writing Approaches

Academic writing skills can be taught by combining the knowledge with standard methods for writing classes. Such methods can be used in academic writing as specific activities to improve comprehension of students.

1) Product Approach

A product approach is a product approach, according to Wahlstrom (2006), when teachers give pre-written phrases or paragraphs to students in which they learn skills such as converting past to present. This approach helps students prevent errors and, after achieving their

skills, students can share their own ideas (Catramado, 2004). The emphasis of this approach is on the precision of students rather than the fluency of writing (Bachani, 2011).

2) The Free Writing Approach

This approach focuses on the volume and standard of writing of students (Bachani, 2011). Teachers encourage their students to write openly on a certain subject without being concerned with grammar and orthography. Students' output receives little to no correction because teachers want first content and fluency (Whalstrom, 2006). However, based on Catramado (2004), the students need to go through four stages before they can write freely on a given subject: familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing and ultimately free writing.

3) Paragraph-Model Approach

This is an organizational approach. This approach is based on the concept of arranging and building content according to the context of the language of the student (Catramado, 2004; Whalstrom, 2006). Teachers will ask students to practice teaching students how to organize larger writing pieces into paragraph units (Bachani, 2011). Wahlstrom (2006) added that students need to evaluate and practice paragraphs in their target language to write smoothly.

4) Approach Grammar-Syntax-Organization

This approach focuses on types and messages that allow students to deal concurrently with a number of aspects of learning. To do so, students must be familiar with the grammar, syntax, vocabulary and structure, in order to express their message. Bachani (2011) also says that students are trained in the management while working on the grammar and syntax required.

5) Communicative Approach

This approach focuses on writing and the public. Teachers will ask students to focus on two questions: Why am I writing and who is going to read them? (Electricity, 2006). In addition, students must read their peers' work and react, summarize or comment as input on the basis of instruction (Catramado, 2004).

6) Process Approach

This approach focuses on the writing process. Teachers want their students to realize that they can also develop their writing at first and that the subject will change (Whalstrom, 2006). Bachani (2011) says students are trained to write thoughts, to think about a goal, the audience, etc. Nonetheless, as this method is very lengthy, teachers use this approach depending on the time they spend in school and the expertise of the community of students in which they work (Catramado, 2004).

7) Genre-based Approach

This approach focuses on a genre that students will use later in life. The teaching focuses on the language and discourse features of a given text and its meaning (Kamrul & Moniruzzaman, 2010). This method is considered to expand the product-oriented method, as students will research a large number of written patterns (Tangpermpoon, 2008). However, Hasan and Akhand (2010) say that this approach focuses less on the voice of the learner, which is an inconvenient for imagination and critical thinking. Both methods often focus on the foundations of writing and not on scholarly research. According to Ganobscik-Williams (2006), three key methods are used by educators in the area of higher learning. Most tertiary students, particularly those in the first year, are not aware that their academic abilities are not enough for university needs, as secondary education prepares only them for their success in public examinations (Alston, 2008). However, it is important to note that the three methods are not interdisciplinary, but rather mutually exclusive (Lea & Street, 1998, as quoted in Zhang, 2011).

8) Skills Model

Ganobscik-Williams (2006) says this model includes the teaching of skills in writing, so that the student or instructor builds a support network based on the concerns of the student. This approach allows students to meet the requirements of a university by teaching their 'study skills' and solving the issue by offering resources outside of the subject (Alston, 2008). Zhang (2011) says "atomized skills, surface language, grammar and orthography are emphasized" (p. 41). Nevertheless, as stated in Alston (2008), Lea and Street (1998) criticized this strategy because it is focused solely on the student deficit.

9) Socialization Model

This approach assumes, by being immersed in the culture of higher education, that students can develop awareness and skills in their choice of discourse (Ganobscik-Williams 2006). This means that the model suggests that students develop the skills required to write by not being measured into the culture of college (Alston, 2008). It is also perceived that after much social interaction and involvement, students can reproduce a particular academic debate without difficulty (Zhang, 2011). This model is related to the study skills model, in which the support settings are created by educating students in academic writing (Alston, 2008). Ganobscik-Williams (2006), however, says that students can not be expected to understand a complex discourse language. It is particularly true for poor English students.

10) Literature Model

Literature is a phrase used when there is a sense of trust and fluency in performing a specific function. Academic literature relates to the same concept that is the secret to success within the university (Ganobscik-Williams, 2006). In its Zhang citation (2011), Lea and Street (2006) notes that the viewpoint of academic literacy views writing as a social activity and varies in genre, meaning and culture. Zhang (2011) continued that this model did not see the weakness of students but instead stressed that students failed to grasp the complexity and specificity of the written discourse. This means that learning is achieved through writing, and writing is not the result of learning (Alston, 2008).

DISCUSSION

One of the key goals in the 21st century is to effectively incorporate technology into education. There have been many developments in educational technology and mobile apps are believed to contribute to the advancement of learning. There are several features that inspire educators and learners to use mobile apps, particularly because of their usability, accessibility and privacy. These tools also facilitate self-reliant learning. Not only this, MALL can create an exciting and creative interactive classroom, since the tools can provide knowledge for debate immediately and spontaneously. Because of these and many other reasons, mobile learning is becoming increasingly common everywhere, including in developed countries. If used to teach writing, MALL has several features that are helpful to students at all times—either inside or

outside the classroom. MALL also gives learners the ability to communicate with peers and educators through written text messages about various social applications.

There are a few difficulties with ESL students with respect to academic teaching, and there are limitations to presenting thoughts and concepts in English. Mobile apps may also be combined together, rather than using traditional writing methods alone to address the issues as they have other pedagogies that support writing methods (Howlett, 2019). Flipping learning, for example, can be used to research the genre of academic writing before class and participate in practical discussions and events during class and better understand academic writing. If a teacher wants to use the method approach to teaching, feedback is ideal for mobile devices as a means of collaborative learning. MALL is also beneficial to use as a form of constructivism in writing classes. There are various styles of simulations and media in which students practice writing in an immersive environment (Mustafa & D'Auria, 2019). It is useful when combined with the socialization model as students can be absorbed in the higher education community through their mobile devices by exchanging and learning different types of knowledge and discussing it with their counterparts and educators.

There are few research in MALL concerning skills in writing. Alsaleem (2013) used electronic journaling to develop the writing skills of 30 EFL graduate students at Allmam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Saudi Arabia in their language and translation degree. They had to make reflective comments about the work of their peers through WhatsApp. The quasi-experimental research showed that students responded well to the discussions and appreciated journalistic dialogue. The pre-and post-test showed that the vocabulary and thoughts (ideas) of students were increased. The research indirectly used the study skills and socialization model, in which students form a small group to provide input on the faiblesses of each other and immerse themselves in the academic community by continuously correcting their own work.

Shree et al. (2014) conducted another study to see whether trainee teachers from 27 Malaysian teacher training centers are prepared to use mobile learning to strengthen arguments for their writing. This genre is somewhat close to academic writing as it allows students to become critical and analytical thinkers. The investigation found several difficulties that respondents had with the writing of statements such as poor material, poor vocabulary and weak organization. Jai Shree et al. (2014) also stated that students can not write their ideas because they focus more on the concept than on the writing process. We can not even understand the

research skills we need as they have less group-based tasks. The study suggested that mobile learning would improve Argumentative writing skills so that students can use it anywhere and anytime. It allows students to learn more collaboratively without thinking about time and place to develop skills in writing. Lee and Kim (2013) have also been using a mobile learning platform to improve the writing skills of EFL students. The methods used are to search for grammatical errors and students agree that grammar is successful at the penalty point. This is like the mobile approach to the commodity.

CONCLUSION

Depending on the debate above, mobile learning is highly likely to teach ESL academic writing. In future study, it is proposed that mobile devices teach one or more writing approaches to develop the academic writing skills of students. Researchers and educators may use existing apps or develop new mobile technologies to enhance their academic writing skills further. While studies have been done on MALL to improve writing skills, this paper does not yet improve academic writing skills. In addition, mobile learning can be implemented in academic writing by integrating various writing approaches, allowing students to gain expertise and to learn how to write better.

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Hi ImroatusSolikhah

Hi DenikWirawati

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1

Good afternoon.

We are done with the initial review of your paper entitled, “Mobile Assisted Language Learning and Its Insights in Teaching Academic Writing: A Literature Review”

1

and the results are:

Plagiarism – 94% original. 6% is properly cited.

Word length – 5,791

There were no issues on the paper. This is good for publication.

Cited ELE Journal paper:

Wijitsopon, Raksangob. (2019). Key multi-word expressions in Thai learner English argumentative essay. *The Asian EFL Journal*. 23(6), 115-141.

Mustafa, Faisal & D’Auria, Thomas, Peter. (2019). Differences in vocabulary, clauses, and voices in unpublished academic articles written by native and non-native speakers of English. *The Asian ESP Journal*. 15(1.2), 297-319.

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RAMON MEDRIANO, JR., PhD

Reviewer

Mobile Assisted Language Learning and Its Insights in Teaching Academic Writing: A Literature Review

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