MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN MALAYSIA:
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the research trend of mobile-assisted language learning in Malaysia. It concentrates to explore the initiatives related to English Language learning through mobile technologies among the Malaysian academics. The research design of this study is qualitative and based on secondary sources and data are processed using Nvivo. The study compares and contrasts various studies in mobile-assisted language learning area in Malaysia. The study does not only highlight the gap in mobile-assisted language learning, but also adds value in understanding the situation regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the related studies. These are significant areas which need to be explored toward the future of mobile-assisted language learning research in Malaysia.

Field of Research: Mobile-assisted, language learning, Malaysia.

1. Introduction

The issue of English Language competency among Malaysian students has been a concern for many years. What is apparent is that although students have been exposed to the English Language subject in schools, the issue of English Language proficiency persists. It can be seen that there are many efforts by the Ministry of Education in improving English Language proficiency. These are the English for Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETEMS) program to encourage the use of the English language in teaching Mathematics and Science subjects (English for Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETEMS) Official Portal) and also a program known as Upholding Bahasa Malaysia, Strengthening English (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2009; The Star Online, 2010). The teaching and learning of English Language in Malaysian schools also utilize ICT. The use of browser-based teaching is an example of the ICT deployment (Ismail, 2003; Chan, 2002; Muhammad et al., 2004). In addition, courseware is also used in English teaching and learning (Samuel and Abu Bakar, 2007; Abdullah et al., 2006; Cloke and Sharif, 2001). English lessons are also made available through websites (Bajunid, 2001; Idrus and Atan, 2004; Chan, 2002). Educational content to support English subjects are also broadcast through Educational TV (ETV) (Abdullah, 2006). The latest ICT application for the English Language subject is EduWebTV where students can watch on-demand video streaming of educational content (EDuWebTV Official Website). In addition, several portals have been developed by private institutions: Portal Kakak Tua, Epelajar, CikguNet, getcyberEd, my schoolnet and Portal Pendidikan Utusan (Siraj, 2004).

Nevertheless, to support the initiatives in improving English, it is also worthwhile embracing the affordances of mobile-assisted language learning. Therefore, this has initiated many researchers in Malaysia to explore the possibility of utilizing mobile learning to solve this issue. This area is also known as mobile-assisted language learning. As defined by Chinnery (2006) and Shield & Kukulska-Hulme (2008), mobile assisted language learning is an approach to language learning that is assisted or enhanced through the use of a mobile device. In the context of this paper, mobile-assisted language learning refers to the teaching and learning of English Language as a Second Language in
Malaysian educational settings; mainstream schooling, higher education or other learning institutions and environments.

2. Methodology

This study applied secondary source methodology where the publications are analyzed using Nvivo, software which aids the process of analyzing data (NVivo Official Website). The data analysis was conducted based on the model by Cresswell (2008), in discovering patterns, themes or categories through careful examination of data. This was inductive analysis. The study discovered that, currently, there are more than 10 publications dedicated to this area among the Malaysian academics. While every effort has been made to review as many publications as possible, it is possible that some publications have been missed such as from conference proceedings. Notwithstanding, overall it can be said that the coverage is acceptable and this paper explores these academic articles to find the major trends and issues in the study of mobile-assisted language learning in Malaysia.

3. Findings

The paper produced an annotated bibliography of each publication, with brief summaries before comparing and contrasting each of them to highlight the research trends and issues in mobile-assisted language learning in Malaysia. These are presented below:


This study proposes a conceptual framework for English for Specific Academic Purposes mobile learning framework for technical and engineering context in higher education. The study applied Delphi techniques to confirm the elements juxtaposed and also quantitative study through survey techniques and SEM PLS to verify the framework. The findings revealed that the proposed mobile learning framework would benefit both learners of English in technical universities and language educators as well as developers of mobile learning.


In the vision to propose an alternative to teaching and learning of English Grammar, a project known as i-MoL is established. This project will design and develop a system which include several mobile-based applications for grammar learning, including notes, alerts, query, quizzes, polling and forum. The system is projected to be accessed from low-end to high-end mobile platform, including Android, iPhone, and basic mobile phones with SMS and MMS capabilities.


This paper aims to describe how learners could be assisted in language-learning via supportive scaffolding using mobile devices for undergraduate English language learning. For that purpose, Gilly Salmon’s five-stage scaffolding model which is supported by Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development is applied. A case study was conducted to explore how this model could be applied to mobile learning. The results revealed that there are improvement
in students’ performance. In addition, the findings also highlighted that there is a need for adaptation of the model to be applied in mobile context.


This paper propose an mLearning curriculum implementation model for English Language and Communication skill course among undergraduates using Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) technique. It consists of a network of mobile language activities and in-class activities in the development of the model through focus group activity. Findings revealed the development of an interpretive structural model of a network of mobile language activities weaved into in-class activities for undergraduate learners. The paper concludes that the study also has the potential to be replicated in other areas of learning disciplines and not only restricted to language learning.


This thesis explores how mobile learning activities, developed using social constructivist learning principles have the potential to support undergraduate in English Language learning. The methodology applied in the study is a design-based research with two stages of data collection. The research tools include questionnaires, students’ blog posts and online interviews. The findings indicate that students have a positive attitude toward the use of mobile learning in their learning activities. The study also highlighted several types of mobile learning activities which should be introduced; contextual, reflective, collaborative, multiple-medium, communication and learning management.


This paper describes a study of students’ behaviour response towards mobile learning application. Being both qualitative and quantitative in nature, this study applied interview, observation and questionnaires as the research tool. An application known as M-Language application was developed to support students English Language learning among secondary school students. Findings were positive where the majority of the respondent satisfied with the interface and the content of the application. The application also perceived as increasing motivation and engagement toward learning English Language


This thesis explores the use of mobile phones to support English vocabulary learning in Malaysian schools with the interview as the main research tool. The methodology consists of rigorous steps in developing, evaluating and disseminating the implementation strategy as well as exploring other issues associated with mobile learning implementation in Malaysian schools. It has been established that the implementation strategy developed in this study would have the potential to provide guidance in the implementation of mobile learning in Malaysian schools. The findings revealed the opportunities and the challenges in embracing mobile phones as learning tool.

This article proposes a strategy to implement mobile learning in secondary school, with the focus on English Language learning. It identifies the challenges and provides the solutions to implement mobile learning such as the structure of mobile lessons for English Language subject and the policy and procedure to be addressed in a conceptual framework in the implementation of mobile learning in Malaysian secondary schools


This article explored the use of mobile phones for reading comprehension in a higher education institution. By applying quasi-experimental design, the aim of the study was to determine the impact of texting reading comprehension exercises to the improvement in their reading performance. The findings revealed that on the whole, students who participated in the study performed better in their reading comprehension paper.


This master’s thesis explores the use of mobile and communication technologies in English Language learning. Specifically, the use of mobile phone and wiki in language learning is investigated among the undergraduate student in a higher education institution. By applying both quantitative and qualitative methods, three themes are derived in the study; accessing, communication and usability. This finding suggests that although the use of mobile phone and wiki in language learning is feasible, further studies are needed to enhance the possibility. This study is important in providing alternative learning tools in the area of English Language learning.


This paper explored Malaysian secondary school students’ perceptions of a Mobile Learning environment through mobile technology applications. Through SMS, an application was used to support Literature Component of English and students was interviewed to gather their perspectives. The findings show that the participants have a positive attitude and agreed that this type of support would have an impact on their learning.


This paper explored the students’ readiness and perception towards using mobile technologies for learning the English language literature component in school. Quantitative methodology is applied with 235 samples and questionnaire as the research tool. The results revealed that the participants showed positive perceptions and readiness of the notion in using mobile technologies for learning. This is an indication that teachers can embrace
alternative methods in teaching English language literature among the secondary schools’ students.


The study explores students’ perceptions of the use of smart phones in learning English oral communication. Being quantitative in nature, the study surveyed 150 students at a polytechnic using a questionnaire to measure students’ perceptions on the use of smart phones in educational activities. The findings showed positive outcomes where there are potentials and possibilities of using the device for the educational purpose. This is a positive sign for the stakeholders in education to embrace emerging tools such as smart phones in learning environments.


This study review the mobile-based teaching and learning in the English Language classroom. By applying secondary source methodologies, this study highlighted the application of a variety of mobile devices; PDAs, IPODs, podcast and cell phones in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language. The paper discovered that factors which contribute towards the application of mobile learning is portability and accessibility.


The paper explores the learners’ response towards mobile learning through usability analysis. The research was conducted on 43 students in four polytechnics in Malaysia using English for Technical Purposes. Students were asked to access materials designed using their mobile phones of various brands. The findings showed that the items used were reliable.

4. Discussion: Major trends and issues

It has been found out that the most of the papers or articles are in the form of primary source research. The exception is for the paper by Tayebnik & Puteh (2012), where the study is conducted by utilizing secondary source study. In regard to the research methodology, by far, the most frequently occurred methodology is quantitative. The most popular source of the papers is from journals, followed by conference and thesis from graduate studies.

Studies are mostly regarding the development of application and the conceptual framework as well as exploring the behaviour and attitude of the stakeholders in mobile-assisted language learning. The exception is for the study by Mohamad (2012) where an implementation strategy was developed as a preparation to utilize mobile learning in English language learning.

There seems to be a concentration on higher education students in applying mobile-assisted language learning. Specifically, these are in the area of communication skills. It is found that the next popular context of study is in secondary schools. However, there is a gap in the research by exploring the possibility of embracing mobile-assisted language learning in other areas such as primary school, pre-school, special educational need and lifelong learning. However, in the area of lifelong learning,
although research is scarce, there was a commercial application known as SMS-ME-ENGLISH for adult learners (SMS-ME-ENGLISH).

5. Conclusion and Future Recommendation

Although we have seen increases in the research area of mobile-assisted language learning in Malaysia, there is a need to reflect on the trends and issues that were highlighted in the previous paragraph. Obviously, diversity is critically needed to be taken in this area so that it is not skewed to similar contexts only. More research in other contexts are highly encouraged to be explored such as in the areas of primary school, pre-school, life-long learning and also for special need education. More research is also needed in developing ground breaking applications rather than studies which are related to the exploration of behavior and attitude, as we already have enough studies on it reported here and there.

If we were to ask this question, “Mobile-assisted language learning in Malaysia: Where are we now?”; we can conclude that the answer is that we are still in the embryonic stage because there is still ample room for diversity in our research trends. However, we can see that we have a promising future where from day to day the research articles published are growing in this area in Malaysia. From the publications reviewed, mobile assisted language learning is perceived positively and this is indeed an indication of promising one in Malaysia.

References


