

FLIPPED APPROACH TO MOBILE ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

There are abundant possibilities for using smart phones and tablet computers for foreign language learning. However, if there is an emphasis on memorization or on technology, language learners may not develop proficiency in their target language. Therefore, language teachers should be familiar with strategies for facilitating creative communications. The focus should be on how learners use the content, rather than content delivery through technology. This paper will combine American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines, pedagogies to promote language proficiency, and the idea of a flipped classroom to conceptualize the use of mobile technology applications to promote proficiency among language learners.

KEYWORDS

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), flipped classroom, ACTFL proficiency guidelines, authentic learning, task-based learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has been a topic of interest among foreign language instructors (Alemi, Reza Anani Sarab, & Lari, 2012; Saran, Seferoglu & Cagiltay, 2009; Wong, Chen, & Jan, 2012; Wong & Looi, 2010), especially since high school and college students now commonly own smart phones and tablets. Moreover, there is an abundance of mobile apps specifically designed for language learning. However, over-dependency in content-delivery and apps has the potential to force learners to spend most of their time focused on memorization rather than language creation. It is necessary to build instruction around how learners interact with others and negotiate meaning in authentic communication (Schinke-Llano & Vicars, 1993; Shekary & Tahririan, 2006). Hence, all language instructors need to have a firm understanding of how learners develop proficiency in the target languages prior to making the decision to use mobile technology in their classrooms.

The purpose of this paper is to connect a pedagogical framework of language learning to the idea of a flipped classroom. The flipped classroom concept is already accepted for science and math education and has the potential for success in foreign language instruction. In a flipped model, students learn content as homework, then use their knowledge for real-life problem solving and projects (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000; Sams & Bergman 2011). A teacher can facilitate a real purpose for communication and assist their learners in interaction with native speakers through digital communication. This paper will suggest a flipped model for MALL.

1.1 Language Proficiency

There has been an enthusiasm for delivering content through mobile devices so that learners can study anywhere and at anytime. Some MALL researchers focus on delivering vocabulary and pronunciation through mobile devices (Alemi, Reza Anani Sareb, & Lari, 2012; Saran, Seferoglu, & Cagiltay, 2009). However, language proficiency is determined not by what learners know, but instead by what learners can do. In other words, dynamic performance is the main focus rather than static knowledge. Therefore, how the learners use the vocabulary and pronunciation that they learn in open-ended communication, requires further

investigation. The most referenced guidelines for foreign language proficiency in the United States are authored by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). These guidelines are divided into distinguished, superior, advanced, intermediate, and novice, and are used in conjunction with the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning. The distinguished speakers can hypothesize, advocate a point of view, and adjust their speech according to an audience. Superior speakers can talk about a variety of topics in formal or informal settings. They can also present their opinion on a wide range of issues. Advanced speakers speak in past, present, and future tenses utilizing paragraphs. They can be understood by native speakers who have limited exposure to non-native speech. Intermediate speakers can combine learned materials for personal communication. They can be understood by native speakers who are accustomed to non-native speech. Novice speakers can communicate using memorized materials in highly predictable situations (ACTFL, 2012).

2. APPLICATIONS OF MOBILE TECHNOLOGY THAT PROMOTE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

2.1 Pedagogy for Language Learning

2.1.1 Beyond ‘Anywhere, Anytime’ Input

Mobile phones allow students to study pronunciation and vocabulary anywhere they go, and students seem to benefit from this feature (Saran, Seferoglu, & Cagiltay, 2009). Such a report has the potential to make language educators enthusiastic about MALL. Nonetheless, one should not ignore the negative side of mobile technology use, instead they should try to minimize potential drawbacks. For example, mobile phones can provide stimuli that cause students to waste time, rather than to study. Lu (2008) reported that a student who was curious about new words and intentionally used new words retained vocabulary better than the one who could not resist playing a game every time he picked up a mobile phone. Hence, instructors must know their learners first, and think of a variety of ways to make learning enjoyable. For example, if new words were presented first, and then embedded in an interesting story and delivered daily in a small segment, it would be possible to entice more learners to read or listen to the contents.

Presenting vocabulary in a story is not only good for motivation, but it is also effective for retention. There are two types of vocabulary learning: incidental, in which learners figure out the meaning of words in a context while reading, and intentional, learning without context and dependent on memory (Ahmed, 2011; Derakhshan & Khodabakhshzadeh, 2011). Vocabulary is retained better when both incidental and intentional learning are utilized. In addition, the focus of MALL should not only be on input, but also on learners’ output (Anthony, 2008; Li, 2012) and interaction (Ryoo, 2009). Learners need to create their own sentences in order to move from the novice to the intermediate level. Language learners need an environment and feedback in which to communicate their ideas on both concrete and abstract topics.

2.1.2 Task-based Language Learning

Application of language to a task that exists in real life allows learners to use the target language in a meaningful manner. For authentic language creation to occur, learners need a reason to communicate. A mobile device can facilitate interaction after an authentic task is created (Tai, 2012). For instance, understanding authentic material, or material made for a native speaker, is a task that allows learners to make sense of their real environment. Moreover, learners are actively engaged when they describe their experiences and environment using their target language. Use of mobile tools allows them to go outside of their classroom (Wong & Looi, 2010). When language learners communicate their thoughts and ideas through a digital device with native speakers, they find a purpose for studying the target language. This author suggests that learners’ interests and abilities should be reflected in instructional design. For example, if learners are interested in food, they can first learn the vocabulary words for food and cooking. They can then research a new recipe and create a cooking show video so that they will have an opportunity to use the target language.

2.2 Flipped Classroom

A flipped classroom is a format in which students learn necessary contents at home and apply the knowledge in the classroom (Tucker, 2012). Students report to the class with the knowledge needed for application. This format allows the instructor to adjust the in-class exercises to students' learning styles (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000) because students can receive individualized attention (Rycik, 2012). Students are responsible for solving problems during the class. Some students, who are more passive learners, may resist this model. Hence, the teachers who implement this model need to set up clear expectations for students that require them to take ownership of their learning process. The students are able to participate in activities only if they watch important content videos prior to reporting to class (Sams & Bergman, 2011).

2.3 Combining Language Learning Pedagogy and the Flipped Classroom Model

A flipped classroom approach has a potential to make language instruction more effective. Learners can report to the class with the vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation already learned. They can use the language to communicate ideas, with their teacher's assistance, during the class. One might argue that learners could use the target language on their own through *YouTube*, *Twitter*, and other means to interact with native speakers. Language learners may choose to use the target language on their own and it may have impact on their proficiency. A possible drawback is that when the quality of input and interaction is not controlled, social interaction through technology does not always result in successful language learning (Bahrani & Sim, 2012). Therefore, quality control can be time consuming for teachers.

Below are some ideas for flipping a foreign language classroom.

- Have students learn family vocabulary and practice pronunciation prior to reporting to a class. There are language learning apps such as *Essentials* and free dictionaries. Ask students to take pictures of the family members with their phones and bring them to the class. During the class, students can use tools such as *PicCollage* or *Glog* to create a visual to show their families. The students can show visuals to their classmates to present about their families in the target language.

- Students watch a music video via *YouTube* as homework. For example, students in the United States studying Spanish may view Los Yonic's *Quinceanera*. During the class, students will discuss cultural perspectives, starting with questions such as "Why does this song repeatedly mention challenges in life?" and "What seems to be a difference between Quinceanera in Mexico and Sweet 16 in the United States?"

- Prior to the class, students practice dialogues with *Hello-Hello*. During the class, a teacher can set up slightly different contexts with the dialogue. The students engage in impromptu conversations.

- Students practice past tense prior to the class. They will also read a folktale making use of the target grammar in past tense. During the class, the teacher will present picture prompts for a folktale. Students will write the story in their own words.

- Students in a Japanese class watch a lecture video about "...ga hoshii" (I want) and "... tai" (I want to do) form as a homework. During the class, they watch a short video clip of *Doraemon*, an animation about a cat robot that grants one's wishes. As the post-viewing activity, they discuss things that characters in the animation want, or activities they want to do. Students will also read *Doraemon* in manga (Japanese comic) format. Then, they make their own manga about what they would ask *Doraemon* to give them. Finally, they will share their manga with native speakers.

3. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the author suggested ways for flipping a classroom using while mobile technology so that learners will have opportunities to engage in meaningful communication using their target languages. Since language creation is a condition required for the development of language proficiency, spending most of the class time in language output, interaction, and receiving feedback is recommended. A limitation of this paper is that this idea has not been tested and researched in a foreign language classroom. Another limitation is that this paper did not mention security and privacy issues that instructors need to understand. In addition, this

paper did not discuss how the students will develop the ability to evaluate the quality of input. For example, students are likely to be exposed to low-quality writings by native speakers when they read responses to a *YouTube* video, which language learners need to know not to mimic. Despite these limitations, this paper suggested pathways for foreign language teachers to flip their classrooms while utilizing their students' mobile devices.

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