

Teacher perspectives on the integration of mobile-assisted language learning

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Abstract. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) provides second language (L2) learners and teachers with resources to enhance the learning experience, including its anytime, anywhere accessibility (Traxler, 2007). However, factors such as lack of confidence with technology (Son, 2014) and time limitations (Godwin-Jones, 2015) may prevent teachers from implementing MALL successfully. To better understand the barriers to using MALL, this pilot study investigated the perspectives of 21 L2 English teachers at secondary schools and colleges in Quebec (Canada). An online questionnaire, requiring 15-30 minutes to complete, consisted of six-point Likert scales, short answers, multiple-choice questions, and probed teachers' current practices, willingness to engage with different tools, and factors influencing their implementation (e.g. time restraints, lack of training). Results suggest that while most language teachers appear to be open to engaging their students in MALL, limitations and concerns regarding distractions, cheating, school policy, class disruption, and time pressures remain.

Keywords: MALL, teacher perspectives.

1. Introduction

MALL provides L2 learners and teachers with innumerable resources to enhance the learning experience. With MALL, not only can each student have L2 resources available at the literal tips of their fingers, but these resources can be accessed regardless of time or place (Traxler, 2007). However, the implementation of MALL in language curricula raises concerns, especially in schools where mobile devices are banned. Concerns include student distraction, academic misconduct, and privacy issues. Although González-Lloret and Ortega (2014, p. 1) argue that the

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pedagogical potential of technology is generally recognized and no longer disputed, instructors may be accustomed to more traditional forms of teaching. Many teachers also lack integrative training in computer-assisted language learning (Jalkanen, 2015) and may encounter barriers such as budgeting constraints, infrastructure issues, teacher overload, and individual factors such as teacher attitudes (Godwin-Jones, 2015), which can be influenced by their personal interest and confidence in using technology (Tour, 2015).

In this study, we probed teacher desires and concerns with respect to the implementation of MALL, simultaneously while conducting a study investigating the impact of MALL on student learning. The first step, reported here, was the piloting of an online mixed-item questionnaire; this pilot stage will enable us to refine questionnaire items before a planned distribution to a wider teacher population. This study addressed the following research questions:

- How are teachers currently using MALL in L2 teaching?
- What are their beliefs and attitudes towards MALL? What limitations and barriers do they face?

2. Method

An online mixed-item questionnaire (hosted on SurveyGizmo), consisting of six-point Likert scales and multiple-choice and short answer questions, was distributed via social media and emailed to professional contacts in the field. The questionnaire took 15-30 minutes to complete. Participants were 14 secondary and seven college (pre-university) English as a second language teachers ($M=7$, $F=14$; age range: 25-50) living and working in Quebec. The Likert scale questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple-choice questions were summarized via response counts. Short-answer questions were used to complement questionnaire results. Participants were not able to skip question items, but skip logic was used to automatically eliminate irrelevant sections for each respondent.

3. Results and discussion

Of the 21 participants, 11 had received formal training in using technology (eight in teaching training and three in professional development workshops) while five

expressed that they were self-taught. In terms of personal technology use, all but one participant owned a smartphone or tablet. Mobile devices were ranked high in use: eight teachers ranked smartphones as their most-used device, two ranking it as their second most-used, and three as their third most-used. Overall, teachers were comfortable using technology ($M=5.29$, $SD=0.78$; additional Likert scale items are summarized in Table 1). Some participants (via short answers) attributed their high level of comfort to frequency and ease of use. One teacher who expressed less comfort suggested that there was simply “not enough time to invest in learning new technologies”.

In terms of MALL, 13 teachers were familiar with using language learning applications (apps, e.g. Duolingo, Memrize) and ten had access to classroom sets of tablets or laptops. While only two had previously been trained on using apps for language teaching, 14 said they would recommend language learning apps to students, and nine expressed that they had either told their students about these apps or trained them how to use them.

Teachers were divided on how often they allow students to use mobile devices in the classroom, with responses ranging from ‘never’ to ‘very frequently’ ($M=4.10$, $SD=1.70$). Mobile devices were used in classrooms for activities such as looking up words or definitions ($n=15$), searching the web ($n=14$), taking notes ($n=8$), and playing language games ($n=5$). Other less frequently reported uses included downloading course content, reading texts, and using other apps (e.g. video editing applications). One participant commented that mobile devices were incorporated because “banning phones is a losing battle”.

Table 1. Relevant items from the online questionnaire

	Mean	Standard deviation
How would you rate your current level of comfort with technology outside the classroom?	5.29	0.78
I allow students to use their mobile devices in English class.	4.10	1.70
I train my students to use mobile apps to practice English.	4.05	1.50
In class, we use language learning apps.	2.50	1.36
I would like my students to use language learning apps to practise English outside the classroom.	4.86	1.01
Technology helps to engage students in the lesson or task rather than distract them.	4.29	0.85
The use of technology in class brings up many privacy issues.	3.86	1.59

Regarding the barriers influencing MALL implementation, only 6 participants reported the following reasons: distraction (n=4), academic misconduct via cheating (n=4), school policies (n=3), class disruption (n=2), and time limitations (n=2). Participants volunteered additional barriers to using technology in general via a short answer question, expressing that planning time, budgeting, and lack of training played significant roles, echoing [Godwin-Jones's \(2015\)](#) findings. Another participant commented that he “was classically trained as a student, so I tend to replicate that behavior as a teacher. It’s hard to envision myself teaching in a different way than how I was taught even though I know it is possible”.

In summary, the teachers surveyed appear to be open to the idea of using MALL with learners (as seen in [Park, 2014](#)), but there are several factors that continue to limit implementation. In addition to the training and planning issues outlined by [Godwin-Jones \(2015\)](#), we see that school policy and concerns regarding distraction, classroom disruption, and possible cheating may also influence a teacher’s decision to allow the use of mobile devices in the classroom. It is important to acknowledge and address these issues in future teacher training, and researchers also need to take them into consideration when designing tools and technology-mediated tasks.

4. Conclusions

As this was a pilot project, the participant pool is small and the results therefore cannot be generalized to a larger population. Participants were recruited via social media and email, indicating a potential bias towards users of technology. For future recruitment, we will seek a larger sample of teachers via their institutions.

This pilot study will allow us to further refine the questionnaire for use with a larger participant pool; for example, some of the short answers provided by participants will be added to multiple-choice questions to provide future participants with more insightful choices. When implemented, the study will constitute phase one of a multi-phase project which aims to develop MALL resources that can be used outside the classroom to extend students’ interaction with the target language while also complementing what they learn in class (e.g. by relating the out-of-class experience to work done inside the classroom). The results of the survey will be used in conjunction with a survey of student perspectives of technology for language learning ([Collins & Cardoso, 2017](#)), as successful implementation of any novel approach requires that BOTH student and instructor opinions be taken into consideration.

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