

The Role of Mobile Assisted Language Learning in the Teaching of FFL in Kenyan Universities

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Abstract

One of priorities of the Education in Kenya is the integration of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in education. Therefore, the use of ICT in foreign language teaching and learning seems to have become a prerequisite to the modernization of the education system and learning methods. This chapter specifically focuses on the integration of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in Kenya's universities. It provides a brief overview of the growing use of MALL in foreign language teaching and thereafter discusses how FFL lecturers in Kenya utilize these devices during their FFL classes. The discussion in this chapter indicates that the integration of MALL in the teaching of FFL has the potential to transform learning from a traditional passive experience to one of discovery, exploration, and excitement in a less stressful setting. It is revealed that MALL-mediated learning could also enhance students' critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills through online interactive activities.

Keywords: French as a Foreign Language, Information Communication Technology, Mobile Assisted Language Learning, Universities.

Introduction

The significance of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in foreign language teaching (FLT) (Liao, 1999; Liou, 2000) continues to receive attention from language scholars. Graddol (1997, p. 16) argues that “technology lies at the heart of the globalization process; affecting work and culture...”. Specifically in the Kenyan higher education reality, the enforcement and implementation of ICT in the teaching of foreign languages is a challenge in the integration of ICT, especially in the teaching foreign languages.

The current human communication revolution which has its origin in the massive use of the internet and new technological devices has necessitated a pedagogical shift that requires increasing the use of ICT (Harendita, 2013; Kee & Samsudin, 2014; Fu, 2013). In this view, Kee & Samsudin, (2014) believe that the use of ICT in teaching and learning processes can help the teachers and students to have the opportunity to explore the information related to their educational needs. This means that ICT tools can facilitate French as a Foreign Language (FFL) teachers and students to access teaching and learning resources from many sources through their interaction with ICT. However, all stakeholders involved in FFL teaching need to be acquainted with the significant roles that the different ICT tools play. As stated by Fu (2013), the use of ICT in the teaching-learning process can be done by using several devices such as computers and mobile devices. This chapter focuses on the role of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in the teaching and learning of FFL.

MALL in Foreign Language Teaching

The use of mobile devices in teaching and learning foreign languages continues to increase (Hsu, 2013). This may be attributed to the fact that these devices can facilitate learning anywhere and anytime through a handheld device

(Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Furthermore, due to the flexibility of mobile devices, language scholars have argued that mobile learning (M-learning) has significant potential to improve language learning (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Hsu, 2013). Language researchers have also identified the following types of mobile devices used in MALL; smartphones, tablets, and laptops (Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler, 2005). These devices are known as mobile technology because of their adaptability to mobility and portability when being used. This enables teachers and students a flexible way of using these devices in the teaching and learning processes anywhere and anytime.

Reviewed literature reveals that MALL plays a significant role in foreign language teaching and learning. Chiu et al. (2015), for instance, note that the use of the mobile device in language learning could improve students' language skills. This is attributed to the fact that mobile devices provide some applications that supports language learners to improve their language competencies.

MALL and the Teaching of FFL

Many studies had been conducted which is related to the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of FFL. A study by Wasike, et al., (2021) sought to investigate the use of the smartphone by students of FFL in universities in western Kenya. The findings indicated that FFL students use different applications on their smartphones in the acquisition of both oral and written competencies. The study, therefore, concluded that learning opportunities offered by smartphone could improve learners of FFL at the university.

Otieno (2017) analyses how lecturers in technical universities use Technology in their classrooms to motivate the learning of FFL. The participants for this study were lecturers of the French language who frequently use technology in their classrooms to support FFL learning activities. The

findings illustrate the potential of technology integration in French classrooms for supporting students' French language learning in the university context. The study also reveals that the attitude towards learning the language has changed due to the integration of ICT in learning activities. This is inferred from the fact that the learners enjoy being in a French classroom when a digital device is incorporated into the lesson.

Another study by Alabay & Bastürk (2021) sought to develop, apply and evaluate Adobe Captivate, one of the most used e-learning software worldwide, for use in the French teaching and process. The study was carried out in an experimental model. The achievement test developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool of the research. The data obtained as a result of the pre-test and post-test applications revealed that the use of Adobe Captivate positively affected the general language competency of the students.

Implication for EFL pedagogy

The reviewed literature reveals preference for MALL and particularly use smartphones and laptops in foreign language teaching. In FFL teaching, it has been shown that MALL facilitates teaching and learning activities. Mobile technology also has brought a real revolution, proving a new approach to teaching and learning FFL. FFL teachers have to consider how to teach language literacy and technological skills so that learners can make effective use of MALL. Based on the reviewed literature, it is inferred that when lecturers develop and implement MALL, they must also address several key roles that were salient to the teaching and learning of FFL discussed in the following subsections;

MALL as a teacher

MALL teaching (MALL as a teacher) can make use of several applications on smartphones or laptops when learning FFL. On such applications, students can listen to recorded audios on the pronunciation of French vocabulary, speak into the microphone, record their progress or learn words by clicking on pictures and hearing their pronunciation on the applications available on the internet. Muehleisen, (1997), for instance, underscores the potential of the internet to provide a new learning environment that has rich digital textual, graphic, audio, video and other interactive features for the language learning approach as well as for culture. This implies that learners of FFL can make use of the French learning applications such as *Duolingo*, which has practical exercises in pronunciation of French words that they can learn from. Research has shown that language teachers have been exploring ways in which ICT can be employed to make language learning more effective and motivating for students (Donaldson & Kotter, 1999; Yang, 2001; Chien & Liou, 2002). Therefore, there is need for teachers of FFL to find out ways of motivating students to maximize the potential benefits of MALL in FFL learning.

MALL in evaluation

On March 15, 2020, the Government of Kenya ordered the closure of all educational institutions to contain the spread of Covid-19. To comply with the president's directive, all public and private universities suspended face-to-face learning and adopted e-teaching and learning methods. From the data collected, it was revealed that the universities also adopted online testing. The laptop was the most widely used in this case. However, as reported by teachers and students of FFL, there was mass failure by students in the online exams. The question that arises is whether Kenyan students and faculty of FFL at the University level are sufficiently prepared to

undertake online evaluation in the wake of modernizing the learning of FFL.

There is need for universities to do thorough induction of students and teachers in the use of MALL to evaluate FFL learners. Though the literature has shown the role of ICT in evaluation, careful and purposeful planning of such evaluation is a prerequisite before rolling out the exercise in the universities.

MALL as data sources

The multimedia function of the internet can provide information sources related to videos, images, sounds and animated figures. Secondly, the function of the hypertext, which relates different texts by clicking on a link, thus creating a giant network allowing the user the possibility to access a large extent of information can be utilized by teachers and students of FFL to access a variety of new information sources.

MALL in facilitating communication

It has also been shown that the Internet is the principal medium by which FFL lecturers and their students can communicate anywhere anytime, (Abdelraheem and Ahmed, 2015; So, 2016; Chartrand, 2016). This could be facilitated by e-mail and by participating in discussion forums. Several applications can be used to facilitate MALL. These include; Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and other social media that support language learners to learn their target language. (Abdelraheem and Ahmed, 2015). WhatsApp can also be utilized in language learning because it allows students and teachers to communicate outside of normal classroom learning hours (So, 2016). It also enables teachers to share learning material through a group chat with students. Dictionary applications available on smartphones can also facilitate foreign language teaching. Chartrand (2016)

observes that e-dictionaries facilitate learners' improvement in their pronunciation and vocabulary mastery. It is because language learners can listen to the correct pronunciation from the dictionary application and they try to pronounce it. There are also other interactive applications such as Zoom, Google Meet and Teams. These applications can enable teachers and learners to communicate outside the traditional classroom. Besides, applications on smartphones can help the teachers and learners of foreign languages to access a variety of language resources through the use of internet services. Thus, teachers and learners of foreign languages can access teaching and learning materials anywhere anytime.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion in this chapter, it can be concluded that FFL lecturers and students in Kenyan universities are familiar with Mobile-Assisted Language Learning. Besides, FFL lecturers believed that the use of MALL was rich in information sources related to FFL teaching and learning anywhere and anytime. A variety of learning activities could be designed using MALL. Due to the positive response of FFL lecturers toward the use of MALL in teaching FFL, it is suggested that universities bridge the ICT skill gaps and prepare themselves to teach in the digital era. They are also suggestions to improve FFL learners' knowledge and skill in operating MALL because they are future teachers in the digital era. Besides, further research is also suggested to conduct and develop this study by expanding the research problems and the participants for those who are interested to conduct studies about other ICT devices in the teaching and learning of FFL.

In implementing MALL, teachers can utilize applications provided in mobile devices such as WhatsApp, Google Meet, Teams, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in teaching-learning processes in FFL classrooms. It is because

millennial students are familiar with social media in their daily lives (Abdelraheem & Ahmed, 2015). From the reviewed literature, it can be deduced that FFL teachers can implement MALL in French learning because learning can take place anywhere anytime. It has been established that MALL is flexible and easy to be used in teaching and learning foreign languages (Kukulska-Hulme and Shield, 2008). Moreover, teachers and learners have also been reported to favor the use of MALL in foreign language teaching and learning (Widiana, et al., 2018).



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