

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL): An Accelerator to Iranian Language Learners' Vocabulary Learning Improvement

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Abstract

In spite of the fact that technology devices such as mobile have been widely used by many people, their contribution to language teaching have not been practiced in Iran. The present study was intended to focus on the improvement of vocabulary learning through Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. It is hypothesized that because of the accessibility of cell phones and the Internet and also the curiosity of using new social networks such as Telegram, MALL would be helpful in learning English vocabularies. To this aim, 60 Iranian intermediate EFL learners, who participated in Testing of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation course, were recruited as the subjects. Two groups were given a 40 multiple choice item researcher-made vocabulary test as a pretest. Received 180 vocabulary out of 450 of vocabularies of Barron's Essential Words for TOEFL book, the participants in the experimental group enjoyed the definitions and example sentences of 5 words every other day (15 words per week) via Telegram regularly. The subjects of the control group were requested to study and learn the same vocabularies through book by themselves at the same days. After 12 weeks, the 40 multiple choice item vocabulary test was administered again as the posttest to the both groups. The result to emerge from the data was that the experimental group performed successfully rather than the control group.

Key words: Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Vocabulary, Vocabulary Learning

1. Introduction.

Learning vocabulary is regarded as an integral component of learning a new language. Laufer (1998) and Nation (1990) proposed that if learners of English as a foreign language want to figure out nontechnical English texts, they have to learn at least 5000 lexical items. Given the fact that the amount of class time is limited in academic and educational settings, learners do not have the opportunity to practice all the words they know in a classroom. For instance, a typical English class in Iran has held twice a week for 3 hours total. Therefore, it leads to some difficulties for not only English teachers but also EFL learners. The problem encounters teachers is that how to teach a vast number of new English vocabularies in such a limited time in educational classrooms to enhance language learning. Also, learners face difficulty in learning a large number of vocabularies, for example, they have to memorize a great number of words. Because learners merely expose to learn and practice the target language in a limited time in classrooms, it is reasonable that they should be exposed to the other kinds of methods of vocabulary learning.

Given the lexical knowledge plays a pivotal role in learning new language, research into the highly effective types of vocabulary learning methods as well as teaching vocabulary has been of a great value in the domain of second language learning and teaching. One of the efficient interactive ways that pave the way for learners to practice vocabularies and allow teachers to give feedback is Internet (Prensky, 2005). One of the best ways which aids teachers in teaching vocabularies is using various technologies available for learners. One of the technology devices that can be useful in second language learning and teaching is mobile phones which have become an integrated part of our lives. As a matter of fact, comes from a new trend of technology. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is a branch of technology which can be applied in different forms including distant, on-line, and face to face modes. Mobile devices have been interestingly popular among people especially for language learning, not only learners but also students applied technology to make vocabulary learning as unique as possible. Also, with the advent of the Internet learning mobile devices provide a highly effective resource for learning and education. In this line, researchers have attempted to make mobile devices as an effective source for both learning and teaching. (Prensky, 2005). As a matter of fact, it is a challenging research that learning tasks is covered by mobile phones. (Oberg & Daniels, 2012). Vocabulary is one of the crucial components of a language. Nation (2001) postulated that L2 learners are conscious of the extent to which limitations in their vocabulary knowledge confined their communication skills. As a consequence, one of the

basic hurdles that L2 learners face in learning vocabulary is the amount of vocabularies they need to learn in order to become fluent in the target language. In spite of the fact that teachers fully understand this need, they do not know how to support their learners in this field. Hence, pedagogically speaking, there is a great desire to research in this field to find different methods to provide opportunities for L2 vocabulary learning improvement. Owing to the limited educational time, it is necessary to apply text message vocabulary learning in our pedagogical setting.

2. Review of Literature.

Some researchers proved that MALL is useful in language learning in educational setting, Alemi, Sarabi, and Lari(2012), Cavus and Ibrahim (2009), Chaung (2009), Gu, Gu, and Laffey (2011), and Thornton and Houser (2005).

According to MALL Research Project Report (2009), mobile devices play a significant role on enhancing students' confidence in both listening and speaking. In this study, a group of students were asked for having Indonesian conversations on their mobile phones. The data showed that all the students were satisfied with the privacy that they have when they were working on their own mobile phones. At the outset of the study, took a conversation test to identify their initial conversation ability and a posttest to recognize their enhancement. The result revealed that mobile devices have effect on language learning abilities.

Derakhshan and Kaivanpanah (2011) attempted to examine the role of Short Message Service (SMS) on university students' vocabulary learning. The result of the study revealed that the experimental group had higher scores than the control group; that is, they outperformed the control group in vocabulary retention.

Another study which was conducted by Motallebzadeh, beh-Afarin and Daliry Rad (2011) realized the effect of SMS on help Iranian intermediate EFL learners to retain English collocations. The data illustrated that the subjects in the experimental group are performed better than those in the control group. Furthermore, participants were recruited to complete the attitude questionnaire and the answers of experimental group show the positive attitudes towards learning collocations through SMS.

3. Methodology.

3.1. Participants:

The participants of the present study were composed of 60 Iranian intermediate male and female students who participated in Testing of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation course in Giti language Institute in Gorgan, Iran. They ranged in age from 23 to 30 years and all of them were native Persian speakers. These EFL students were categorized into two groups, 30 male and female students took part as the experimental group and 30 students participated as the control group. As far as their English proficiency is concerned, they were at intermediate level of language proficiency.

3.2. Instrumentation.

The instruments applied in this study consisted of a Nelson English proficiency test and one researchers' made vocabulary test used both as the pre-test and the post-test whose reliability and validity were checked.

At the outset of the study, both groups took Nelson English proficiency test, Nelson 350A test (Flower & Coe, 1976) to ensure their homogeneity of subjects. This test consists of 50 multiple choice items. The validity and reliability of the Nelson test have been estimated several times before by other researchers and according to them, it is a highly valid and reliable test of English proficiency (Shahivand&Pazhakh, 2012, p. 18).

After that the vocabulary test was a test that the researcher chose 45 words from the 180 words of 'Barron's Essential Words for the TOEFL' book by Matthiesen (2014) that was the content of the instruction. Therefore, the researcher gave the list of words as the pre-test to both groups and the same vocabulary items were used as the post test in the same way but the order of items were different.

3.3. Procedure.

As the first step, the reliability of the vocabulary test that was used as pretest and posttest was measured. It was administered to 35 students of a language institute of Gorgan and by using Cronbach alpha coefficient, the reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.74 which is an acceptable reliability coefficient. The validity of the test was assured by three English Language experts.

The treatment the experimental group received was the definitions and example sentences of 5 words every other day (15 words per week) via Viber regularly. On the other hand, the subjects in control group were asked to study the same vocabularies through the book by themselves at the same days. For example the words for the first day are:

1. Abroad
2. Abrupt
3. Acceptable
4. Acclaim
5. Actually

The 30 students in control group study the definition and examples of these words from the book, but these words along with their definitions and example were sent to 30 students in the experimental group via Viberat the same day and they were asked to check this application every other day to study the new vocabularies. This procedure is continued about 3 months until sending and learning the whole 180 words were finished.

After 12 weeks the vocabulary test with 40 multiple choice items was administered by the researchers again as the posttest to the both groups. The form of items in vocabulary test devised by the researchers was multiple choice and students were asked to choose the correct answer from 4 responses. It took about 45 to 55 minutes to answer the whole test.

4. Result.

In order to check the probable effects of mobile assisted language learning on vocabulary learning improvement of students, the scores of the vocabulary tests developed by the researcher that were run in both groups, were analyzed. First of all to ensure that the mean differences of vocabulary test of the two groups were not significant at the beginning of the study, an independent sample t-test was run. Below is the table that shows the result of Kolmogorov Smirnov test which indicates the distribution of vocabulary test with the normal mean. It is obvious that the result is significant (sig=.710; X=22.6; SD= 5.90). Table 1 indicates the result.

Table 1. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for the pretest of vocabulary

N	60
Normal Parameters	Mean 22.6000
	Std. Deviation 5.90662
Most Extreme Differences	
	Absolute .090
	Positive .090
	Negative -.060
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	.701
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.710

The descriptive statistics of pretest of vocabulary and the results of independent-sample t-test is presented in table2. The mean of pretest of vocabulary in control and experimental group was 22.10 and 23.10 respectively as Table 2 indicates.

Table 2. Group Statistics for Pretest of vocabulary

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Vocabulary Pretest	30	22.1000	5.24141	.95695
Con. Pretest vocabulary	30	22.1000	5.24141	.95695
Exp. Pretest vocabulary	30	23.1000	6.55665	1.19707

The sig (2-tailed) value is .653, greater than the required cut-off of .05 as indicated in table 3. This implies that there is not statistically significant difference in the mean of vocabulary on their pretest. There is not a significant difference in the scores for pretest of vocabulary in control group (X=22, SD=5.24) and pretest of vocabulary in experimental group (X=23.10, SD=6.55; $t_{(58)} = .517$). Therefore, both groups were the same before treatment.

In order to show the difference between the mean of the group for the posttest of vocabulary another independent sample t-test was conducted. Prior to comparing mean, the groups' Kolmogorov Smirnov test was run to check if the distribution of vocabulary test is normal. Table 3 shows the result of Kolmogorov Smirnov test that the distribution on vocabulary test with the normal mean is indicated in. Therefore, the result is significant (sig=.317; X=11.80; SD= 3.41).

Table 3 One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test For the post test of vocabulary

Null Hypothesis	Test	sig	Decision
The distribution of vocabulary test is Normal with mean 11.80 and standard Deviation 3.41.	one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test	.317	Retain the null hypothesis

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .50. In order to compare the mean scores of both groups an independent-sample t-test was run on the participants' scores of post-tests in vocabulary test. The significant difference in the scores for control posttest (X=22.03, SD= 6.53, and experimental posttest (X=27.40, SD=6.38, $t_{(58)} = -3.218$) is presented in table 4.

Table 4.Descriptive Statistics for low level in posttest groups

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
vocabulary Posttest	Cont. Posttest vocabulary	30	22.0333	6.53100	1.19239
	Exp.Posttest vocabulary	30	27.4000	6.38749	1.16619

Table 5 shows that the sig (2-tailed) value is .848. This value is greater than the required cut-off of .05, therefore the assumption of equal variances has not been violated.

The sig (2-tailed) value as table 6 indicates is .002 and because of the fact that this value is below the required cut-off of .05, there is a statistically significant difference in the mean of vocabulary. Table 6 indicates experimental group performed better than the control group the test of vocabulary.

5. Discussion.

As the results revealed, students in the experimental group who received the vocabularies via Telegram outperformed the students in the control group who studied the vocabularies from the book at the same days. There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of students in experimental group but not in the scores of the control group. This significance means that students who were asked to use their cell phones for learning definitions of the words learned the meaning of vocabularies better than the students who did not receive such treatment.

Table 5. Independent Samples Test.

		Levene's Test Equality of Variances	Test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	(2-Mean Difference)	Std. Difference	Error95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	Upper
vocabulary Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.037	.848	-3.218	58	.002	-5.36667	1.66787	-8.70528	-2.02806	
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.218	57.97	.002	-5.36667	1.66787	-8.70531	-2.02802	

The results of this study are consistent with some other studies done in this area which emphasize the positive effects of mobile assisted language learning (Abbasi and Hashemi, 2013). There are some other studies that are directly emphasized the role of using mobile in improving vocabulary learning (Khodashenas and Amouzegar, 2013, Alavinia and Qoitassi, 2013).

6. Conclusion.

Vocabulary has a crucial role in language learning, and language learners have to know a vast number of words to have a better communication. Thus, the present study conducted to investigate the effect of MALL on vocabulary learning. The finding revealed that the participants in the experimental group enhanced remarkably in vocabulary knowledge in the post test rather than control group.

The heart of the matter is that the speed of technology is growing drastically and it dominates nearly most of the aspects of peoples' lives, hence, this technology plays a great role in educational atmosphere. Nowadays, as a result of growing the Internet and mobile phones, mobile learning causes the learners use the technology such as Telegram more enjoyable anywhere and anytime. Therefore, an enjoyable environment can be provided through mobile phones for language learners.

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