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THE ROLE OF MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) IN IRAQI EFL STUDENTS' VOCABULARY ACHIEVEMENT

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigated the role of Mobile Assisted Language Learning from learners' perceptions of classroom activities and vocabulary learning. The participants were 100 female students from Secondary school in Iraq., age between 15 to 18 years old, studying English at a school in Iraq. A perception of Classroom Activities Questionnaire was used to collect the data of the study. To assess the vocabulary level of the participants, the Bable Placement Test was utilized. The findings revealed that that the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has significant effects on Iraqi EFL students' vocabulary learning and retention. Also, the students' perceptions toward using mobile instructional application were positive.

1.   INTRODUCTION

According to Nuraeni (2021), Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is the most recent method in language learning. Indeed, there are many ways to learn the language (Granger, 2005), but MALL is the newest. Mobile technology has become popular for a several reasons. For example, it is portable which means students can move them from place to place (Arashnia and Shahrokhi 2016; Pratiwi, Nariyati, and Sudirman 2020). This is not the case with other technologies, like computers which are not small and light enough to be transferred from one place to another.

Statement of the Problem

A country like Iraq may not be accustomed to the usual use of technology in everyday education. In other words, although we have a lot of technological improvements they may not be used appropriately for academic purposes and more specifically for the aims of language learning. Teachers always want to make the learning enjoyable for their students, and one of these ways is to use students' favorite devices, i.e., their mobile phones. When technology is used, some cautions should be taken into account. Thus, it is worth to investigate students' perceptions toward using Mobile Assisted Language Learning in learning vocabulary.

Significance of the Study

Due to the role of technology in language learning and the online education, it seems significant to investigate the effect of one manifestation of technology (MALL) in vocabulary learning and perceptions of classroom activities.

Research Questions

To achieve the aim of the study, the following question is set " Does Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) have any significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' vocabulary learning?"

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definitions of the Key Terms

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL):

It is the language learning assisted or enhanced through the use of a handheld mobile device. MALL is a subcategory of Mobile Learning (m-learning) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Mobile technologies include cellphones, MP3 and MP4 players, PDAs, iPhone, or iPad all of which can be used at anytime, anywhere.

2.2 Perceptions of classroom activities:

Perceptions of classroom activities are actually the ideas perceived by the student about the intellectual, emotional, and physical environments in which they are faced in the classroom. They have four subfactors: interest, challenge, choice, and joy.

2.3. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (Mall)

Language acquisition with the use of a mobile device is a very young topic in language learning and established meaning for the terminology often used in this field have yet to emerge. Even the notion of "mobility" is a point of contention. Scientists have been attempting to come up with comprehensive, universal, and satisfactory definitions for key mobile learning ideas (Keegan et al., 2002).

The connotations of "mobility" are the source of the majority of the controversy over the concept of mobile learning and mobile language learning. As for Kukulska-Hulme (2009), this confusing word could have two alternative interpretations, affecting the notion of "mobile learning" which means it could allude to "portable technologies", which are comfortable and available at any time and in any location. Capability can also refer to "learner mobility," in which case the focus is on the learner rather than the technology, who accesses knowledge in various locations and at various times.

Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) research has sparked a slew of debates. One of the most crucial questions is whether MALL should be utilized as a replacement for traditional classroom teaching methods or as a supplement to the traditional classroom teaching and learning process. There were no such arguments offered in the early stages of MALL. However, as MALL technology and practices improved, studies (Cherian & Williams, 2008; Zhang, 2004) began to focus on its usage as a substitute for classroom instruction.

In this style of learning, learning is not limited to four-wall classrooms. This one-of-a-kind property of mobile devices leads to a slew of other benefits. According to Kennedy and Levy (2008), learners find learning languages via MALL applications to be very motivating because of their mobility. "The messages prompted me to go over points or words seen in class outside my typical study period," one of the students stated (Kennedy & Levy, 2008).

Attitudes of Students and Teachers Towards MALL

The majority of studies on the usefulness of MALL in language learning have included studies on people's attitudes regarding utilizing mobile learning devices in language learning and teaching. As a result, there are not many studies in the literature that specifically examine learners' and teachers' perspectives toward MALL. As a result, the attitudes of students and teachers in effectiveness studies can best be explained by their performances, comments, thoughts, and views.

MALL devices, such as iPods, are being used to help students learn. Many areas of technology-enhanced learning applications and mobile-assisted language learning have been studied so far. However, research on MALL uses as supplementary learning aids for English language coursebooks is still lacking in the literature. Another factor to consider is that the absence of study concentrating specifically on attitudes about using MALL as a supplementary learning material in the literature, which can be explained by the rarity of MALL uses in educational settings (Pettit & Kukulska-Hulme, 2007).

MALL has been used largely in experimental learning settings by researchers and educators who have been striving to investigate the potential of this new field, owing to the fact that it is a novel technology in many ways. As a result, the students and teachers whose opinions have been considered are usually the ones who take part in these studies. Hence, more research on attitudes regarding MALL, as well as effectiveness studies, might be undertaken in real-world educational settings where MALL has been employed for a long time.

Baleghizadeh and Oladrostam (2011) carried out an analysis to see whether MALL can enhance EFL students' grammatical knowledge. To reach this aim, researchers devided the participants into control and experimental groups. In the experimental group, the teacher asked learners to record their voice while they are using the grammatical structures orally. The proceeding session, they were asked to reflect on their errors and mistakes while speaking in English. The results of their study depicted that the students who did MALL activities had higher proficiency in grammar compared to their counterparts in the control group.

Perceptions

Perception, as the other factor considered in the present study, can be defined in terms of the processes by which one receives and interprets information from the environment and can reflect our emotions, expectations, and needs. In the educational field, the importance of teachers' perceptions of their classroom environment has been highlighted (e.g., Mucherah & Frazier, 2013).

Student perceptions of classroom activities, on the other hand, consist of four main components of interest, challenge, choice, and joy (Gentry, et al., 2002) which have been identified as significant determinants of academic achievement (e.g., Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Mucherah & Frazier, 2013). In other words, the more students perceive their environment as supportive, the more motivated they will be. In contrast, if students perceive the classroom environment as obstructive, their motivation will be eroded.

According to the phrase, perception is a term used to convey the experience of an item or a series of events. Perception is our set of the information content; we can compare this representation to previous experiences, as well as how one detects or interprets something utilizing one of his/her senses. Other experts have also given certain definitions and opinions on perception. To begin with, according to Konent (2011), perception is the entire process of the conscious human mind drawing on the surrounding. As a result, the process of grasping the meaning of a stimulus is known as perception. Perception provides stimuli derived from the perception of objects, events, or relationships between symptoms, which are subsequently processed by the brain.

Vocabulary Learning

In fact, according to Kristiansen (1998), if one-fourth of the content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) are foreign to the reader, the reader's comprehension of the language suffers dramatically. Because words express complex and often many meanings, vocabulary can never be entirely understood; its extension and elaboration take a lifetime (Kamil & Hiebert, 2005). The Collins Cobulid English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2001), for example, contains more than 110,000 words, phrases, and definitions. Even native speakers do not know all of their mother tongue's words or how to use them effectively.

Furthermore, various people have diverse collections of vocabulary and utilize it for different goals. Oral and written languages, for example, frequently utilize distinct terminology, and inability to recognize the appropriate vocabulary for the situation might lead to misunderstandings (Kamil & Hiebert, 2005).

Nation (1990) identifies three elements that determine the difficulty of learning a word. The first is the learner's prior English and mother tongue experience, as one's first language influences second language vocabulary acquisition, and borrowing and interference between first and second language vocabulary is common. Learning the function and meaning of a word, for example, might be challenging because words rarely correlate directly to terms in other languages.

3.   METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study are 100 Iraqi EFL female students from Secondary School in Iraq. The participants were selected and divided into two groups randomly (Experimental and control group). The school for Girl is located Dhi Qar Governorate in southern Iraq.

3.2 Instrument

To answer the question of the study and to achieve the aim, an instructional mobile application was prepared to collect the data. Its validity and reliability have been calculated. Kahoot application was used to develop EFL students' vocabulary competence. In order to use cell phones during learning, Kahoot application was applied in the experimental group. This program contains fun, interactive games to help learners practise their English and build their language skills. It is free that includes music and images to engage young learners and make learning exciting and enjoyable.

4.   RESULTS OF THE STUDY

To answer the question of the study that states " Does Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) have any significant effect on Iraqi EFL students' vocabulary learning?", the differences between the two groups were calculated in a post-test. The means of the both groups in the post-test were found to be different as shown in TABLE 1.

TABLE: I

Descriptive Statistics of Students' Vocabulary in Posttest

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Posttest Vocabulary	**Experimental**	50	18.80	4.18
	Control	50	15.50	3.58

As can be seen in Table 4.6, the mean of the experimental group (M= 18.80, SD= 4.18) is higher than that of control group (M= 15.50, SD= 3.58). To investigate whether this difference is statistically significant, an independent-samples t-test was run.

Table 2

The Results of T-test on Students' Vocabular Learning in Posttest

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Posttest vocabulary	**Equal variances assumed**	6.56	.00	6.64	50	.00	. 34	.16
	Equal variances not assumed			6.64	50	.00	. 34	.15

As Table 2 shows, there is a statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups with regard to their vocabulary learning in which experimental group has higher vocabulary retention than the control group (t= 6.64, p <.05).

5. CONCLUSION

To answer the first research question concerning the effect of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on Iraqi EFL students' vocabulary learning, the differences between the two groups were calculated in a post-test. The means of the both groups in the post-test were found to be different. To investigate whether this difference is statistically significant, an independent-samples t-test was run. As the result shows, there is a statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups with regard to their vocabulary learning in which experimental group has higher vocabulary retention than the control group (t= 6.64, p <.05).

The results revealed that the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has significant effects on Iraqi EFL students' vocabulary learning and retention. Also, the students' perceptions in the experimental group are higher than control group. The mean score of interest, challenge, choice, and joy are higher in the experimental group than in the control group.

The implications of the study are as follows:

The implications for the use of MALL in teaching and learning English language can be helpful for the syllabus designers and material developers in order to design materials in a way that learners can understand them better via technology like MALL. Therefore, it can be implied that such research can make the material developers integrate MALL into EFL curriculum. Also, EFL teachers can be aware of the advantages of usi ng MALL in teaching English language at schools. EFL learners are able to use this favorite tool to not only use it for their fun but also for other purposes such as language learning.

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