



The Effects of MALLS -Mobile-Assisted Language Learning on Learner's Autonomy in an EFL Context

Les effets de MALLS -Apprentissage des langues assisté par mobile sur l'autonomie de l'apprenant dans un contexte EFL

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Abstract :

In the modern, globalized world, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is growing quickly, spurred on by advancements in technology. For this reason, this study aims to investigate the notion of learner autonomy and the perspectives of EFL students regarding the usefulness of mobile-assisted language learning strategies. The overall goal of this study is to determine how prepared and willing Dr. Moulay Tahar University's EFL context is to embrace mobile technologies to improve language learners' autonomy; Utilizing a questionnaire as a research tool, the study examines the attitudes and readiness of master's level Didactics students. The analysis of the study instruments revealed that the majority of master's level Didactics students had a positive attitude and were prepared to accept responsibility for their education.

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Résumé:

Dans le monde moderne et globalisé, l'apprentissage des langues assisté par mobile (MALL) connaît une croissance rapide, stimulée par les progrès technologiques. Pour cette raison, cette étude vise à étudier la notion d'autonomie de l'apprenant et les perspectives des étudiants d'EFL concernant l'utilité des stratégies d'apprentissage des langues assistées par mobile; l'objectif général de cette étude est de déterminer dans quelle mesure le contexte EFL de l'Université Dr Moulay Tahar est préparé et disposé à adopter les technologies mobiles pour améliorer l'autonomie des apprenants en langues ; Utilisant un questionnaire comme outil de recherche,

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l'étude examine les attitudes et l'état de préparation des étudiants en didactique de niveau maîtrise. L'analyse des instruments de l'étude a révélé que la majorité des étudiants en didactique de niveau maîtrise avaient une attitude positive et étaient prêts à accepter la responsabilité de leur éducation.

langue

1. Introduction

The integration of mobile-assisted applications (apps) in educational settings has become increasingly prevalent, offering a myriad of opportunities to enhance learning experiences and foster learner autonomy. In particular, within the academic environment of Dr. Moulay Tahar University in Saida, the utilization of such apps holds significant promise in shaping the attitudes and autonomy of Master's students. Thomas (1971), "Attitudes and Behavior," asserts that the use of mobile-assisted apps can significantly shape students' attitudes and autonomy in the academic environment. As technological advancements continue to permeate various facets of society, including education, understanding the implications of mobile-assisted apps on students' attitudes and autonomy becomes imperative. Dr. Moulay Tahar University, situated in Saida, stands as a microcosm of this evolving landscape, providing a fertile ground for exploring the intersection of technology and education. This paper sets the stage for an in-depth investigation into the utilization of mobile-assisted apps among Master's students at Dr. Moulay Tahar University in Saida. By examining the impact of these apps on students' life, attitudes and autonomy, it also aims to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on leveraging technology to enhance learning outcomes in higher education contexts.

A singular research tool was adopted to scrutinize the impact of mobile device utility on learners' autonomy in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. The study specifically honed in on second-year master's students enrolled in the Didactics and Civilization program at Dr. Moulay Tahar University. Aligning with Patton's (2015) guidance, "the careful consideration of strengths and limitations inherent in each data collection method becomes paramount". This strategic acknowledgment allows researchers to optimize the strengths of a singular methodology, thereby augmenting the overall understanding of the research problem or questions, while concurrently addressing and mitigating the limitations associated with individual methods. Subsequently, the overarching goal of population sampling within this academic pursuit was to acquire comprehensive insights about the population without necessitating the examination of each individual unit. The selected sample encompassed second-year master's students enrolled in the Didactics and Civilizations streams at the Department of English Language, Faculty of Letters, Languages, and Arts, Dr. Moulay Tahar University, during the academic year 2021/2022. In the course of this study, and based on the research

problem which pivots around the usability of Malls in classroom and how it may affect learners' autonomy and attitudes two main hypotheses were formulated

It is hypothesized that learners demonstrate a positive attitude towards mobile-based learning in the context of language education.

The second hypothesis posits that mobile-based learning significantly contributes to the promotion of learner autonomy in language education. These hypotheses find their grounding in the affirmative expressions of learners, reflecting their optimistic perspective on

2.Methodology

In this research, the investigator included 60 Master students at the Department of Letters and English Language at the University of Dr. Moulay Tahar during the academic year 2021/2022. The decision to select this specific sample was influenced by the students' obligation to complete their dissertations during this academic year, involving substantial online reading. Over the course of their university education, the students have cultivated autonomy in their study habits and have become accustomed to utilizing mobile applications and technology for learning.

The researcher employed a quantitative method for data collection. A pilot study was conducted to evaluate the utility and functionality of the research instruments, along with assessing the participants' interest in the investigated issue. Subsequently, a pilot study involving four selected individuals was carried out to assess the clarity and effectiveness of the questionnaire. Following the validation of participants' responses, the questionnaire was distributed online to the target population. Post-completion of the questionnaire, the researcher elucidated the research's nature to the participants and invited them to reach out for any questions, issues, or clarifications related to the questionnaire or the research project. Participants were assured in advance about the confidentiality of their identities, and the responses were automatically stored for subsequent analysis.

3.Analysis of The Findings

Table 3.1. Daily Life Apps Usages

Student	Device Used	Percentage
1-25	Smartphone	41.7%
26-50	Computer	41.7%
51-60	Tablet	16.7%

This table shows that the majority of students used and owned smartphones and laptops, with tablets being the least popular gadgets in this group. The data also revealed that 41.7% of pupils utilized mobiles and laptop computers on a regular basis.

In contrast, a smaller percentage of students, specifically 16.7%, expressed a preference for using tablets in their daily lives.

- The second inquiry aims to establish the daily duration of students' mobile device usage. The table presented below illustrates the outcomes of this particular question.:

Table 3.2 Mobile Hourly Usage

Usage range	Percentages
0 to 3 hours	25% (15 students)
3 to 6 hours	30% (18 students)
6 to 9 hours	20% (12 students)
More than 9 hours	25% (15 students)

This table illustrates the distribution of daily mobile device usage among a sample of 60 Master students. The majority of respondents, comprising 30% of the sample, reported using their devices for 3 to 6 hours daily. Additionally, 25% of students indicated a usage range of 0 to 3 hours, while another 25% reported more than 9 hours of daily usage. A smaller proportion, constituting 20% of the respondents, stated a usage range of 6 to 9 hours. This distribution provides insights into the varying patterns of mobile device engagement among students. The prevalence of the 3 to 6 hours range suggests a substantial portion of the sample engages in moderate daily device use. The near-equal distribution between the 0 to 3 hours and more than 9 hours categories indicates a notable diversity in usage habits within the surveyed population.

- The third question asked about the frequency with which students used mobile devices to learn English. The following table explains the results of this question:

Table 3.3 Learners' Frequency of Using Mobile devices for Learning English

Frequency of Usage	Percentages
Always	15% (9 students)
Often	30 % (18 students)
Sometimes	35% (21 students)
Rarely	15% (9 students)

Never	5% (3 students)
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Table 3.3 displays the frequency of mobile device usage among a cohort of 60 master's students. The data is categorized into five levels of frequency: "Always," "Often," "Sometimes," "Rarely," and "Never." A notable finding is the predominant tendency among master's students to use mobile devices at varying frequencies. The highest frequency is observed in the "Sometimes" category, representing 35% of the surveyed students. This suggests that a considerable proportion of master's students engage with their mobile devices on an intermittent basis. It is worth noting that this pattern aligns with the flexible nature of graduate programs, where students may balance academic commitments with professional and personal responsibilities. Additionally, 30% of students report "Often" using mobile devices, indicating a substantial presence of consistent usage patterns. Conversely, the "Always" category shows a lower prevalence at 15%, suggesting that a moderate percentage of master's students maintain constant mobile device engagement. Interestingly, there is a relatively low percentage in the "Never" category (5%), implying that the majority of master's students find some level of utility or necessity in mobile device usage, even if infrequent. These findings shed light on the nuanced mobile device usage patterns within the master's student population.

- The fourth query seeks to uncover the ways in which students employed their mobile devices to enhance their English language learning. The subsequent visual representation illustrates the findings from this inquiry.

Table 3.4 Students' Learning Objectives While Using Mobile Devices

Learning Objectives	
Reading Online Articles On mobile	70%
Listening to Music, lyrics or BBC Broadcast	60%
Watching films or Documentaries	70%
Surfing social media	30%
Dictionary Apps or English learning Apps	70%

Table 3.4 presents a result of how 60 master students utilizing mobile apps to enhance their English language learning. The data reflects various learning objectives, each associated with a specific percentage of student engagement. The most prominent learning objective, as evidenced by the high percentage of 70%, is "Reading online articles on mobiles." This suggests a strong inclination among master's students to leverage mobile platforms for accessing and assimilating information through online articles, potentially aiding in reading comprehension and vocabulary enrichment. Similarly, "Watching films or documentaries" and "Dictionary apps or English learning apps" also

exhibit substantial engagement, each garnering a percentage of 70%. This emphasizes the importance of visual and interactive tools in language learning, as students turn to multimedia resources and specialized language applications to reinforce their understanding. "Listening to music lyrics or BBC broadcasts" attains a notable engagement level of 60%, underlining the incorporation of audio-based content in language acquisition. This objective indicates a preference for auditory learning methods, where students may leverage music lyrics and authentic broadcasts as language input sources. Contrastingly, "Surfing Google, YouTube, and social media in general" has a lower engagement percentage at 30%. This suggests that while some students use these platforms for language learning, it may not be as prevalent or structured compared to other objectives. In conclusion, the analysis indicates a diverse range of learning objectives among master's students utilizing mobile apps for English language learning. The emphasis on reading, visual media, and interactive tools underscores the multifaceted approaches students adopt to enhance their language proficiency.

The fifth inquiry aims to determine whether learners have a preference for standardized learning platforms like Moodle or if they lean towards non-standardized platforms such as Facebook groups and forums. The subsequent table presents the results of this particular question:

Table 3.5 Preferences for Learning platforms

Learning Platforms	Percentages
Embracing Normalized platforms e.g., Moodle	45% -27 Students
Embracing unnormalized platforms e.g., Facebook groups	55% 33 Students

The analysis of this table reveals that among 60 master's students, 45% prefer using normalized platforms like Moodle, while 55% prefer unnormalized platforms such as Facebook groups. The preference for unnormalized platforms may be attributed to their informal and interactive nature, fostering real-time communication and spontaneous interactions. On the other hand, the preference for Moodle could be driven by its structured approach, offering organized course content and assessment tools. The inclination towards unnormalized platforms might also be influenced by challenges associated with Moodle, a relatively new technology in the university. Students may face difficulties in navigating the platform and adapting to its functionalities, leading to a preference for more familiar and user-friendly alternatives. This diversity in preferences highlights the importance of understanding student needs and adapting learning technologies accordingly.

The sixth question was designed to determine the most beneficial behavior that promoted autonomy in learners. The following graphic depicts the outcomes of this question:

Table 3.6. Most Preferred Behavior to Foster Autonomy in Learning

Attitudes	Percentages
Using Mobile device(s) connected to the Network	28%
Using mobile devices offline	18%
Reading articles, books offline	12%
Reading articles, books online	25%
Using Grammar books and Dictionaries online	15%
Using Grammar books and Dictionaries offline	2%

The second hypothesis which indicates that that mobile-based learning significantly contributes to the promotion of learner autonomy in language education. This hypothesis finds their grounding in the affirmative expressions of learners, reflecting their optimistic perspective on mobile technology and its perceived role in augmenting autonomy during language learning, as revealed by the study's findings which is confirmed in the previous table. The analysis of learners' attitudes towards mobile app usage both online and offline in English language learning is elucidated through the insights provided in the presented table. Notably, learners demonstrate a distinct inclination towards online components, evident in the higher percentages associated with activities requiring internet connectivity. The subsequent examination delves into key findings, confirming positive attitudes among learners and exploring potential reasons for their preference for online sources.

Using Mobile Devices Connected to the Network (28%): A substantial portion of learners exhibits positive attitudes, favoring the utilization of mobile devices connected to the network. This trend suggests a discerning recognition among learners of the advantages linked to online access, including real-time information, interactive content, and collaborative learning opportunities.

Reading Articles, Books Online (25%): The noteworthy preference for reading articles and books online reflects positive attitudes among learners. The appeal of convenience, accessibility, and multimedia features of online materials contributes to the higher percentage in this category.

Using Grammar Books and Dictionaries Online (15%): The preference for online grammar books and dictionaries, evidenced by 15%, underscores positive attitudes among learners. This inclination signifies a desire for dynamic and easily accessible language resources, with online tools offering interactive exercises, instant feedback, and the latest language updates.

Using Mobile Devices Offline (18%) and Reading Articles, Books Offline (12%): In contrast, the percentages for offline activities are relatively lower. This shift may be attributed to an increasing reliance on digital resources, where learners appreciate the immediacy and interconnectedness that online

materials provide, reaffirming positive attitudes towards technology-mediated language learning.

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore whether the use of mobile technology in English language learning contributes to the enhancement of learners' autonomy.

Table 3.7 Percentage Analysis of Learners' Attitudes Towards the Impact of MALL Apps on Autonomy.

Degree of consent	Percentages
Strongly Agree	25%
Agree	18%
Neutral	10%
Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	2%

A High percentage of learners strongly assert the first hypothesis which indicates that learners demonstrate a positive attitude towards mobile-based learning in the context of language education.

Strongly Agree (25%): A significant majority of students strongly affirm that mobile-assisted apps play a pivotal role in enhancing their autonomy. This substantial percentage underscores a robust belief among learners, reflecting a profound acknowledgment of the positive impact these apps have on autonomy in language learning and asserting our hypothesis. **Agree (18.00%):** Another considerable portion of students expresses agreement regarding the contribution of mobile-assisted apps to increased autonomy. This endorsement further solidifies the prevailing positive sentiment, affirming that a majority of students perceive these apps as advantageous for fostering autonomy in their language learning journey. **Neutral (10%):** A moderate percentage of students adopts a neutral stance on the impact of mobile-assisted apps on autonomy. This subgroup indicates learners who neither strongly advocate nor oppose the idea that these apps influence their autonomy. A closer examination of this group's perspective may unveil insights guiding potential enhancements or clarifications. **Disagree (5%):** While a smaller percentage of students disagrees with the idea that mobile-assisted apps enhance autonomy, this dissenting viewpoint is acknowledged. Delving into the reasons behind this disagreement can provide valuable insights into challenges or concerns associated with the utilization of these apps in autonomy-focused language learning. **Strongly Disagree (2%):** The smallest percentage vehemently disagrees with the notion that mobile-assisted apps contribute to improved autonomy. Although a minority, exploring the rationale behind strong disagreement can illuminate specific issues or preferences that may inform adjustments in the seamless integration of mobile-assisted apps to further enhance learner autonomy.

4. Discussions

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) apps have revolutionized the landscape of language education, offering a diverse array of features and advantages that significantly enhance the learning experience. These applications empower learners by providing personalized and interactive language learning experiences, enabling them to engage with content at their own pace and in diverse contexts. With real-time feedback mechanisms, learners can promptly address language challenges and monitor their progress, fostering a sense of agency and ownership over their learning journey. One of the key strengths of MALL apps lies in their incorporation of multimedia elements, including interactive exercises, language games, and audiovisual content. These features make language learning not only more engaging but also more reflective of real-world language usage, bridging the gap between classroom learning and authentic language experiences. Furthermore, the accessibility of MALL apps extends learning opportunities beyond the confines of the classroom, allowing for continuous practice and reinforcement in everyday settings. Incorporating MALL apps into classroom activities can be approached through various strategies. For instance, educators can leverage these apps as supplementary resources to traditional classroom materials, recommending specific apps that align with the curriculum to encourage independent exploration and additional practice. Adopting a flipped classroom approach, teachers can assign language learning activities through MALL apps as homework, freeing up class time for more interactive and collaborative activities. Moreover, the gamification elements often present in MALL apps transform language learning into an enjoyable and competitive experience, motivating students to engage with language content actively. Integrating gamified learning activities into lesson plans not only enhances student motivation but also cultivates a positive attitude towards language learning.

Regular assessments through MALL apps enable educators to gauge individual student progress accurately, allowing for tailored instruction based on students' strengths and areas needing improvement. By providing timely feedback and tracking progress over time, MALL apps support learners in setting and achieving their language learning goals, further fostering autonomy and self-directed learning skills. In implementing MALL apps into daily activities, it is crucial to ensure alignment with the curriculum and provide teachers with professional development opportunities to effectively integrate these tools into their teaching practices. In addition to that, offering guidance to students on selecting and utilizing MALL apps effectively promotes autonomy in their language learning journey, empowering them to take ownership of their learning and explore resources that cater to their individual needs and preferences.

5. Conclusion

In the contemporary technological landscape, proficiency in utilizing technology is crucial to motivate learners to leverage it for their academic progress. Mobile-based learning serves a crucial role in nurturing learner autonomy, instilling a sense of responsibility in learners for their

own learning journey. Simultaneously, learner autonomy facilitates the necessary security for risk-taking, enabling learners to make independent decisions and understand the consequences. Given that English serves as a primary gateway to technology and science, learners should prioritize the cultivation of autonomy by relying on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources in learning and capitalizing on the ubiquity of mobile devices among learners. This study aimed to explore learners' attitudes toward mobile-based language learning and the potential of mobile devices in enhancing learner autonomy. The research employed two data collection instruments, and the results addressed the study's posed inquiries. The researcher formulated two hypotheses suggesting a positive learner attitude toward mobile-based learning and its role in promoting autonomy. These hypotheses were substantiated by learners, affirming their favorable outlook on mobile technology in language learning and its contribution to augmenting learner autonomy. Additionally, Lahmer's (2021) investigation on the effectiveness of mobile learning in the Algerian EFL context supports the positive attitudes of English learners towards this mode of learning. This claim was also consolidated by Başöz, T. (2017). Furthermore, Djoub's (2014) study on "Mobile technology and learner autonomy in language learning" asserts that mobile devices offer versatile learning opportunities, allowing learning to occur anytime and anywhere while serving as a multimodal learning tool that encourages the development of learner autonomy. The same claim was also referred to by Kukulska-Hulme, A. (2019). In his paper Mobile language learning innovation inspired by learners.

To conclude, this research study was built on the findings and research of several studies that have explored the concept of learner autonomy, and mobile devices use in learning. Furthermore, there are many challenges that both the teacher and students will have to deal with, but the determination to attain the set goals should prevail. Learner autonomy should be acquired step by step and be up to date with learning and teaching resources that help the education sector be more innovative. Technology came to make men's life easy, which can also be true for learning and acquiring knowledge.

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