Exploring Mobile Assisted Language Learning in Enhancing Reading Skill among ESL Learners: A Concept Paper

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Abstract
Reading skills would be one of the most important skills in language learning that should be mastered by every learner to be an excellent language user. It is indubitable that reading skill is pivotal compared to other skills as having strong reading abilities helps learners to comprehend and interpret in all that they read which eventually helps to enhance other language skills as well. It is indisputable that there are learners who are yet to master reading skills which eventually impact greatly in their language learning process. Thus, it is crucial to explore effective reading strategies to captivate learners' attention towards reading besides enhancing their reading skills. Having said that, observing the current trend in the education system, technology integrated teaching and learning would be one of the effective teaching methods as it is preferred by the current generations. Moreover, it is undeniable that technology enhanced learning also would cater to learners' needs in learning as it will eventually encourage autonomous learning among learners. Hence, this paper intends to explore Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in enhancing reading skill among ESL learners. Apart from reviewing past literature on MALL and how it helps to enhance reading skill in language learning, this paper imparts a conceptual framework that can be useful for future research in exploring MALL to enhance reading skill of language learners. The conceptual framework is based on the TAM model. Thus, it is hoped that this study could propose the effectiveness of MALL in enhancing reading skill among ESL learners.

Keywords: ESL Learners, Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Reading Skill, TAM Model, Technology

Introduction

At present, the English language has become an indispensable means of communication worldwide due to its nature as a *lingua franca* (Navarro et al., 2022). Although there are various languages around the world, it is estimated that about 1.5 billion people use English with fewer than 400 million using this language as their first language (Ku et al, 2021). This

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language is used as a mode of communication that permits common understanding between one another regardless of their different ethnic background and culture. Having said that, it is indisputable that acquiring a foreign language as a second language can be onerous these days since it requires effort and continuous practice. This phenomenon is no exception in Malaysia since English is taught and given importance in the education system even though it is a second language. When we look at Malaysian education, English is recently taught using the Common European Framework of References (CEFR). The rationale for adopting CEFR is to set a benchmark on every learner's English proficiency as according to the international standards (Khair & Shah, 2021). English consists of four language skills which are speaking, listening, reading, and writing which allows each learner to be assessed based on the descriptors set according to CEFR. These skills are pivotal for learners to master to be ascertained as proficient users (North & Piccardo, 2019). It is incontrovertible that lack of competency in any of the skills will have a direct consequence on other skills into the bargain (Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021). On the other hand, reading skills diff from other skills since it is the most requisite skill that helps improve overall language proficiency. Furthermore, this skill also aids learners to comprehend written or printed materials which helps in their language engagement and interaction (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021). Having said that, it is revealed that students from countries which use English as a second language (ESL) may have difficulties in reading and comprehension due to interference of the mother tongue language (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021). In relevance to Malaysia, Woolcock (2019) stated that 51% of Malaysians from the lower class were incompetent to read manuals due to poor proficiency in English (as cited in Ujang, 2019). This substantiates with the World Bank report which stated that 13% of Malaysian late primary school students are not proficient in reading (*"How Serious is the 'COVID' Learning Gap and What Can We Do About It?"*, 2022). Other than that, UNICEF also predicted that approximately 10% more students have the possibility to fall into learning penury due to Covid-19 pandemic repercussions (Anon, 2022). It is undeniable that students who are likely to have low proficiency in reading are incompetent in other subjects. Having said that, it is crucial for language educators to use an effective reading strategy to enhance students' reading skills.

The 21st century is synonymously known as the era of technology where technology plays an immense role in every aspect. This is also seen in Malaysia where different industries have undertaken technology in every aspect as par to the current world trend. Similarly, the Malaysian education system is also updated where local teachers have started to integrate technology in teaching and learning. This substantiates with Raja and Nagasubramani (2018)

who ascertained that learners in this current era prefer learning to be at the leading edge with the current trend by integrating modern technology in their learning. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) offers an effective strategy to improve learners' reading skills. It is indubitable that MALL has gained popularity in recent years due to the rampant availability of mobile tools and educational apps which will be efficacious in teaching and learning. Apart from that, there are mobile apps which can be used by learners inside or even outside of the classroom to enhance their English language. Therefore, MALL can be considered as an effective learning tool for language learning especially to enhance reading skills. Alternatively, it can be used with other adequate language strategies to ensure learners get a well-rounded and effective language learning experience. Therefore, the growing body of research needs to be addressed for the community especially on the effectiveness of MALL in enhancing learners' reading skill. Hence, this paper intends to answer the following questions:

1.   What are the types of platforms used in MALL to enhance reading skill?
2.   To what extent has MALL helped to enhance reading skill among ESL Learners?
3.   What are the challenges faced in integrating MALL to enhance reading skill?

Literature Review

The literature review will be based on the identified research questions, which is crucial at understanding the exposure on MALL that helps to clear research gaps, besides giving readers clear insights on MALL and foresee its potential challenges.

Reading in Language Learning

Reading is an important element in language learning since it is considered as one of the pinnacles in language acquisition. Undeniably, language acquisition would be difficult without reading. Since learners are exposed to more sentence structures, grammar and new vocabularies per minute through reading even if it takes place at a slow pace (Dong, 2019). This is because reading provides learners with a wide range of vocabulary and grammar which consequently supports the development of the in terms of building correct language structures. Apart from that, it is indisputable that there would be implications in learning other subjects if a learner does not master reading skill. This is because the ability to read is the foundation of an entire learning process, which is crucial for learners to master the skill not only for language learning but also to learn other subjects (Rintaningrum, 2019). When we investigate reading skill in depth, there are five components in reading which are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and also comprehension (Best, 2018). These are the five crucial components which need to be mastered for reading fluency. This is because these components of reading are interrelated and working together is likely to create a successful reading experience for readers.

To become proficient readers, language learners can benefit from learning about and practising each of these components explicitly. Essentially, readers will shift between sources of information before elaborating meaning and strategies which later result in evaluating their understanding and the application of social context to reflect their response (Kiew & Shah, 2020). In other words, it can be said that reading skill involves cognitive activity which presupposes the integration of meaning construction and memory to acquire information adequately. According to Jerrim and Moss (2019), it is crucial to encourage young learners to read more as it will help them to develop their reading skill. This substantiates with the fact

that young learners acquire new languages effortlessly compared to adult learners (Manurung & Izar, 2020). Apart from that, there are a series of ways of acquiring reading skills such as reading aloud, reading newspapers, and mastering phonics rules (Musa & Ismail, 2023). Thus, learners should experience diversified reading strategies so that they will have the passion for reading for learners to master reading skills.

MALL to Enhance Reading Skills and Its Challenges

In a globalized world, it is irrefutable that MALL has become increasingly popular due to the prevailing availability of mobile devices which offer many educational apps and tools. As matter of fact, it can be labelled as a new cultural practice in the educational world where learners practise and strengthen their understanding by means of mobile devices (Cakmak, 2019). Apart from that, MALL can be diversified into many forms, including mobile games, language learning apps and language learning content. It is reported that teachers who use MALL believe that it helps them with the teaching and learning process as MALL provides additional materials for learning besides encouraging learners on self-paced learning (Rafiq et al., 2021). This is because MALL allows learners to self-paced learning anywhere and anytime, if they are equipped with mobile devices and have access to internet connection (Gonulal, 2019). Having said that, MALL can be one of the most effective and powerful tools to enhance reading skills in language learning. Despite the many available platforms useful to enhance reading skills of language learners, three prominent MALL platforms will be highlighted in this paper. Firstly, E-readers would be one of the well-known MALL platforms which allows users to read books and other written material via portable electronic devices. Apart from that, E-readers have interesting features like note taking and dictionaries which will be very handy for language learners. This echoes Jansen (2019), who argued that the research participants of his research responded positively in using E-readers for leisure reading as it's convenient to them.

Apart from this, social media platforms also can be categorised as one of the effective MALL tools. Undoubtedly, there is a reliance on social media platforms by the current generation. Thus, making use of social media to enhance reading skills of language learners would be practical and effective. This is because social media platforms can be a great source for authentic reading materials for language learners. Furthermore, the application of social media platforms is not limited to entertainment purposes only but also currently being widely used for learning purposes as well (Pujiati, et al., 2019). Sitorus and Azir (2021) reported that their research participants showed a positive outcome on using social media, specifically Instagram, to up-skill their reading skill. This is because, they found that it is a novel method when engaging Instagram for language learning process which helped them to comprehend reading better. Thus, it is expected that social media can be a great support for learners in studying English specifically to improve reading skill besides providing an efficient platform in which they are able to study independently. Moreover, there are a variety of reading apps that are available in the MALL platform that can assist language learners to enhance their reading skills. For example, there is an app called "Kids story book free" which helps learners to read simple words besides having animated games, songs and narration which relate to every story (Gupta, 2021). Apart from that, there are apps that motivate learners to read for leisure, in particular Goodreads app. This app would be one of the MALL platforms which bring readers from all around the world together (Walsh & Antoniak, 2021). Readers can get book

recommendations besides building a community of readers with similar book choices (García-Roca, 2020). In a nutshell, there are many types of platforms which can be used in MALL to enhance reading skill. So, it is up to the learners on the choice of platform in MALL that they choose as it depends on the learner's needs and preferences, as well as the resources available to them.

Although MALL has plenty of affordances in language learning, there are some drawbacks that should be highlighted and taken into consideration. First and foremost, learners should have a certain level of technological literacy so that they can use MALL resources productively. It is undeniable that a person can be considered digitally poor if that person is ICT illiterate as today's generation is fully dependable on technology daily (Anon, 2020). Even though certain learners are familiar with using mobile devices or even technology in their everyday activities, they might not necessarily be familiar with technology for learning. This is because they might make use of technology more for entertainment or social purposes rather than using it for learning. This substantiates with Harmanto (2020), which the author stated that learners are not necessarily motivated to use mobile devices for learning purposes as they are more familiar using it for social or entertainment purposes. Consequently, concerns regarding learners being distracted by using mobile devices also has aroused among educators. This is because there is a high possibility for learners to misuse mobile devices to pass time by surfing the web, texting or even chatting online with their peers, which results in not paying attention to the teaching and learning process (Metruk, 2020). Apart from that, Metruk (2020) also stated that integrating MALL eventually distracts learners' concentration towards learning as they will be prone to use mobile devices for entertainment which could impact on teachers' decision to allow learners using mobile devices in language learning. Thus, this would be one of the major challenges in integrating MALL in language learning that should be taken into consideration, besides its numerous benefits.

Additionally, educators might face challenges in terms of equity when integrating MALL in language learning as there may be divergence in access to technology and internet among learners. This may lead to unequal access to the benefit of MALL as not all the learners are privileged to have access to technology due to their different social background. According to research conducted by the MoE involving almost 900,000 students and 670,000 parents, approximately 36.9 percent of Malaysian students do not possess any kind of electronic devices (Chan et al., 2020). This undoubtedly can hinder the learning process for underprivileged learners as it would be challenging for them since MALL relies heavily on mobile devices and the internet. Thus, teachers should ensure that all the learners have equal opportunities to use MALL resources and at the same time seek solutions to address any digital divide issues. Apart from that, educators may need to adjust their teaching styles to incorporate MALL into their curriculum besides evaluating its effectiveness in terms of resources at meeting language learning objectives. This is because MALL resources undoubtedly vary in quality and effectiveness as with any technology-based resources. Furthermore, the selection of its resources also should align with the learning objectives so that it does not compromise the quality of teaching and learning. This is because, even though most of the MALL resources are useful for learning, there are certain resources which might not be relevant to learners' needs or even learning objectives. Hence, educators should be meticulous when selecting MALL resources to ensure it is relevant to the learners' needs and the learning process. In general, integrating MALL into language teaching and learning requires

heedful consideration and planning to make certain that it is an effective and equitable tool for all the learners.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) would be relevant to enact in this research study as this framework is acknowledged as the best model in relevance to understand the acceptance of information technology in education (Han & Sa, 2021). TAM is a well-known model which was developed to explain how users perceive and adopt a new technology. This model was introduced by Fred Davis in 1986 and has been broadly used in various research studies (Alfadda & Mahdi, 2021). According to Alfadda & Mahdi (2021), this model was developed to foresee the probability of an individual adopting a new technology. According to Alfadda and Mahdi (2021), this model consists of five variables which are perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude toward use, behavioral intention to use and actual use. Apart from that, the TAM model suggests two main factors which are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. These two factors determine users' attitudes towards applying a new technology. When we investigate the first factor which is perceived usefulness, it refers to the extent to which users believe that a particular technology helps them to achieve their goals. This contradicts the second factor which is perceived ease of use, where it refers to users believing that a specific technology will be easy to use. However, these two factors substantially impact the users' attitude and intention to use the technology. Hence, this model will be useful especially for researchers to gain insights into the factors that influence users to accept and adopt technology for a certain purpose. By taking this into consideration, this model is effective to use to explore MALL in enhancing reading strategies. This is because, there are no crossover effects between perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use when teachers integrate technologies especially in language teaching (Avelino & Ismail, 2021). Based on the proposed model, it helps future researchers to get clear insight on MALL to enhance reading skill as technology top pick among current generations (Avelino & Ismail, 2021). TAM model is shown in Figure 1.
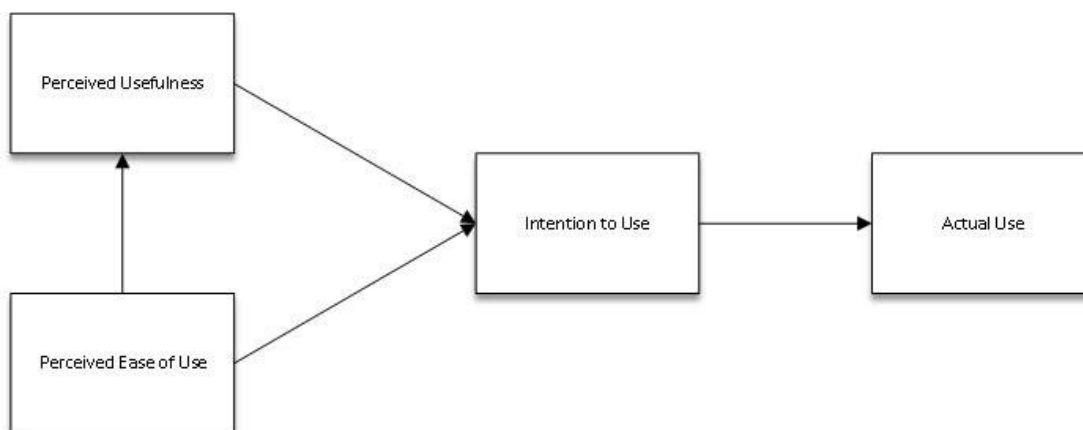

Figure 1: TAM Model

Suggested Research Methodology

The proposed research study will employ a mixed-methods research design to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. It is recommended to carry out mixed-method research design because it is a combination of specific and detailed insights from qualitative research

and generalizable quantitative research (Regnault et al., 2018). Having said that, this research will be conducted in one of the primary schools which is in the suburbs of Sentul, Kuala Lumpur. The researchers chose Sentul district as this place consists of plenty of primary and secondary schools. Thus, one of this schools which is located in this district is specifically chosen by researchers as the majority of the students are intermediate in English language acquisition due to the lack of exposure to this language at home with a precisely non-English speaking background.

To carry out this research, purposive sampling will be used to select research participants. This type of sampling would be appropriate for this research as researchers can aim for niche demographics to obtain specific data collection. In other words, it would be convenient for the researcher to select research participants who have a shared set of characteristics that are important to study (Bakkalbasioglu, 2020). Moreover, purposive sampling also assures generalizability of the research study and contributes to the consistency, usefulness, and reliability of the data collection (Thomas, 2020). Having said that, researchers will use their expertise to select specific research participants on purpose which will help the study meet its goal. Specifically, researchers will choose one hundred and twenty research participants using the sampling method. Hence, students with reading difficulty will fit into this research study as interactive reading activity would gauge their attention towards enhancing their reading skills.

The study will start with the quantitative phase, followed by the qualitative phase. In the quantitative phase, researchers will conduct pre- and post-tests to assess research participants' reading proficiency level. The test papers will mainly examine learners' reading fluency level. Furthermore, these test papers will be developed by the researchers and the tests consist of leveled reading passages. Furthermore, there would be five comprehension questions in every reading passage to evaluate learners' comprehension. To ensure the validity of the tests, the test papers will be administered to higher authorities like the school's English head panel and the School Improvement Specialist Coach (SISC). In the initial stage, the experimental group will engage in reading activities using a designated language learning app which can be found in MALL while the control group will receive traditional reading instruction. So, the tests will be administered to both groups in the initial and final stage of the experiment to check the effectiveness of MALL in enhancing learners' reading fluency. In the next phase, which is the qualitative phase, researchers will administer the questionnaire to gather qualitative data on ESL learners' perceptions of using mobile devices for language learning purposes. The questionnaire will be adapted from other relevant research studies to suit this research study. On the other hand, the research participants' attitudes, experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges which are associated with MALL will be explored in this phase. After all the data is collected, it is crucial to analyse the data using relevant statistical techniques. Thus, researchers will perform a paired sample t-test using SPSS software to ensure that the mean difference in reading fluency scores between pre- and post-test is statistically significant. This is because the analysis will help to assess MALL's effectiveness on reading fluency enhancement compared to traditional instruction. On the other side, researchers will also perform descriptive analysis to analyse questionnaire items. This is an aid in providing an overview of the central tendency and variability of the data.

It is expected that the findings of this study will demonstrate the effectiveness of MALL in enhancing reading skills among learners. Moreover, the qualitative data helps to shed light on

learners' perspectives on the use of mobile devices for language learning which substantially aids to identify factors that influence learners' acceptance and engagement with MALL. In a nutshell, the study outcomes will give insights to educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers on the integration of MALL into ESL reading instruction which aids to the development of more effective learner-centred language learning environments. Many research studies have been conducted on MALL. However, this research study will give a clear insight to future researchers on how to integrate it in language learning. By exploring its impact on reading proficiency and investigating learners' perceptions of MALL, this study seeks to contribute to the field of language education and inform best practices for incorporating mobile devices into ESL instruction. The proposed research holds the potential to provide valuable insights that can benefit both teachers and learners in their language learning endeavours.

Projected Discussion and Recommendation

Since technology plays an important role in every aspect these days, it is crucial to give emphasis on this research topic, especially on MALL as it helps to bridge the existing gap in research. Even though there are challenges in integrating MALL in teaching and learning, effective strategies should be taken to vanquish those obstacles so that educators and learners could experience the benefits of MALL in education. Firstly, every educator should ensure all the learners are familiar with basic technology knowledge for them to use MALL effectively. Supposedly if there are students who are ICT illiterate, teachers should provide enough guidance for them to master using ICT for their learning. Moreover, it is crucial for educators to ensure all the students are equipped with technological devices to integrate MALL in teaching and learning as this is to ensure that none of the students are left behind from using MALL in their learning. Apart from that, it is proposed that researchers can use the TAM model to investigate the effectiveness of MALL specifically in teaching reading skills for future research. Moreover, quantitative research can be done on MALL as quantitative research usually generates reliable and factual outcome data which is usually generalizable to large populations.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that there is ample research on MALL which are related to commodious language learning. However, it is crucial to research further on the effectiveness of integrating MALL in language learning as it would bring changes in education besides gauging learners' interest in language learning. This is because educators and learners' knowledge on MALL are limited as the awareness of the usage of MALL in language learning are meagre which should be taken into consideration. Furthermore, this research also helps to clear gaps in research by giving insight to future researchers to further carry out research study on MALL. Hence, the subsequent recommendations are suggested according to the above conceptual paper to explore Mobile Assisted Language Learning in enhancing reading skills among ESL learners. Firstly, it is suggested to identify suitable MALL applications which would be appropriate for learners' language learning. Apart from that, teachers and educators should be trained on using MALL in their teaching effectively so that the purpose of implementing MALL in language learning can be achieved. Moreover, it is suggested to design further MALL applications especially related to enhancing reading skills so that it would encourage the future generation

to enhance their reading skills in convenience. Thus, the finding of this study helps to enlighten teachers-educators, stakeholders, and education policymakers on the effectiveness of integrating MALL in language learning.

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