

## Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL): Mobile as an Innovative Tool to Learn English Language

1. Dr. Kiran Rakibe, 2. Ms. Mohini Savedkar

---

1. Principal, Karmaveer Punjababa Govardhane Arts, Commerce and Science College, Igatpuri, Nasik ( Maharashtra).
  2. Research Scholar, K.T.H.M. College, Nasik ( Maharashtra).
- 

### ABSTRACT:

The traditional chalk and talk method used by teachers in the classroom setting can make learning monotonous, dreary, drab and dull. As a result, New Education Policy 2020 emphasises online/ digital learning. Taking note of the fact the present research paper sets out to explore how smart phones and iPads can be used resourcefully by the learners either in a classroom setting or at their own pace to learn a language so that learning becomes a fun-filled and enjoyable activity.

There is no gainsaying that Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) can be used to learn any language but the present paper discusses MALL with special reference to English language alone. Moreover, MALL can be used by the native speakers of the language for advanced learning too. However, the use of MALL by the first language users ( $L_1$ ) is rare and therefore the present paper is restricted to the use of MALL by the second language learners ( $L_2$ ) only.

**KEY WORDS:** First language users ( $L_1$ ) Grammar, Mobile Assisted Language Learning ( MALL), Multimedia Messaging Service ( MMS) , Second Language Learners (  $L_2$ ), Short Message Service (SMS), Smart phones, Video-On-Demand-cast (Vodcast), Vocabulary, Wireless Communication

---

### Introduction:

In the contemporary world the use of hand-held mobile devices has become ubiquitous and wide-spread. Wireless communication technology is evolving expeditiously and mobile phones have made inroads in all areas of human life. Now the use of cell-phones is not limited to communication, shopping, social networking and entertainment alone. They can be used handily and skilfully to learn a second language (L<sub>2</sub>) and a foreign language too.

Thus, Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is a subarea of mobile learning and technology driven pedagogy. It can be defined as language learning that is assisted and enhanced through the use of handheld mobile devices such as smart-phones, PDAs and iPads which are used for short messages, video call, MP3, MP4, Mpeg, web surfing to browse electronic dictionaries etc.

It is to be noted that the present paper does not take laptops into consideration as they are more like computers than cell phones. Even though portable, they cannot be carried in one's pocket or handbag as is the case with mobile phones. In this way, laptops are not handy enough and do not serve the same purpose as a cell phone. Physical features of cell phones such as small size, touch-screen, audio functions etc. play a significant role in making them useful in the learning process, unlike a laptop.

MALL is the next generation of e-learning. However, MALL is not a substitute to a teacher or extant language learning devices. Rather, it provides new environment with new attributes and capabilities to language learning. MALL marks a shift from teacher-led learning to a student-led learning thereby promoting self-learning and allowing the learners a greater degree of freedom.

As J. Colpaert ( 2004) states it, mobile learning environment can be: face-to-face, distance, online, self-paced and calendar-based. The present research paper takes all of these into account.

### **Brief History of MALL:**

As an entry on MALL on Wikipedia reveals, in as early as 1980s, Twarog and Pereszlenyi Pinter used telephone service in order to provide assistance and feedback to distant language learners. In 1990s telephone and computer were used to impart an English Course through distance mode at Brigham Young University, Hawaii. (Green, Collier & Evans, 2001) In the

year 2001, teleconferencing was used to conduct an English Conversation Course by Dickey in South Korea. Between 2002 and 2005, English was taught at a Japanese University by using mobile phones. At City College Southampton, Second Language learners of English were taught through Short Message Service (SMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) by supplying them with mobile phones with inbuilt voice-recording systems and cameras. Many such experiments using mobile phones were done at other universities to teach other languages too.

### **Advantages of MALL:**

MALL is beneficial to language learners for a variety of reasons. First of all, a majority of language learners have a smart-phone because as compared to other wireless devices like laptops, mobile phones are comparatively inexpensive. Secondly smartphones are portable and are carried wherever one goes so learners can study outside the class too. Thus, MALL promotes self-paced learning and learner- autonomy. Learning can take place with almost anyone, anywhere, anytime, over any length of time.

Apart from portability another feature of mobile phone is its connectivity. That is to say, it can be connected to Wi-Fi and internet. The other features of mobile phone are its flexibility, small size and user-friendliness.

Moreover, MALL provides a platform for remediation to slow learners. It provides one-on-one live class. It also makes language learning interesting through games which have features like cumulative point system, progress indication and instant feedback. The apps provide regular notifications when the learner is not studying according to the schedule and/or if a task is not finished on time. They also integrate various skills and aspects of language such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.

Moreover, MALL provides context-specific and real-world practice. Learners can interact, communicate and collaborate with peer learners and the first language speakers of the target language.

Other useful feature of MALL is that it is accessible, easy to navigate and learner-friendly. Apart from providing audio-resources like dialogue it has video resources like pictures, animation and movies too. There are a slew of exercises based on the content for reinforcement of learning.

MALL is highly interactive as opposed to books. The most noteworthy feature of MALL is collaborative learning, wherein learners can support, motivate and evaluate one another. Lastly there is freedom to control and choose the content in accordance with the individual needs of the learner and his/her cognitive level.

It needs to be stressed that incorporating MALL into an English curriculum does not change the pedagogical goals of the course. Rather, MALL-based curriculum can increase the learner's access to course content even outside the classroom. When implemented in a classroom that leverages mobile devices, MALL provides unrestricted access to the learners to a high-quality course content at their fingertips.

### **Disadvantages of MALL:**

Mobile-learning has some limitations too. For example, the cell-phone has a small screen posing reading difficulty. It has a small keypad too which makes it difficult to type content. Furthermore, one has to bear the cost of internet access on the phone. For some handsets, storage can be an issue, as well. Apart from this, if MALL is used in a classroom setting then the teacher has to garner information regarding students' mobile literacy and suit/adapt the learning process and types of applications used in teaching in accordance with students' abilities and educational needs. However, the limitations of the mobile phone as a learning tool are far too less as compared to its advantages.

### **New Education Policy -2020 and MALL:**

India is a global leader in ICT and therefore it is believed that integration of ICT into education will transform and enhance the learning process. Taking cognizance of the fact the New Education Policy -2020 ( NEP 2020) lays emphasis on online and digital learning. Recognizing the significance of digital education it sets out to integrate it in school and college curricula.

The NEP 2020 envisages an education system that is technology-enabled and intends to make technology a vehicle of education. In this scenario, MALL can be particularly useful as it will provide high quality second language (L2) learning to the learners from any geographical location thereby making quality language learning available to learners even from remote and rural areas. It will dispel the fear of English language from the minds of students from rural areas making quality education accessible to them and bridge the gap between the urban and rural schools/ colleges. The use of MALL therefore can be a game-changer in the educational

sector as it will usher in digital language teaching methodology, personalised learning and increased student engagement.

## **Use of MALL to Teach Various Language Skills :**

### **Listening and Speaking:**

MALL promotes innovative learning environment and authentic language learning experience. It assists learners comprehend target language spoken in a context. It also enhances the production of oral language. It fosters meaningful sentence construction in L<sub>2</sub> learners thereby enhancing accuracy and confidence among the learners.

Vodcast as instruction material apart from TV shows and commercials provides authentic representation of the language to be learnt. Video applications like Vodcast can be used both in-class and out-of-class. They facilitate learners to comprehend the spoken language thereby fostering listening and speaking. Additionally, they provide real-life like expressions for the learners to internalise. Video apps can aid students recognize regional accents and syntax too as they connect images with words.

Voice recording application like WhatsApp can be used to communicate with the teacher and/or record answers to the classroom activities. This can promote self-monitoring, self-correction and self-evaluation thereby enhancing learner-autonomy and independence. Voice recording feature in WhatsApp can be resourcefully used by a teacher to make learners record monologues and produce dialogues. Such activity can foster creativity, enhance confidence and reduce anxiety among the language learners.

A most useful listening tool is mobile music application. It offers listening inputs apart from being interesting as a large number of persons like listening to music. Furthermore, most of the music applications have subtitles that expose learners to the target language.

There are platforms like the Handheld English language Learning Organization (HELLO) which aid to manage English language learning and have user-friendly features.

### **Reading and Writing:**

Reading activities can be provided to students either through a well-designed course installed on their cell phones or through text messages sent to them followed by an exercise to gauge their reading comprehension.

A handwriting app for tablets can be used to make students write about their personal experiences or compose a paragraph/ essay based on a theme. This can enhance the students' ability to organize written texts. Similarly, an instant messaging app like WhatsApp if used resourcefully in the target language, can positively impact students' language accuracy. For instance, WhatsApp can be used by the teacher to correct errors in writing immediately after an error is committed in a group setting by a learner. Such kind of error-correction is highly fruitful as all learners in the thread can learn from the corrections offered by the teacher. Apart from this, the messages/ texts/ posts used in the WhatsApp in the target language by the teacher, make learners reflect on the language that is used in the text and to negotiate meaning and comprehend the message/ post/text. The feedback offered to the post/text/message by the learners, makes them construct language actively too, thereby improving their writing skill.

A web-based collaborative reading annotation system can positively influence students' reading comprehension. Likewise, apps like HP Reveal (former Aurasma) which are free for iOS and Android devices can be used by a teacher in an innovative manner to offer learning material for an English class.

Social media sites like X (formerly called Twitter) and Instagram can be used by teachers to enable learners find voice in the target language and construct socially appropriate texts. Social networking app such as Tumblr can be used in a writing class profitably to make students engage in a dialogue with their classmates and also to enrich their vocabulary. The comment feature of Tumblr makes them express their views too. Furthermore, Social Networking Sites like these enable students to consume and produce content on a device of their choice.

Mobile Games too can be used resourcefully. For, instance, games such as Minecraft, can promote literacy development if a teacher encourages the learner to connect and interact with the real world in a real context.

### **Grammar :**

Grammatical rules can be taught through a module on mobile followed by multiple choice questions or exercises such as 'fill-in-the-blanks' or 'true-false' etc.

Mobile phones can play a significant role in enhancing the accuracy of the students. For instance, mobile games can be useful to help learners conjugate verbs. Gamified language learning apps such as Duolingo can be useful in this regard. The recording feature of a mobile phone can be used to enable students to practise spoken grammar. Social media can be helpful in allowing students to witness authentic content in real-life situations in order to analyse grammar. For example, X (erstwhile Twitter) can be used by learners to identify grammatical errors in real life situations. The automated feedback feature of certain apps like Busuu, can enable learners to rectify their grammatical errors and improve the accuracy of their usage. Text messages revolving around a grammar unit taught in class can be helpful to make learners consolidate the particular grammar unit outside the classroom.

The web-based Grammar Clinic enhances metalinguistic awareness of the students apart from their self-editing skill. The grammar-based content on web can be interesting and playful and not too demanding making learning an engaging activity. As a result, it can also enhance student involvement.

### **Vocabulary :**

MALL can be immensely beneficial in learning vocabulary as internet can provide pronunciation, image, translation into native language, synonyms, antonyms, sentence usage etc. of the word to be studied.

Learners having access to smartphones with features like authentic audio, sound effects, text that highlights itself as it is read can benefit from vocabulary exercises. Such exercises are particularly beneficial to visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners. For better understanding of a visual learner a pictorial annotation can accompany a word on the learner's mobile phone.

A noteworthy language app that enriches the vocabulary of the students is 'Memrise'. The games like 'hangman' on mobile make vocabulary learning interesting. Vocabulary learning apps make learning self-regulated adding to learner motivation.

Mobile dictionaries add to students' repertoire of vocabulary. Though paper dictionaries have the same elements like the mobile dictionaries; mobile dictionaries are portable and can be carried in one's pocket to look up a word anywhere, any time. Similarly, online flashcard options offer more features than traditional paper based flashcards. However, the vocabulary learning feature on apps is not a substitute to a teacher entirely as the feedback and notification

is necessary to keep students motivated to use the vocabulary app frequently both in and outside the classroom. Learners can be sent tailor-made vocabulary exercises based on the activities conducted in the classroom. The learners are then asked to complete the exercises on their cell phones and post them to the teacher. The feedback offered by the teacher keeps the learner motivated.

Thornton and Houser (2005) e-mailed vocabulary-based micro-lessons to students thrice a day. In these lessons new words were used in multiple contexts for the learners to guess the meaning. The result was encouraging as the learners improved scores after tests.

### **Pronunciation:**

The second generation of cell phones allow the users to access multimedia so that the learners can record their own voice. As a result the instructors/ teachers can make a better evaluation of the learners' weaknesses in pronunciation. In the absence of a teacher, the learners can record their voice, listen back to it and compare it with a desirable/ideal pronunciation provided, thereby neutralising the 'local colour' in their accent.

### **Some Examples of Apps and Sites for MALL:**

Given below are a few learning interfaces and apps on mobile phones that can be used by English language teachers/learners both in the classroom setting as well as outside the class :

**Anki** ( <http://ankisrs.net/> ) :

Anki is a "flash card" development program for vocabulary acquisition. It is free of charge and uses open-source software. It is available for all devices and platforms.

**Babbel** <http://www.babbel.com/> :

Babbel teaches the learner words and phrases in English apart from other languages. It uses exercises like listen and repeat, read and tap-to-match, fill-in-the-blanks and unscramble jumbled words etc. It is a paid app.

**Beelinguapp** <https://www.beelinguapp.com/> :

Beelinguapp, which is available on Android and iOS, allows one to read a wide range of texts in two languages simultaneously. An L<sub>1</sub> speaker reads the text in English, allowing the learner

to listen to the correct pronunciation. The app is user-friendly and offers learners authentic texts to read in the target language. Moreover, it permits the learner to edit the speed of the audio, the size of the text, and conceal the L1 translation of the text. The app is free apart from a premium version which is paid.

**BliuBliu** <https://bliubliu.com/> :

This language learning program teaches one primarily vocabulary through authentic materials. It is in the beta version and is therefore free. The learner can access the program through their website. The program gauges the level of the learner through a test to decide the difficulty level of the words to be offered to the learner. The program defines all the words using Google Translate and provides pronunciation through Google Voice.

**Busuu** <http://www.busuu.com/> :

Busuu teaches vocabulary, sentence-structure and conversational skills. The app can be used alone or one can access the community wherein one can practise the target language with other learners and L1 speakers. Apart from app for smartphone and tablets, there is website version too. The app is free of charge apart from a paid premium version.

**Drops** <https://languagedrops.com/> :

It allows users to practice vocabulary through games. It is particularly useful to learners with a short attention span because the daily practice sessions in the app are for five minutes only. For more practice the learners need to go for the paid version.

**EAC Echo** <http://englishaccentcoach.com/> :

The present app focuses on pronunciation practice by teaching phonemes in American English. It makes use of samples from 30 speakers from North America. Echo lite version is free but is available on iOS only. There is full paid version too.

[www.educatorstechnology.com](http://www.educatorstechnology.com) :

This is a highly useful site for the learners and teachers of English as a second language. It has augmented reality games for elementary, intermediate and advanced learners on Android and iPad. It also has useful tools and applications for teachers.

**HiNative <https://hinative.com/> :**

HiNative allows learners to do language exchange on smartphone with native speakers by asking questions and receiving answers. The best part is that it is absolutely free of charge.

**InnovativeLanguage [www.innovativelanguage.com/](http://www.innovativelanguage.com/) :**

It offers modules on communicative English as per the learning level of the learners from beginner to advanced. It is both free and paid.

**Lingua.ly <http://lingua.ly/> :**

It makes learners read articles and learn vocabulary in context. Apart from vocabulary it covers reading, discourse, translation and pronunciation. The app tracks the progress of the learners through tests too. It is free on iPad, iPod, iPhone, Android, Mac/PC via web browser.

**Mango / MLibrary (Mango Languages) :**

The app focuses on pronunciation and uses recording and playback technologies to help students acquire native-like pronunciation. Apart from pronunciation it covers grammar and vocabulary.

**[www.podcastinenglish.com](http://www.podcastinenglish.com/) :**

The website contains a large number of learning situations, dialogues, cartoons etc. on a variety of topics for different levels of learners. The role-plays and recorded situations are in native accent. The written forms of difficult words used in the dialogues are provided for elementary learners.

**ReadLang:**

It is a program that provides an online e-reader that makes use of Google Translate to translate words and phrases instantly when the learner clicks on them. The program also saves these clicked words in a database so that the learner can refer back to them later on. The mobile version of the program is available for iOS and Android.

**Rosetta Stone Course:**

Rosetta Stone is one of the most useful language learning apps. The app uses picture and word matching for the elementary learners. For the intermediate and advanced learner, there is speech recognition option that ensures that the learner is pronouncing the word correctly.

**Study Stack** <https://www.studystack.com> :

It is a flashcard generation tool which can be used for vocabulary learning. Instructors can design flashcards for the students, or students can make flashcards all by themselves. The free as well as paid versions are available on Android and iOS.

[www.talkenglish.com](http://www.talkenglish.com) :

The website contains dialogues recorded by native speakers to repeat, ranging from simple to complex according to the learner's level. The dialogues have transcript, they can be downloaded and have a quiz based on them with check-answer feature. As the dialogues are recorded by native speakers the learners get exposed to the native accent.

**Tandem:**

Tandem is a community language-learning app which pairs language speakers who wish to practise each other's language. Learners can speak with their partner through the app's texting service apart from making audio-calls, video-calls, sending audio messages and photo messages etc. The app is free on iOS and Android.

There are many other applications and web sites useful for MALL. However, due to space constraints only the most useful have been mentioned above.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude, it can be stated that mobile technology has penetrated all aspects of postmillennial life. Due to mushrooming of mobile phones, MALL has become one of the most useful tools to learn a second/foreign language. The advantages of mobile phones such as growing screen size, portability, ability to record sound and video are apparent which make them a highly useful tool in learning a language.

However, even though useful, mobile phones cannot replace a teacher who will have to step into the shoes of a facilitator when MALL is used under his/her supervision and guidance. A teacher can make language learning student-centric, interesting and effective by using cell

phones resourcefully. However it needs to be stressed that, MALL is one of the growing and understudied fields on which further research is necessary so as to increase its efficacy.

### References:

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobileassisted\\_language\\_learning#:~:text=Mobile%2Dassisted%20language%20learning%20\(MALL,assisted%20language%20learning%20\(CALL\).](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobileassisted_language_learning#:~:text=Mobile%2Dassisted%20language%20learning%20(MALL,assisted%20language%20learning%20(CALL).) (Accessed on 30 August 2024)
2. <https://sites.middlebury.edu/mall/using-mall-to-teach-various-language-skills/> (Accessed on 30 August 2024 )
3. <https://sites.middlebury.edu/mall/apps/explicit-apps/> ( accessed on 30 August 2024)
4. Colpaert, J. (2004) "From Courseware to Coursewear ?" *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 17 (3-4), pp. 261-266.
5. Green, B.A., Collier, K.J. & Evans, N. (2001) "Teaching tomorrow's class today: English by telephone and computer from Hawaii to Tonga." In L.E. Henrichsen (Ed.), *Distance-learning program* (pp. 71–82). Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Language, Inc.
6. Thornton, P and C. Houser (2005) "Using mobile phones in English education in Japan". *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 21 (3), pp.217-228.