Research on Mobile-Assisted English Language Learning Among Primary School Students in China: Focusing on Students' Feedback of Learning English with Mobile Devices

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Abstract: Guided by the conceptual framework of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in informal settings, this study investigates how primary school students in China use mobile devices to learn English out of class, focusing on students' feedback of learning English through an app named "We Speak".The data was collected through quantitative data of completed responses to a desgined online survey questionnaire and qualitative data from follow-up email interviews with parents and face-to-face interviews with teachers. This study demonstrates students' positive and effective learning feedback by using this app to practice English and suggests an approch for English as a foreign language (EFL) learning with mobile devices[1]. The findings bear significant pedagogical implications for teachers to intergarte MALL into their teaching curriculum objective to achieve specific teaching tasks of mobile pedagogy and provide parents with hints on how to better schedule and support their children's learning outside class.

Keywords: Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL); Primary school students; Mobile device; Feedback; English language teaching (ELT); Mobile pedagogy

1. Introduction

People's enthusiasm for learning English has been on a rise in China with the rapid development of economy and technology, learning languages online and via mobile devices are becoming more and more of a norm than of being peripheral with the ever increasing communication across the borders and the development of educational technologies, and the boundaries between formal and informal learning are becoming more blurred than ever before. English learners are no longer limited to the face-to-face learning environment, it is not surprising that language teachers have also adopted mobile technologies into their individual teaching and learning contexts (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). After the widely using of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) for teaching and learning (Stockwell, 2012), another booming learning English way is mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) through mobile devices (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012).

2. Background

In accordance with the teaching curriculum objectives, for primary school students, English teachers will choose some supplementary learning materials or learning through app by using mobile devices for extra practicing out of classroom in order to better achieve the teaching objectives and intentionally giving more English input for these young English learners. According to my six-year-old child's English learning curriculum in grade one in a private primary school, I have known that her English teacher will always arrange some assignment for them to learn or practice through the app named "We Speak" after class by downloading this app on the iPad or the mobile phone. However, it seems that we didn't know whether it is effective for the students to learn English from this app and students' feedback were unknown by learning through these mobile devices, so my this current research will focus on students' feedback such as attitudes, perceptions and factors that influenced students' acceptance of these mobile devices.

3. Literature Review

For this section, I have reviewed some relevant literature on MALL in general and introduce the research gap for my current paper to fill.

Stockwell & Hubbard (2013) propose that MALL has developed over the past decade as a sophisticated field within its own right, with an increasing number of articles that examine various mobile devices used in environments both inside and outside of formal language learning situations. MALL has been defined as the use of "mobile technologies in language learning, especially in situations where device portability offers specific advantages" (Kukulska-Hulme, 2013, p. 3701). MALL includes devices ranging from MP3/MP4 players, smart phones, iPads, e-book readers through laptop, etc.. There has been a surprisingly large amount of research published over the past two decades that has seen the field develop along with the enormous steps forward that have taken place in mobile technologies[2].

Kukulska-Hulme, Norris & Donohue (2015) suggest that MALL learning needs guides of mobile pedagogy for English language teaching (ELT), mobile pedagogy for ELT is founded on the belief that while mobile devices can support self-directed learning and the role of teachers is equally important. Mobile-assisted language learning is not simply the transfer of current teaching and learning materials and practices to a mobile device, but a complete reconceptualisation of these.This guide aims to share knowledge and highlight some appropriate pedagogical strategies with teachers and support staff so that mobile devices can be used more effectively in teaching and learning English. The adoption of mobile devices has potentially far-reaching consequences for learners, learning design and how learning is supported by teachers and advisors. So for students to achieve the effectiveness of any mobile-assisted language learning , mobile pedagogy should be taken into consideration for teachers to support students' effective and careful use of mobile devices.

Qian & Tang (2018) demonstrate that students' main motivation for engaging in mobile-assisted English learning is to fill in the gaps in their daily schedule in order to maximize available time, and the majority use mobile devices to support formal course learning.This study also reveals that teachers play a very limited role as perceived by students, while students expect more support from teachers for their out-of-class mobile-assisted language learning. The authors have also introduced that there are a few studies on user's attitudes[3], perceptions and factors influencing learners' acceptance of mobile devices for language learning. The majority of studies have focused on the feasibility of a specific application and its effectiveness of certain language skills such as speaking and vocabulary acquisition.

The above literature review suggest to me that mobile device are widely used for English learning and many researches have been published over the past two decades that has seen the field of MALL develop. And according to Kukulska-Hulme's mobile pedagogy project, student's out of class MALL learning need teacher's effective support[4]. Moverover, in the research of Qian & Tang (2018), the study filled the gap in the field on how and why adult distance language learners of English in China use mobile devices; what apps and resources they use and why; and their attitudes towards the tutor's role in MALL. However, it seems that few research have be reported for the young primary school students to use a mobile device for English learning, since young learner always lack of self-discipline, so how they use mobile device to learn English out of class? Is learning effective and achieving some improvement? Do they get some feedback from these learning? What's their attitudes towards this extra learning at home by mobile learning and how teacher support their mobile-assisted language learning by using mobile devices through an app? Therefore, my current research will try to focus on young students' learning feedback, including students and their parents' attitudes or views, factors that influenced learners' acceptance of by using mobile device through an app "We Speak", and teacher's feedback and perceptions towards this app's learning[5]. This current research is important for teachers to have a better understanding about how the young students using mobile devices to improve their language learning outside class, and for students' parents they can better know the process of this learning so as to better support and cooperate with the teachers to achieve an effective learning.

In the following section, I'll present my research question and methodology.

4. Research Proposal
4.1 Context and Research Questions
This study is undertaken in the Asia-Pacific Experimental School of Beijing Normal University. The course offered on the app "We Speak" which is a multimedia teaching materials app developed according to the compilation of curriculum standards and can be used both in the classroom and at home. This app designed by the developer aims to help students to improve the ability of listening comprehension and oral expression around the topic and is fit to primary school students with zero basic English ability from grade one to grade two students[6].

The overall aim of this study is to investigate how mobile learning impact on the primary's school young students' learning and whether they get some effective improvement by this informal learning through the app "We Speak". I designed the below two specific questions:

RQ1: What are the students and their parents' attitudes or views of learning English from this app via mobile devices?

RQ2: What's the teachers' perception towards this app's learning outside class in terms of achieving their teaching curriculum objective and how?

4.2 Research Design
This study will be undertaken with grade one English learning course offered by the app "We Speak".The learning course shall be from Unit 1 to Unit 5 with 4 level courses: 1A , 1B, 2A and 2B according to the learning curriculum for one semester. Students are required to study about 4 level courses in one semester (each level course extended for 1 month about 4 weeks). The assessment of experimental learning will include the app's automatic evaluation of dynamic scores according to the learning index graph formed in the app based on students' monthly learning time, learning days, scores and the same classroom's ranking list. And the assessment also consists of formative assessment in the form of unit-based assessment and final assessment in the form of a final exam after one semester's learning[7]. The design of the experimental learning will provide the results and give some implications to the teachers for their mobile pedagogy. The experimental learning will extend for one semester from the beginning of September 2019 to the end of January 2020.

4.3 Research Method
Kukulska-Hulme(2012) puts forward the seven questions for the analysis of MALL data or for interviewing participants for MALL research projects. The seven questions for MALL analysis include: "What is the interviewee trying to learn? How is the interviewee doing this learning? Who else is involved in the interviewee's learning? Which mobile devices support the learning? What is the interviewee's motivation or need? Where is the locations, the favorite places? And When: times of the day, patterns of use ". The formulation of these seven questions in the questionnaire, the email interview questions and the analysis of data are guided by these

seven questions will help to answer the research questions of this study[8].

Therefore, a mixed-methods research approach combining both quantitative and qualitative studies will be undertaken.

Quantitative Methodology:

A student questionnaire will be designed to cover the above seven questions, students' basic information, English learning history and pattern (scheduled or spontaneous), familiarity with the app and their feedback of learning from this app "We Speak" so as to diagnose their English language proficiency, their learning feeling and results by using mobile devices to learn or practice English.

Qualitative Methodology:

Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with the participating teachers focusing mainly on their feedback of experimental teaching with this supplementary learning from this app, particularly on their perceptions towards students' learning from the app to support and enhance their teaching objective. And the email interview questions covering the above research questions and seven questions proposed by Kukulska-Hulme will be sent to the students and their parents for questionnaire so as to better know the students' learning feedback by using of this app. These two ways of interviews will be the guide to better help answer the above research questions.

4.4 Research Participants

The participants of the study shall be approximately 105 students from 3 classes in grade one, and all the students are from a noted primary school: Asia-Pacific Experimental School of Beijing Normal University (I intend to design my research in this school since my child is also studying in this school). The students are all the new enrollment students in grade one aged 6 or 7 years old and all the students with nearly zero English basic level (maybe some students have already learnt some English outside the class, I'll try to avoid this kind of students to participate). And 10 parents whose children completed the online questionnaire volunteered to be interviewed through the email, each parent corresponding to each student.

The three participating teachers shall be from three classes, who all have MA degrees or above degree in either Applied Linguistics or English Language Education, having been teaching English for grade one students more than 5 years, and are keen on using technology in teaching and are familiar with the usage of the app "We Speak".

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Three different kinds of data collections shall be used: online survey questionnaire and follow-up interviews with parents and face-to-face interview with teachers.

The online survey questionnaire is prepared in Chinese and sent to approximately 105 students, questionnaire will be total 10 questions including above research questions and seven questions Kukulska-Hulme proposed: " 1.How often do you use this app for English learning? 2.What's your views of learning English from this app, is it effective? 3.Do your teacher assign homework for you to complete every day by learning through this app? 4.What are you trying to learn? 5.How are you using this app for learning ? 6.Who else is involved in your learning? 7.Which mobile devices support your learning?(iPad, mobile phone or computer) 8. What is your motivation or need by using this app? 9.Where is your favorite places for this mobile learning? And 10.When do you usually use this app for learning? ". Considering these young students, their parents can help them to complete this questionnaire to some extent[9].

The 10 student parents whose kids completed the online questionnaire are volunteered to be interviewed so that we can get more insured and correct information from students' using of this app. The email interviews comprised five open-ended questions in Chinese intended to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences in terms of the perceived benefits and drawbacks of mobile devices in their learning: " 1.Why do you prefer this apps to others? 2. Do you think your kids English is improved through this mobile learning? Is it effective? 3. How do you want the school teacher to support your kid's using of this mobile learning? 4. Do your kids like this kind of mobile learning? Is it interesting for them? 5. Do you think what else should be done or improved for this mobile learning? ". All these 10 parents replied to the questions by email with some degree of detailed information.

In addition, three teachers will be interviewed for the three targeted question: " 1. How do you use this app to support your teaching curriculum objectives ? 2. Do you think is it effective for students to use this app for extra time learning and how do they improve their English ? 3.What's the benefit and drawback from students' using of this app, what else do you think should be done for improvement ". And teachers response can give some implication for the mobile pedagogy and provide suggestions for the need of training about intergarting MALL into their teaching curriculum objective[10].

Finally, quantitative descriptive analysis will be carried out for analyzing the objective questions in the questionnaire survey to provide us with an initial broad picture of the research questions we wanted to answer. Some descriptive statistics will be generated by the online survey tool itself. And qualitative data from the interviews both with parents' and teachers'' responses to the questions in the survey will be analyzed manually. All this will be also integrated with the information of the participants for the focused research questions.

4.6 Anticipated Research Results and Progress

It is expected that this research will indicate the positive and effective learning feedback from this app's extra time learning. Students feel interesting by learning through this app and can improve their English speaking and listening if they insist to practicing and learning through this app via mobile devices. For parents, the biggest advantage of MALL is that it could help their kids to study whenever and wherever they would like to, then they can accompany their children for this learning to get a more effective learning achievement according to their own time. For teachers, they can arrange the learning tasks for the students' extra time learning through this app outside class and can support their teaching by intergarting MALL into their teaching curriculum objective to achieve specific teaching/learning tasks of mobile pedagogy, and simultaneously, students' English skill will be improved to some extent. The finding anticipates that for the primary school students participate in this study, mobile learning has become a very important part of their learning process, moreover the benefits and effective feedback they obtained by learning from this app via mobile devices indicate

that students have made great progress through this mobile-assisted language learning.

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