TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF MOBILE – ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ENHANCING LEARNERS' ENGLISH VOCABULARY AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN VIETNAM

Nguyen Thi Dieu Ha[1*], Do Phuong Thanh[2]
[1]*TNU - School of Foreign Languages*
[2]*Cam Pha High school - Quang Ninh province*

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 17/5/2022
Revised: 14/6/2022
Published: 14/6/2022

KEYWORDS

Mobile – Assisted Language Learning
Language learning
Mobile technology
Mobile device
Learning approach

ABSTRACT

This paper intends to highlight a 21st - century educational shift: the advent of Mobile – Assisted Language Learning (MALL) as a new language learning approach. The main focus is on how high school students in Quang Ninh province update themselves by using mobile technology to support their English language level, particularly in terms of vocabulary acquisition. It also tries to figure out how students learn a language by using mobile devices, and understand more about how teachers and students apply mobile technology in their daily practice. In order to investigate the use of MALL in English language teaching, a questionnaire for students and an interview for teachers were used to collect data. The study used experimental investigation method. The collected data presents that both teachers and students agreed that mobile devices were good tools for improving vocabulary knowledge. The value of MALL vocabulary activities were demonstrated to have a favorable impact on students' English achievement by assisting them in various courses. The teachers were also aware of the usefulness of mobile devices as new educational instruments for teaching various language abilities.

NHẬN THỨC CỦA GIÁO VIÊN VÀ HỌC SINH VỀ VIỆC NÂNG CAO VỐN TỪ VỰNG CỦA HỌC SINH THÔNG QUA HỌC NGÔN NGỮ TRÊN THIẾT BỊ DI ĐỘNG TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG Ở VIỆT NAM

Nguyễn Thị Diệu Hà[1*], Đỗ Phương Thanh[2]
[1]*Trường Ngoại ngữ - ĐH Thái Nguyên*
[2]*Trường THPT Cẩm Phả, Quảng Ninh*

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO

Ngày nhận bài: 17/5/2022
Ngày hoàn thiện: 14/6/2022
Ngày đăng: 14/6/2022

TỪ KHÓA

Học ngôn ngữ trên thiết bị di động
Học ngôn ngữ
Công nghệ di động
Thiết bị di động
Đường hướng học tập

TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này tập trung vào việc làm sáng tỏ sự thay đổi của giáo dục trong thế kỷ 21: sự ra đời của việc học ngôn ngữ với sự hỗ trợ của các thiết bị di động (MALL) như một phương pháp học ngôn ngữ mới. Trọng tâm của nghiên cứu là tìm hiểu xem làm thế nào học sinh trung học phổ thông ở tỉnh Quảng Ninh nâng cao trình độ tiếng Anh, đặc biệt là nâng cao từ vựng thông qua việc sử dụng công nghệ di động . Bên cạnh đó, nghiên cứu cũng cố gắng hiểu thêm về cách học sinh học ngôn ngữ bằng thiết bị di động và phương pháp cả giáo viên và học sinh sử dụng công nghệ di động trong thực hành học tập hàng ngày. Để điều tra việc sử dụng MALL trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh, một bảng câu hỏi khảo sát dành cho học sinh và câu hỏi phỏng vấn dành cho giáo viên đã được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu khảo sát thực nghiệm. Dữ liệu thu thập được chứng minh rằng cả giáo viên và học sinh đều đồng ý rằng thiết bị di động là công cụ hiệu quả để nâng cao từ vựng. Giá trị của các hoạt động từ vựng qua việc học với các thiết bị đã chứng minh ảnh hưởng tích cực đến thành tích học tiếng Anh của học sinh bằng cách hỗ trợ các em trong các khóa học khác nhau. Giáo viên dạy tiếng Anh cũng nhận thức được sự hữu ích của thiết bị di động như một công cụ giáo dục mới để dạy các kỹ năng ngôn ngữ khác nhau.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.5997

[*] Corresponding author. *Email: dieuha.sfl@tnu.edu.vn*

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, education is becoming more and more dynamic due to the widespread of globalization. The rapid growth in the field of technology has undoubtedly revolutionized the whole area of education. It has also encouraged the use of new and innovative ways of producing and exchanging information for the purpose of communication and socialization. Different devices and modes for learning and teaching in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have emerged due to technological advancement such as smartphones, laptop, multimedia, iPod, e-learning, e-reading, video-calls etc. Now learners feel more confident in the use of technology not only for the purpose of education but also for socialization and entertainment.

Several studies were conducted to examine the effect of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) on English as a foreign language (EFL) writing; others such as: Cresswell & Miller (2000) [1], Abedi et al., (2010) [2], Diab (2010) [3], Mukundan et. al (2011) [4], Wakabayashi (2013) [5], and Kalman (2015) [6].

With the tremendous growth of mobile technologies, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has become increasingly common. It is significant to recognize that exploring the effectiveness of MALL in enhancing learners' vocabulary acquisition is not a fully independent field. In addition to its obvious relation to second language acquisition (SLA), Stockwell and Hubbard (2013) claimed that MALL depends on two major bodies which are mobile learning and computer-assisted language learning [7].

Therefore, MALL is considered as a subset of the emerging field mobile learning and CALL. Mobile-assisted Language Learning describes an approach to language learning that is assisted through the use of handheld or palmtop technologies [8]. This new wave of educational technology uses a wide range of mobile devices. Kukulska-Hulme and Shield [9] explicate that unlike CALL, MALL opts for a variety of handheld technologies, often with internet connection, ranging from ultra-portable laptops and handhelds to smartphones, mobile phones, MP3 and MP4 players, digital voice recorders and cameras. Thus, mobile-assisted language learning is a branch of technology-enhanced learning which can be implemented in many studies on the effectiveness of MALL in EFL learners' Vocabulary Acquisition. In fact, MALL has the potential to assist learners and to reinforce their learning process at the exact point of need and in ways that are congruent with the learner's lifestyle [9]. MALL then gives EFL learners the opportunity to learn languages both inside and outside a classroom.

While many external factors may affect learning languages through mobile devices, some internal ones also do have an effect. Indeed, affective factors play a crucial role in both enhancing and hindering the learning process; in which mobile devices may be both motivating and demotivating tools. Some learners may be influenced by personal previous experiences, particularly bad ones, or even by other learners' experiences, so they would shape negative attitudes and perceptions towards integrating mobile technologies in language learning. Six motivational features were presented by Isroff, et al. (2006), including control over goals, ownership, fun, communication, learning in-context, and continuity between contexts (cited in [10]).

There are variety of effects of applying MALL on teaching vocabulary. Due to their size and weight, mobile technologies can be taken to different places at anytime. When compared to PCs, devices used in MALL are more lightweight. Thus, they are more practical and provide the opportunity to bring new technology into the classroom as well as outside the classroom. Besides, the mobile technologies provide learning at the time we want, and in the place we want. That is, mobile learning lies for Just-in-Time-and-Place learning where web browsing and applications can provide instantaneous information to a learner's fingertips in moments.

Another effect is that mobile device are readily available. This new wave of technology continues to spread among the world population due to the unlimited functions the mobile devices provide. Moreover, mobile devices are typically less expensive than PCs and laptops, which makes them affordable for language learners. This affordance consolidates bridging the

digital divide. Mobile learning facilitates learner interaction with teachers; administration, and amongst peers. MALL also enhances learners' engagement because it fits different learning styles and enables learners to partake in learning activities.

Furthermore, learners get motivated when they experience now tools. The widespread ownership of different mobile devices increases commitment to using and learning from them because learners feel secure and spontaneous. According to the communication features of mobile devices, learners can work on collaboration among each other. For instance, several learners at different locations may perform the same activity. They can share files, multimedia, apps, and so many learning materials. Last but not least, mobile technologies may assist learners with disabilities. The different innovative technologies can be integrated in special educational needs. However, mobile learning activities may vary depending on the learner disability and its degree.

Besides the benefits, MALL also faces related challenges. Those challenges may differ from one device to another. Mehdipour and Zerehkafi [11] discussed Mobile learning (Mlearning) barriers from different angles which are summarized as follows:

Technical Barriers: Mlearning poses a number of technical challenges. First of all, battery life of mobile devices and connectivity are at the top of challenges. Most of the time, learners have to limit their online connection times, while sometimes they may not have internet at all. In addition, screen size, key size, and limited audiovisual quality may cause visual problems to learners while performing activities delivered in small chunks.

Educational Barriers: Mlearning still faces some educational and social challenges that decelerate its integration within teaching and learning process. Firstly, funding and affordability still are one of the obstacles faced in using mobile devices in education. For instance, so M-educational applications require paying a sum of money. Few learners may pay, while others are not able to take in charge the high costs. In addition, developing the appropriate theory for Mlearning activities may be a challenge for practitioners. Last but not least, another challenge that may be ignored is that Mlearning can be risk of distraction for learners. Mlearning may disrupt learner's academic achievement because of misuse of devices and applications. Nevertheless, with the rapid growth in innovative technologies, companies try to improve the mobile devices features to suit the various fields.

As far as vocabulary is concerned, MALL becomes increasingly used among both teachers and learners as a tool to scaffold their English proficiency level. Vocabulary acquisition, considered as the building block of any language, has become the topic of interest for English learners because the more they acquires new words, the more they effectively communicate. Therefore, the paper aims at investigating how learners of Cam Pha high school update themselves to use mobile technologies to support their English language levels. It also attempts to explore how learners learn vocabulary with mobile devices, and the ways in which teachers and learners use mobile technology in their daily learning practices.

Given the importance of vocabulary acquisition in foreign language learning and the opportunities that MALL provides, the paper attempts to find answers for the following questions:

- How often do learners at Cam Pha high school use their mobile devices as vocabulary learning tools?
- How do learners at Cam Pha high school perceive the usefulness of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, particularly mobile vocabulary activities, in assisting their vocabulary acquisition?
- How do teachers at Cam Pha high school perceive the use of mobile devices in teaching/learning process, namely as a vocabulary teaching/learning tool?

2. Research methods

To answer the research questions, the needed data were collected by two means. First, a learners' questionnaire was administered to thirty (30) learners at Cam Pha high school. Second, a teachers' interview was provided to three (03) EFL teachers at Cam Pha high school.

In the teachers' interview, 3 teachers whose experience of technology especially mobile devices is good enough were chosen to provide with their using Mobile - Assisted Language Learning in order to develop the EFL teaching and learning practice.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1. Results from questionnaire for students

3.1.1. Students' frequency of learning via mobile devices

Questions 8-18 were created to investigate how students at Cam Pha high school perceived the usefulness of mobile-assisted learning. Due to the COVID - 19 pandemic, hardly any students have ever studied via mobile devices. However, the data collected for this study focus on the normal situation.

About the frequency of learning via mobile devices, all of the students have used mobile-assisted learning. It could be inferred that thanks to technological developments, students could find useful features of mobile devices. Specifically, two-thirds of the respondents said they often learned via mobile devices. Three students even claimed that they always used mobile devices to learn English. The remaining seven students rarely used mobile-assisted learning when studying English (Figure 1).

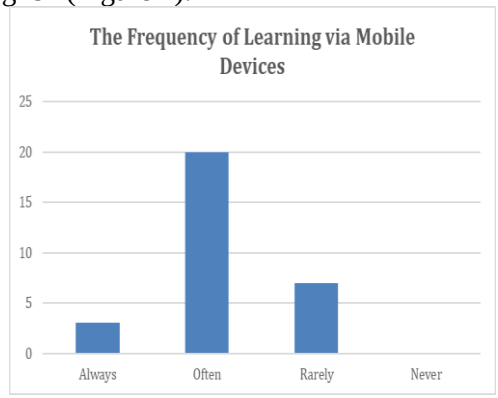

Figure 1. *The frequency of learning via mobile devices*

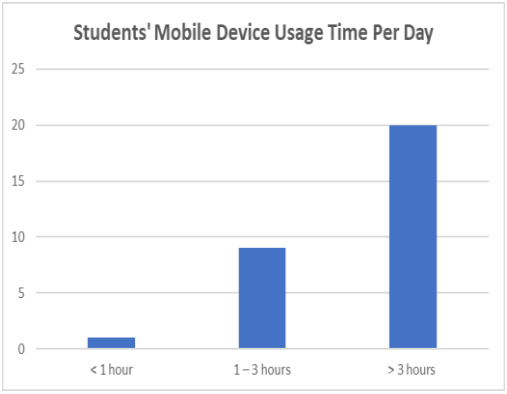

Figure 2. *Students' mobile device usage time per day*

Discussing the time of using mobile devices to learn English, 16 students said they learned English with their mobile devices when they had the opportunities to do so. 5 students said they just used mobile-assisted learning when they were asked to do it. The same number used mobile learned English via mobile devices when they had free time. It could be seen that for most of the students, mobile devices had become a useful assistant. That could be explained for the fact that over half of them used mobile devices whenever they could (Figure 2).

3.1.2. Students' perception of learning vocabulary via mobile devices

When being asked about the advantages of learning via mobile devices, no students denied its advantages. The ability to learn anywhere anytime was selected by the highest number of the respondents. At the second place were practical use and portability. A small number of students considered costs as the barrier for them to learn via mobile devices. There were still students (despite making up a minor percentage) who claimed that there were no disadvantages of learning via mobile devices.

As can be seen from Figure 3, among the 6 provided aspects of the English language, most of the students would like to improve their vocabulary size when using mobile devices. It could be inferred that mobile devices offered a wide range of features for learners to better their vocabulary knowledge. Other aspects of language were also selected, but they accounted for a small number. Reading was not preferable with no vote.

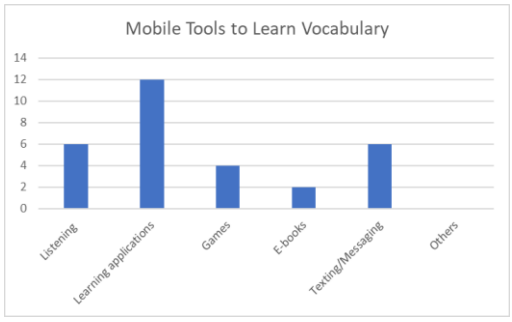

Figure 3. *Students' mobile tools to learn vocabulary*

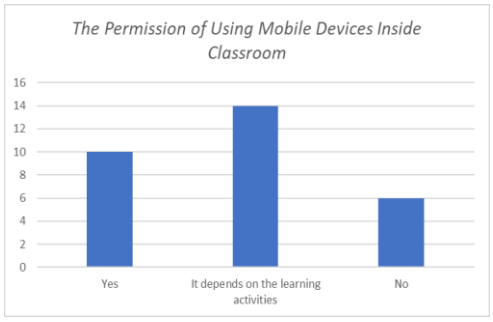

Figure 4. *The permission of using mobile devices inside classroom*

Figure 4 shows that the respondents tended to use mobile-assisted learning when studying English so it is worth knowing whether they were allowed to use their devices in their classroom. One-third of the students said mobile devices were allowed to use in their classroom. A higher number said the teachers would allow them to use mobile devices for certain types of activities. The remaining one-fifth of the students said they were not allowed to use mobile devices inside classroom. It could be seen that the implementation of mobile-assisted learning has been done asynchronously among teachers.

It is clear from Figure 5 that vocabulary was selected as the number-one aspect of English language that the respondents would like to improve when learning it via mobile devices. The author would like to find out the number of respondents who have used mobile devices to learn new vocabulary. Only 7 out of 30 respondents said they did not learn new vocabulary items via mobile devices while more than two-thirds of them used mobile devices to acquire new vocabulary items.

The top reason why students would like to use mobile-assisted learning is that mobile devices are integrated with a wide selection of tools. The most common tool selected by students to learn vocabulary was learning applications. Listening and Text Messaging came second. 4 students claimed that they used games to learn vocabulary. E-books were the least favorite choice.

Mobile learning has become more popular among students, according to Figure 6's statistics. The main reason is that students appreciate the functions offered by mobile-assisted learning. The number of students who strongly agreed and agreed on the usefulness of mobile devices accounted for two-thirds of the respondents. Only 4 students did not agree and 5 others had neutral ideas. It could be inferred that most of the students realized the different features of learning vocabulary through mobile devices that are not available via traditional means. In addition, learning vocabulary with mobile devices was claimed to be effective by a majority of the students. Only one student denied the effectiveness of mobile learning and four others could not decide. In accordance with their perceptions of mobile learning's effectiveness, 90% of the students could see their development in vocabulary size thanks to mobile devices. Only one student did not agree and two others stayed neutral. When they had chances to evaluate their own ability, two-thirds of the respondents claimed that their vocabulary was developed.

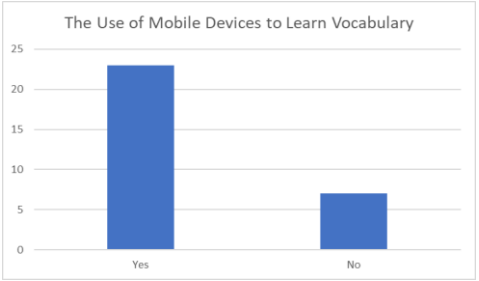

Figure 5. *The use of mobile devices to learn vocabulary*

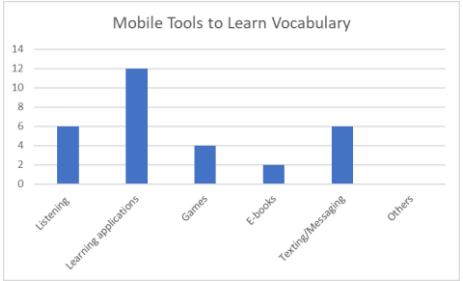

Figure 6. *Students' mobile tools to learn vocabulary*

From Figure 7, like students, mobile-assisted learning was used widely among teachers. 70% of the respondents said that their teachers used mobile devices to teach vocabulary, over twice as many as the teachers who did not use mobile-assisted learning when teaching vocabulary. Although those teachers did not account for a large number, there should be a solution to encourage the use of mobile devices as a teaching tool in classrooms.

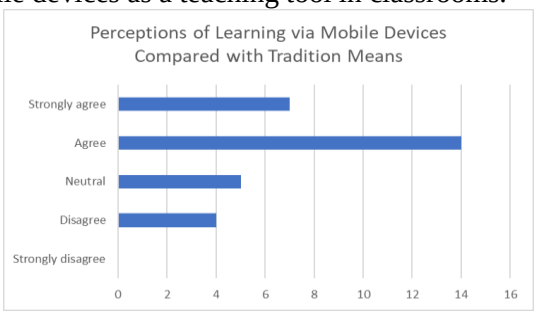

Figure 7. *Students' perceptions of learning vocabulary items via mobile devices compared with tradition means*

When being asked for further recommendations related to English learning, most of the students suggested that their teachers allow them to use mobile devices during English lessons. Through the facts and the students' expectations, the author could see the urgent need of having feasible solutions to make mobile-assisted learning become synchronously and effectively among classes and schools so that students could make better progress in learning English.

3.2. Results from teachers' interview

The teachers' interview aims to collect different teachers' attitudes towards MALL. In addition, the interview seeks to explore how teachers adapt themselves to the new educational wave. The analysis and interpretation of the results are as followings:

1. Do you use your mobile devices to improve your lesson? If yes, in what ways do you do that?

The purpose of this question is to find out how much teachers are aware of how they use their mobile devices in the classroom and what activities they do with them. All of the three teachers said that they used their mobile devices to improve their lessons. Although the number of activities was not the same and the types of activities varied, it could be seen that mobile learning also had its certain role in the teacher's teaching process.

2. When do you allow your students to use their mobile devices inside the classroom?

The question aimed at finding out the teachers' attitude towards students' mobile device usage inside classrooms. All the teachers allowed their students to use their mobile devices in the classroom. Overall, teachers' attitudes towards the students' use of mobile devices were tolerant.

3. How do you think about the use of mobile devices as tools to teach vocabulary and other aspects of English?

The author raised this question in order to know more about the teachers' perceptions of using mobile devices as teaching tools to teach different aspects.

As could be seen from the scripts, all of the teachers highly valued mobile devices. They could give a list of the benefits offered by mobile devices, namely memorizing vocabulary, checking writing mistakes, practicing pronunciation, creating a language environment, developing language skills, and understanding new vocabulary items.

4. Do you use any mobile activities to teach during this school year? If yes, what are they?

This question was raised to identify whether or not mobile activities were used and the specific activities organized by teachers during the school year.

Teacher A and Teacher B use mobile devices in their classes, as described; however, the usage of mobile devices was limited to a few activities, such as "meaning" and "definitions".

Teacher C, on the other hand, did not use mobile activities in her classes. This could be because teachers were unaware of the vast array of activities that can be created and delivered using various mobile devices.

5. In your opinion, how important is a mobile-assisted language learning in teaching English as a foreign language in general and teaching vocabulary in particular?

This question intends to learn how teachers think about the value of MALL as a language learning technique, in addition to gauging teachers' views on the usage of mobile devices as teaching instruments.

Mobile technology is extremely significant in teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language, according to all of the teachers. Teachers A and B stated that mobile devices are currently available and that they motivate pupils, which are two benefits to make use of. Teacher C, on the other hand, brought out an important point about adopting mobile technologies: the need to "understand the exact usage" of the devices in order to guide both teachers and students in utilizing this new type of instructional technology.

All the teachers shared the same idea that mobile technology is very important in teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language. Teachers A and B reported that mobile devices are already available and motivate students, which are two advantages to exploit. On the other hand, Teacher C shed light on a significant point in using mobile technologies; that is, "well instructed by teachers" so that both teachers and students can exploit this new kind of educational technology.

4. Conclusions

The findings revealed that students own various types of mobile devices. Mobile-assisted learning was also proven to be beneficial to help students improve their language skills, particularly their vocabulary development. MALL vocabulary activities penetrated both teachers' and learners' own teaching and learning processes, according to the study.

Students' use of mobile devices to learn English at Cam Pha high school revealed a combination of formal and informal learning styles. However, there was a trend toward informal learning as a way to make use of mobile devices' benefits. The informality of using mobile devices to study vocabulary was attributable to the fact that students were motivated by handheld gadgets. Besides, students had a very good attitude toward learning vocabulary through their mobile devices. Instructors' attitudes toward the use, acceptance, and implementation of mobile devices as instructional aides were overwhelmingly positive, demonstrating their understanding of the significance of staying current with the latest educational innovations.

Finally, the study has illuminated mobile devices as an emergent instructional tool with limitless potential. Furthermore, mobile devices can be used by teachers as stimulating teaching aids.

REFERENCES

[1] J. W. Creswell and D. L. Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," *Theory into Practice*, vol. 39, pp. 124-130, 2000. [Online]. Available: https://www.scirp.org/(S(lz5mqp453ed%20snp55rrgjct55))/reference/referencespapers.aspx?referenceid=1564553. [Accessed October 20, 2021].

[2] J. Abedi and J. L. Herman, "Assessing English language learners' opportunity to learn mathematics: issues and limitations," *Teachers College Record*, vol. 112, pp. 723-746, 2010. [Online]. Available: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203181287.ch3. [Accessed October 20, 2021].

[3] N. M. Diab, "Effects of peer-editing versus self-editing on students' revision of language errors in revised drafts," *System*, vol. 38, pp. 85-95, 2010. [Online]. Available: https://www.iiis.org/cds2010/cd2010sci/ispr_2010/paperspdf/va909up.pdf. [Accessed October 20, 2021].

[4] J. Mukundan, V. Nimehchisalem, and R. Hajimohammadi, "Developing an English language textbook evaluation checklist: A focus group study," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 1, no. 12, pp. 100-105, 2011. [Online]. Available: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Developing-an-English-Language-Textbook-Evaluation-Mukundan-Nimehchisalem/c8269e94e4e12f800c60ba9ef5884a0d4d25b9e5. [Accessed October 15, 2021].

[5] R. Wakabayashi, "The Effects of the Peer Feedback Process on Reviewers' Own Writing," *Canadian Center of Science and Education*, vol. 6, no. 9, pp. 117-192, 2013. [Online]. Available: http://academypublication.com/issues2/tpls/vol05/11/08.pdf. [Accessed October 10, 2021].

[6] Y. M. Kalman, G. Kavé, and D. Umanski, "Writing in a Digital World: Self-Correction While Typing in Younger and Older Adults," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 12, no. 10, pp. 12723-12734, 2015. [Online]. Available: https://www.academia.edu/32348781/The_Effect_of_Mobile_Phone_Applications_on_Improving_EFL_Learners_Self-editing. [Accessed January 20, 2022].

[7] G. Stockwell and P. Hubbard, "Some emerging principles for mobile-assisted language learning," Monterey, CA: The International Research Foundation for English Language Education, 2013. [Online]. Available: http://www.tirfonline.org/english-in-the-workforce/mobile-assisted-language-learning. [Accessed September 27, 2021].

[8] K. E. Valarmathi, "Mobile-assisted language learning," *Journal of Technology for ELT*, 2011. [Online]. Available: https://sites.google.com/site/journaloftechnologyforelt/archive/april2011/mobileassisted languagelearning. [Accessed September 27, 2021].

[9] A. Kukulska-Hulme and L. Shield, "An overview of mobile-assisted language learning: From content delivery to supported collaboration and interaction," *Recall*, 2008b, doi: 10.1017/S0958344008000335. [Online]. Available: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/recall /article/abs/an-overview-of-mobile-assisted-language-learning-from-content-delivery-to-supported-collaboration-and-interaction/55FE8FC0F278B5A2E55A8501F059F14C. [Accessed November 12, 2021].

[10] M. Sharples (Ed.), "Big issues in mobile learning," *Technology-Enhanced Learning, Principles and Products.* Heidelberg, Germany: Springer, pp. 233–249, 2006. [Online]. Available: http://oro.open.ac.uk/31416/. [Accessed December 12, 2021].

[11] Y. Mehdipour and H. Zerehkafi, "Mobile Learning for Education: Benefits and Challenges," *International Journal of Computational Engineering Research*, vol. 3, no. 6, pp. 93-101, 2013. [Online]. Available: http://www.ijceronline.com/papers/Vol3_issue6/part%203/P03630930100.pdf. [Accessed November 10, 2021].