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The Effectiveness of Applying MALL in Improving Students' Language Skills in Learning a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

Technology plays a significant role in assisting both language teachers and students to access materials for foreign language learning, communicating with other colleagues, and learning inside and outside the classroom. It provides useful instruments to facilitate the process of learning. Students are encouraged to learn by using mobile assisted language learning (MALL) such as texting via instant messaging application (Whatsapp, Messenger and Telegram).

Keywords: language teachers, instruments, mobile assisted language learning (MALL)

INTRODUCTION

Technology plays a fundamental role in developing one's language ability (Ersoy & Ersoy, 2013). It is mainly because the rapid development in technology (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012, p.2) transforms the way individuals to acquire, apply and spread knowledge (Ersoy & Ersoy, 2013; Wang, 2005). In addition, the implementation of technology in language learning has provided a new shape to learning and the idea of learning has taken on a completely new form. Additionally, students are encouraged to be more autonomous in improving their skills. However, the use of technology in teaching a foreign language in Indonesia is still limited (Hidayati, 2016). As a result, it affects students' ability in language learning. In this paper, the author discusses the effectiveness of applying mobile assisted language learning (MALL) to enhance learners' language ability in learning English as a foreign language specifically about vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speaking and listening. The author also gives reflection about his context.

There are some strengths and weaknesses of MALL. The use of MALL is perceived as a suitable resolution to language learning constraints or barriers in respects of time and place (Burston, 2014). It is because MALL provides an opportunity for language learners to access the materials ubiquitously, (Kondo et al., 2012; Miangah & Nezarat, 2012). In other words, students do not need to attend the class to learn because they can get access to the lesson materials anywhere and learn effectively. Equally, White and Gillard (as cited in Terantino, 2016) propose that by considering the budget barriers and inadequate resources in respects to language learning, schools need transforming into games, simulations, and applications for mobile devices as appropriate sources to increase both language learning and teaching.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative approach was employed in carrying out this research. It was concentrated on literature reviews based on academic publications such as books and journal articles selected through database searches as well as other proper sources of information (e.g. reports and websites). Additional information was taken based on the author's experience as an English teacher.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

FL Vocabulary Learning via MALL

Several studies recommend that the use of technology such as MALL to enhance students' skill in vocabulary is a practical method specifically for foreign language learners (Altiner, 2011). In line with that, Kassem (2018:1) and Miangah & Nezarat (2012:6), state that the use of mobile phones brings about constructive impacts on learning a foreign language, specifically in the improvement of students' vocabulary and motivation to learn. The following activities in teaching vocabulary to language learners taken from Kassem (2018) and Miangah & Nezarat (2012).

The activity presented above cannot be applied effectively in the author's context due to an insufficient facility (ACDP, 2014; Rinantanti et al., 2017) such as the internet. The internet connection in Papua (Indonesia) still becomes a critical issue (West Papua, 2018) facing by both the students and teachers. Sometimes the internet connection will be available and sometimes not. Even if it is available, the access to a webpage can take more time. That is the main reason why the integration of technology that requires an internet connection cannot be applied effectively. Consequently, the teachers may not have known about the applications that can be used to improve students' learning (for example Quizlet) because they are unable to access the internet. This could create a barrier in teaching and learning language activity. For example, by having limited access to the internet, the teachers cannot introduce and spur the student to learn vocabulary by using mobile phones. This should be taken into account by the education leaders in Papua to address this issue as soon as possible and provide sufficient facility of the internet.

FL Grammar Learning via MALL

It is believed that language learners acquire foreign language abilities better when teaching activities are concentrated on grammar (Norris & Ortega, 2006). Some studies disclose the benefits of MALL in improving students' skill in grammar (Basoglu, 2010). In other words, as one of the significant features in a language, grammar plays a vital role in developing language learners' skills in a foreign language. The activity below is taken from Miangah & Nezarat (2012) and Khodabandeh et al. (n.d). According to Miangah & Nezarat (2012:7), grammar can be learned via a precisely designed program installed on mobile devices, in which grammatical principles are taught or learnt. Multiple-choice activity is presented, and language learners require to choose the right answers from the optional answers provided. Grammatical activities designed in two types, 'true-false' and 'fill-in the blanks' that should be answered by them. Grammatical explanations might be given through short message service.

From the author's perspective, this activity is helpful and can be utilised as well. It is beneficial and easy to be accessed by the students because they only need to install the program to their mobile phones and it does not require internet connection as well. However, in designing the activity, the teacher should be more rigorous to create the task especially in selecting the materials that will be used (Khodabandeh et al., n.d). The teacher should be able to observe the materials provided in the program and assure that it is authentic and reliable (Brown, 2004) for teaching the students. Otherwise, language learners might be unable to take the task successfully. It is because some less competent teachers may not check or observe the materials or tools that will be used to teach beforehand. Therefore, to prevent this situation to appear, the schools should provide teacher training particularly about the use of mobile phones to learn a foreign language. This would be suitable to expand language teachers' knowledge about MALL and how to use it correctly.

FL Pronunciation Learning via MALL

In pronunciation learning, Miangah & Nezarat (2012) design a useful activity as follow. The students are introduced to a new program or dictionary application that can be easily installed to mobile phones. The app has sound functions. In doing the task, the learners can utilise the audio feature in order to learn about the appropriate pronunciation of new words, to meet their learning demands. The students

then are asked to record their voice so that the teacher can be easily found out their problems in pronunciation. They are also encouraged to consult their dictionary to perceive the proper

Dealing with this issue, the author gives several suggestions. First, the schools in Papua should improve the facility concerning internet access to help the students to learn effectively using MALL applications. Thus, the school leader should address this problem in no time to allow the students to access the internet and learn more from it. Second, learning language via mobile phones should be included in the curriculum so it can be applied effectively to help the teachers in enhancing students' language ability. It is essential to raise awareness about the role of mobile phones as instruments that can be used to teach students, especially in this case language learners. Third, language teachers should be equipped with a basic knowledge of both analog and digital technology (Jeong, & Hmelo-Silver, 2016) that can be used to teach a foreign language. As the source of knowledge, the teachers need to be qualified in using a variety of learning instruments to teach. Therefore, teacher training should always be held to meet the demands.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, based on the discussion above, MALL has brought so many positive things in assisting language learners in learning and improving their language abilities such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speaking and listening. Hence, it is necessarily important for language teachers to create a new learning environment in Papua by using MALL.

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