

MALL tools tried and tested

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Abstract. In 2013, Stockwell and Hubbard published an article on emerging principles in Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). In that article, they mentioned three issues that could perhaps impede learning in the domains of the physical, pedagogical, and psycho-social. The physical issue they imply, refers to the general size of screens, which at the time were deemed small, or not big enough to have an impact on learning. The pedagogical issue involved with MALL, according to [Stockwell and Hubbard \(2013\)](#), is to ensure that tasks introduced with mobile tools are suited to the affordances of the devices. They questioned the need for mobile devices for language learning and whether tasks that were being introduced were suitable and worthwhile and not simply replicating what could normally be done without them, with pen and paper for example. The psycho-social issue they refer to implies that the primary function of mobile devices is generally regarded as one for “personal and social purposes, as opposed to work or study purposes” (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013, p. 4). In this short paper, we would like to argue this point by introducing seven tools currently available for free on mobile applications that can be adapted to foreign language learning in several ways.

Keywords: mobile assisted language learning, mobile apps for learning, apps for presentations, web tools for EFL.

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1. Introduction

The MALL Special interest Group (SiG) symposium introduced a selection of seven mobile apps, or webtools, that have been tried, tested, and approved by our expert instructors in three different countries. Each tool will be introduced, and key features of each highlighted. This short paper is a summary of the MALL SiG symposium with the same title, held on August 28th, Day 1 of the conference. It should present readers with further details on the benefit that each of these tools can provide the teacher and the student with regards to MALL.

The use of mobile technology, especially with the younger generation, has become second nature and is no doubt ubiquitous in their everyday life. In the education settings in which these trials were conducted, our students though may not yet associate their mobile device as a potential tool that can enhance their learning. Hopefully this short summary will provide you with a list of MALL tools that we know have worked well for us and can help to change the perception of our students.

2. MALL tools

2.1. SpeakingPhoto

The first tool is a free mobile voice recording app called SpeakingPhoto. This tool allows users to record their voice over photos and is perfect as a substitute to class presentations which can take up time and be difficult to manage. SpeakingPhoto can help students who may not appear confident in class when giving presentations by encouraging them to use mobile devices to speak the target language in a more comfortable environment. Recorded presentations can then be saved and uploaded to a Learning Management System (LMS) of your choice, or sent via email. Students who were given the freedom to record in their own time and submit online showed a higher quality of presentation almost every time. A survey after conducting trials indicated that 70% of students (n=162), if given the choice, would prefer to use SpeakingPhoto to record in a location of their choice as opposed to in class presentations.

2.2. Showbie

Showbie allows teachers to instantly distribute written assignments to students and manage them by providing immediate and multimodal feedback (e.g. comments,

voice messages, pictures). The sample of the study consisted of 43 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) secondary school students from Italy. The presentation demonstrated how students and teachers used the app inside and outside the language classroom. Participants were divided into two sections: an iPad group and a pen and paper group. Data was collected through classroom observations, students' written assignments on Showbie, and through individual interviews. Written assignments were analyzed for accuracy and complexity using t-unit measures. Results provide patterns of use and show significant differences between the two groups, mainly related to the potential of the Showbie app and the immediate and personalized feedback that allowed iPad students to easily edit their written assignment based on the teacher's comments. Results indicated that Showbie can help students' overall writing skills with particular attention to vocabulary and complex sentence writing.

2.3. Moxtra

Moxtra is a tool made for collaboration in the business world, but was used by a Tokyo based EFL educator for collecting digital portfolios from students, and for facilitating feedback both directly from a teacher to a student, and collectively between students. Available on all smartphone and computer platforms, the free app is a smooth way for language learners to practice speaking and listening, especially in conjunction with visual aids made for presentations. Students can actively participate in the benefits of multimedia learning (Mayer, 2009) by sharing presentations beyond the classroom. It is especially useful for extending a presentation project outside class time when students have been unable to see everyone else's presentations because they had made presentations in small groups rather than to the whole class. Thus, Moxtra is particularly beneficial when students need a confidence-building environment. Post-class surveys indicated that students enjoyed using the app as a way to practice speaking and learning collaboratively.

2.4. Clips

The fourth tool is a video app produced by Apple called Clips, free on iOS devices. Clips was chosen in this case as it is free and could offer useful language learning skills while also not distracting from the main purpose of the course: to improve oral communication skills with a specific emphasis on fluency, intonation, and non-verbal communication. Students often feel pressured to talk in front of others in class, but this tool allows students to be creative while giving presentations in a setting they feel comfortable with. Clips offers the opportunity to record video using a variety of backgrounds for effect, with the added advantage of any spoken

word being transcribed and displayed on screen. In classes of 25 to 35, students were instructed to use Clips to create short, one to three minute videos about their impressions of various global issues raised in class. These videos were then exchanged online using Blackboard, the university wide LMS. As the majority of students in the setting were iPhone users, the video editing process was very smooth. Access to footage was instant. For Android users though, students used university owned iPads to transfer footage to and create videos with.

2.5. MyMobileWorld

MyMobileWorld (MMW) is a Moodle-based online site ‘optimized for mobile devices’ integrated with the Pearson student textbook series ‘English Firsthand’ . Sixty students were surveyed and five interviewed about their patterns of MMW use and their preferences for desktops or smartphones. Most students felt that MMW was easy to use, well integrated with the textbook, and that it facilitated their EFL learning. Almost all students felt MMW had successfully adjusted learning materials from the A4 size of the textbook to the narrower mobile screen format using Moodle Quiz activities and Quizlet flashcards. However, some students complained that text input activities only accepted one answer when there were several correct alternatives. Most students preferred desktop use in the classroom and mobile use in their free time, such as when commuting. Most also preferred desktops for activities with longer text input. Students’ positive reactions to MMW suggest it might be of interest for teachers who are thinking of flipping their EFL classroom or as a model for content developers creating mobile materials that intentionally, closely follow a textbook.

2.6. Duolingo

Duolingo is a game-like app and webtool for foreign language learning. The presenter here used ‘English for Japanese speakers’, with a group of 30 university students in spring, 2019 consisting of 56 skills (Duolingo defines a skill as a set of lessons that focuses on a particular topic). Students were set an assignment every week to study and open at least two new ‘skills’. Lessons to be covered varied from student to student, depending on proficiency levels. Self-study with Duolingo was not directly linked to classwork but provided the opportunity to introduce MALL to students, allowing them to learn at a place and pace that suits. According to the activity log available in Duolingo for schools, the number of days students studied with Duolingo over the course of a 13 week semester was 17.3 days on average. The estimated study time per day varied widely, providing a daily average of about 30 minutes. Student feedback on their Duolingo experience was fairly positive:

74% agreed that Duolingo helped them learn English while 65% claimed it helped them to continue learning independently.

2.7. Actionbound

The final tool, Actionbound, allows users to create their own scavenger hunt for mobile devices. This tool was chosen for its interactive features (e.g. audio and video recording as a type of answer), its gamification features, and the possibility for the learners to experience contextualized and situated learning. In the framework of this study, a hunt was designed by ten pre-service language teachers with the help of a research team for use in the Hergé Museum in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. It displayed one potential use of the app for language learning. The game *De avonturen van Hergé* focuses on L2 reading strategies and was created for 43 fifth grade primary school learners of Dutch at the beginner level. The one-hour mobile activity takes the learners through the eight rooms of the museum and addresses various daily life topics relating to the life of the father of Tintin. The learners are invited to implement different reading strategies (e.g. visual discrimination, connecting the text to my experience, transfer from L1) to answer questions, win points, and move forward. The hunt has become an open educational resource as it is now available to any user of the Actionbound app who visits the museum.

3. Conclusion

We, in the MALL SiG, believe that the potential for learning with tools such as those introduced here is an opportunity not to be missed. We will endeavor to discover new tools that can be used in our educational setting and plan on introducing more at future EuroCALL related meetings.

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