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# PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Abstract

The rapid integration of mobile technologies into higher education has significantly influenced language teaching and learning practices. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) offers flexibility, learner-centered instruction, and extended learning opportunities beyond traditional classroom settings. Despite its pedagogical potential, the implementation of MALL in higher education is accompanied by a range of challenges and limitations that may hinder its effectiveness. This article aims to critically examine the pedagogical challenges associated with the use of mobile applications in language education at the tertiary level. Drawing on existing international research, the study explores issues related to learner distraction, technological dependency, unequal access to digital resources, limited pedagogical integration, and insufficient teacher preparedness. The findings highlight that while MALL can enhance learner engagement and autonomy, its effectiveness largely depends on informed pedagogical design, institutional support, and teacher guidance. The article concludes that addressing these challenges is essential for the sustainable and effective integration of mobile technologies into higher education language instruction.

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**Keywords:** Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, higher education, pedagogical challenges, mobile applications, language teaching.

### Introduction

The advancement of digital and mobile technologies has transformed educational practices worldwide, particularly in higher education. The widespread use of smartphones and tablets has led to increased interest in Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) as a means of supporting language instruction beyond traditional classroom environments (Traxler, 2018). Mobile applications enable learners to access educational content anytime and anywhere, promoting flexibility and learner autonomy (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). As a result, many higher education institutions have incorporated mobile applications into language courses to supplement face-to-face instruction. However, despite the growing adoption of MALL, its pedagogical effectiveness remains a subject of debate. While numerous studies highlight the benefits of mobile learning, including increased motivation, engagement, and accessibility (Crompton, 2013), less attention has been given to the challenges and limitations that accompany its implementation in higher education contexts. Language learning at the tertiary level requires structured guidance, meaningful interaction, and critical engagement, which may not always be fully supported by mobile technologies. This article seeks to address this research gap by examining the pedagogical challenges and limitations of MALL in higher education language learning. By analyzing existing literature, the study aims to provide a balanced perspective on the constraints of mobile-assisted instruction and to offer insights for educators seeking to integrate mobile technologies more effectively into language teaching practices.

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### Literature Review

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning has been widely explored within the broader field of technology-enhanced language learning. Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) define MALL as the use of mobile devices to support language learning through personalized, context-aware, and flexible activities. Researchers argue that mobile technologies extend learning opportunities beyond classroom boundaries and encourage learner-centered approaches (Sharples, 2013). Several studies emphasize the positive impact of MALL on learner motivation and engagement. According to Crompton (2013), mobile learning environments promote active participation by integrating familiar technologies into the learning process. Similarly, Godwin-Jones (2011) notes that mobile applications provide multimedia-rich input, which supports vocabulary development and pronunciation practice. However, scholars also caution that technological affordances alone do not guarantee effective learning outcomes. Recent research has increasingly focused on the challenges associated with MALL implementation. Traxler (2018) highlights issues related to institutional readiness, digital inequality, and the risk of superficial learning. Burston (2015) argues that many mobile applications lack sound pedagogical design and fail to align with curriculum objectives. These concerns suggest that while MALL holds promise, its limitations must be carefully examined, particularly in higher education settings where academic rigor is essential.

### Pedagogical Challenges of MALL in Higher Education

One of the primary pedagogical challenges of MALL is learner distraction. Mobile devices provide access not only to educational applications but also to social media, entertainment, and other non-academic content. This multitasking environment may reduce learners' attention and negatively affect learning outcomes (Traxler, 2018). In higher education, where self-discipline is critical, excessive reliance on mobile devices can undermine focused language practice.

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Another significant challenge is technological dependency. While mobile applications support autonomous learning, overreliance on technology may limit the development of critical thinking and communicative competence. Richards (2008) emphasizes that meaningful language learning requires interaction, feedback, and guided practice, which cannot be fully replaced by automated mobile tools. Without proper pedagogical scaffolding, learners may engage in mechanical practice rather than deep language processing. Teacher preparedness also plays a crucial role in the effective implementation of MALL. Many instructors lack sufficient training in integrating mobile technologies into language curricula (Sharples, 2013). As a result, mobile applications are often used as supplementary tools without clear pedagogical objectives, reducing their instructional value. Effective MALL integration requires teachers to design activities that align mobile tasks with learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

### Limitations of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning

In addition to pedagogical challenges, MALL faces several structural and contextual limitations. Unequal access to mobile devices and reliable internet connectivity remains a major concern in higher education, particularly in developing contexts. Digital inequality may create disparities among learners, limiting the inclusiveness of mobile learning initiatives (Traxler, 2018). Furthermore, many mobile applications prioritize convenience and engagement over pedagogical depth. Burston (2015) notes that commercially available language learning apps often focus on isolated skills, such as vocabulary memorization, while neglecting higher-order language skills and communicative competence. This limitation restricts the applicability of MALL as a comprehensive instructional approach. Assessment and evaluation also present challenges in MALL environments. Automated feedback provided by mobile applications may lack accuracy and contextual sensitivity, particularly in speaking and writing tasks. Thornbury (2005) argues that effective language

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assessment requires qualitative feedback and interaction, which remain difficult to achieve through mobile technologies alone.

### Discussion

The analysis of pedagogical challenges and limitations suggests that MALL should be viewed as a complementary rather than a standalone approach to language teaching in higher education. While mobile applications enhance flexibility and learner autonomy, their effectiveness depends on thoughtful pedagogical integration and institutional support. Educators must critically evaluate mobile tools and align them with instructional goals to ensure meaningful learning experiences. Previous research conducted by Jabborova (2025) demonstrates that mobile applications can effectively support vocabulary acquisition and speaking proficiency when integrated into structured language instruction. However, without addressing challenges such as distraction, technological dependency, and limited pedagogical design, the potential benefits of MALL may not be fully realized.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning offers valuable opportunities for enhancing language education in higher education. Nevertheless, its pedagogical challenges and limitations must be carefully considered to ensure effective implementation. Learner distraction, technological dependency, unequal access, and insufficient teacher preparation represent significant obstacles to the successful use of mobile applications in language instruction. To maximize the potential of MALL, higher education institutions should provide professional development for educators, establish clear pedagogical guidelines, and promote balanced integration of mobile technologies with traditional teaching methods. Future research should further explore context-specific



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strategies for overcoming these challenges and advancing the pedagogical effectiveness of MALL in higher education.

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