

CALL to MALL: Shifting Paradigm in Bangladeshi Universities

Md. Ziaul Karim^{1*}, Marium Jamila²

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Languages,
Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh-2202, Bangladesh

¹ziaul007_karim@yahoo.com

²jamila_nub@yahoo.com

*Corresponding Author

Abstract-This paper aims to find out whether mobile phones may be used as a language learning tool both inside and outside of classrooms in the universities in Bangladesh. The authors have conducted a survey through a questionnaire designed for both the learners and teachers who are involved in teaching foundation English courses at different private and public universities. The research challenges the current assumptions about English language teaching and learning with mobile phones, digs out multifarious language learning techniques and procedures and takes its standpoint that there are more advantages than drawbacks in case of utilizing cell phones for English language learning. Finally, it sheds lights on the present applicability and the future prospects of cell phone uses for English language learners (ELLs) in the context of Bangladesh.

Keywords-MALL; M-learning; EFL classrooms; Context of Bangladesh

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of Information Communication Technology (ICT), Bangladesh is very rapidly developing. The government has declared 'Vision-2021' with a view to making a 'Digital Bangladesh'. KPMG's 2012 study (as cited in Zaman & Rokonzaman, n.d., p. 1)[15] revealed that "the 'Digital Bangladesh' initiative of the government is helping setup infrastructure for enhanced connectivity, ICT based citizen service delivery and ICT based education system". At present student admission, advising, applying for jobs, payment submission, online attendance, and grade submission have already started in many private and public universities of Bangladesh. With the advent of mobile operator companies like Teletalk, Grameenphone, Banglalink, Robi and Airtel these opportunities are accessible from any place outside the campuses i.e. a student, a teacher or anyone concerned can avail most of these facilities with their internet connected mobile phones.

Smart phones, netbooks, iPads, iPods, tabs, e-readers and even PDAs are favorite tools for fun and communication for almost all students and educators. Teachers and learners are being exposed to many more hi-tech gadgets with very user-friendly, tactile touch-screen smart devices in a very short span of time than were ever thought possible. But whether these updated gadgets are used effectively in the education sectors in Bangladesh, especially in the universities is still a matter of debate. This paper is an initiative to find out the current trends of using

cell phones in the tertiary education in case of language learning, especially English.

2. WHAT IS MALL?

MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) is a segment of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) that emerged in the 1980s embracing the communicative approach and has now established itself as an important area of research in higher education. Mobile assisted language learning (MALL), in broad terms, is the integration of mobile devices into language learning process (Bezircilioğlu, 2016, p.9)[3]. It means the use of mobile technologies like cell phones, MP3/MP4 players, PDAs, iPods, laptops and palmtop computers to enhance students' language learning. Turc (2017)[12] mentioned that "the birth of the PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) gave rise to MALL. PDAs were popular in the 1990s and they are the precursors to smart phones. The PDA was a business tool, not designed for teaching and its uses included address book storage, note-entering, cellular phone function and fax sender. A PDA was referred to as a pocket computer or a palmtop. 2007 saw that of Amazon Kindle and iPhone and in 2010 the Apple iPad was released. This period also saw the emergence of e-dictionaries and MP3 players. What was previously done with a PDA, a basic mobile phone and an MP3 player is now possible using a smartphone".

Therefore, we can feel that the language teaching paradigm is gradually shifting from CALL to MALL and more broadly speaking, M-learning. It describes the shift from using static desktop computers to mobile devices for

learning. An easy accessibility to language resources which mobile devices offer users can extend the opportunity for language learning both inside and outside the classrooms.

3. WHY M-LEARNING

It is very rare to find a single university teacher and student who don't have a cell phone in Bangladesh. Cell phone has become an integral part of everyday communication in this modern society. There are multifarious applications with numerous functions from just finding simple lexical meaning and language learning games to more complex academic materials and eBooks that can be uploaded and downloaded into a Smartphone at the push of a button. Apps like SHAREit, Chameleon, Messenger, imo, WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, Zorpia, Twitter and so on are very common means of interaction among the educators and learners who may use them as a language learning and teaching target. Materials can be easily shared far and near with the help of these apps.

Attewell, 2004 (as cited in Aamri & Suleiman, 2011, p. 144)[1] asserted that "mobile phones may accelerate both independent and collaborative learning. It may help learners identify areas where they need assistance and support. It may remove the monotony of a traditional sit-down class and engage reluctant learners. It assists them to stay more for a longer period. Ultimately, it helps to raise self-esteem and self-confidence".

Perhaps one of the most significant benefits of mobile learning in education is that of multi-device support. In a mobile learning environment, the same course is available on various devices ranging from PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones (Laskaris, 2015)[7]. So, more awareness towards the use of cell phones for L2 learning is a prime need of the time.

If we can maximize the use of M-learning in guided ways during class time, it can really be a great support for creating effective learning environment as Sharples, Taylor & Vavoula (2005)[11] observed that "...tools such as computers and mobile phones function as interactive agents in the process of coming to know, creating a human-technology system to communicate, to mediate agreements between learners (as with spreadsheets, tables and concept maps) and to aid recall and reflection (as with weblogs and online discussion lists)". In present world, it is an unavoidable concept that, "whereas in traditional models of education the goal is the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, mLearning empowers students to actively participate in the learning process to make it a process of construction and not mere instruction" (dela Pena-Bandalaria, 2007)[4].

With M-learning, traditional classrooms can get rid of monotonous environment and can feel the flavor of e-class. Here the learners of EFL context can expect more exposures for learning the languages where time, space or surroundings fails to put barriers before them.

4. THE CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH

Bangladesh "is connected to information and communication, at a large extent, by the increasing expansion of mobile use. In despite of being a least developed country, it has created a booming mobile market. Moreover, the students are frequent users of mobile phone and familiar with the mobile devices; this is true for the students of both urban and rural places. Accordingly, it will be plausible to use mobile phone as a tool for learning especially for language learning" (Begum, 2011. p. 106)[2]. Begum also asserted that students of Bangladeshi context use "cell phones usually for communicating with the parents, friends and teachers and recreation purposes rather than learning English. They also do SMS, take photos, enjoy music, play games and can browse the Internet because of the cheap rate of Internet connection by some mobile operators. This Internet connection in a mobile phone offer fantastic opportunities to use the handset as a tool to learn foreign language. With the growth of mobile users, the mobile phone companies also design new and updated cell phones installing a number of functions such as SMS, games, GPS, audio, video, recorder, wireless Internet, TV display etc. Compared with other developing countries, the cell phone users of Bangladesh did not properly explore the functions of cell phones as instructional tools in foreign language classroom" (p.107)[2].

In their study, Mahruf C. Shohel & Banks (2012)[8] discussed in this way, "mobile technology is first used in teacher training in Bangladesh in 2006 as part of the e-Teacher Training component of the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education (TQI-SE) Project (see for more details Pouezevara & Khan 2007). In the case of English, both at the primary and secondary level English language teaching and learning is not satisfactory in Bangladesh (EIA 2009) as most students have few opportunities to speak or listen to English for communicative purpose during their English language lessons. Following in the foot-steps of TQI-SE, English in Action (EIA), an English language educational development programme is aimed at significantly improving the teaching of English in all educational sectors using new mobile technologies across Bangladesh" (p. 2).

Bangladeshi scenario was documented in Walsh & Shaheen (2013)[14] where, "During EIA's pilot phase (2009-2010) primary and secondary English teachers were provided extensive audio and visual resources on the Apple iPod Touch (for primary teachers) and iPod Nano (for secondary teachers) with portable rechargeable speakers. The iPods assisted teachers in learning and trying out new CLT practices with their students. Importantly, these MP3 players also provided primary teachers' with audio resources specifically produced to match every lesson in the national textbook series *English for Today* for grades one through ten (545 audio files). This gave teachers and students examples of Bangladeshis speaking

textbook content in English. The Nano also provided primary teachers with songs for the beginning and end of every lesson, and a range of supplementary songs, poems and dialogues. For primary teachers' CPD, the Nano also included 18 video clips and 4 audio recordings that exemplify a range of correct and incorrect English CLT classroom practices. Secondary teachers received fewer additional classroom resources because they generally have higher levels of English language proficiency and have received more pedagogical training. The secondary teachers were also supplied with 46 audio files dedicated to teacher CPD on the iPod Touch. The secondary teachers' iPod Touch was preloaded with audio podcasts enhanced with synchronized text and images as well as 12 CPD videos to be used with a print-based teacher professional development package entitled, *English for Today in Action*, that they can learn from, adapt and use to teach communicative English".

EIA's managing partner the BBC World Trust launched BBC *Janala*, a partner project that works with BBC Learning English on an educational initiative to significantly increase the number of people able to speak English across the country. The BBC *Janala* website (www.bbcjanala.com) was launched in November 2009. It is a unique multi-platform project that harnesses multimedia technology to provide affordable English education to millions of people in Bangladesh and the wider international diaspora. BBC *Janala* offers an innovative way of learning English on mobile phones, the internet and television. Additional audio and video content is also available on Facebook and YouTube. The television component 'BBC Buzz' is a weekly targeted youth entertainment show that places English at the centre of young people's everyday lives (Walsh & Power 2011, p. 2165)[13].

Another advancement in the field of technology use is accelerated by a project called a2i. Access to information or a2i particularly refers to a program initiated by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), with support from UNDP and USAID. Starting in 2007 the program is now in its second phase since 2012, tentatively to be ended in 2018. a2i focuses primarily on bringing information and services to citizens' doorsteps and increasingly within the palms of their hands. It does so by harnessing modern ICTs, local knowledge and global best practices to establish both physical and virtual one-stop access points. The a2i program is now underway and has had some achievements since its operations commenced. As per govt. website following are some highlights of a2i program so far:

- 8.5 Million students learning from Multimedia Content Developed by 100,000+Teachers
- 105 Digital Talking Text Books for all Visually Disabled Students
- 101 Million+ Result of Public Exam over SMS
- 20 Million+ admission Applications Through SMS
- Online Registration of 2 Million+ Male & Female for Overseas Jobs (Islam, 2017)[6].

Walsh & Power (2011)[13] also stated that "currently there are a number of relevant initiatives, studies and research where ICT and mobile technologies are being leveraged to improve people's lives and their acquisition of English in Bangladesh" (p. 2164).

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2010) [10] found that, "in Bangladesh, ICT efforts in formal education have been initiated with a perspective of having trained manpower for developing an ICT industry in the country. To that end most education initiatives focus on providing ICT as a subject at the secondary and higher secondary level. The scope of using ICT as an instructional aid to ensure quality education needs to be explored more extensively" (p.14).

Every project is for the welfare of the humanity. The projects that were implemented so far definitely have brought many innovations in the education sector in Bangladesh but if the use of the developed materials, techniques and further initiatives for implementation stop with the end of the projects, an effective outcome and long term positive impact can never be expected. In many cases this is the scenario of almost every project of our country. The project funding ends and with it ends the practice and motivation of all. Now the EIA project being over, the impact of teaching English in a more communicative manner in primary and secondary schools should have been stronger and more effective but after passing college level when students get admitted into universities, we find them not willing to talk in English in class even though they are requested to do so. Moreover, the quantity of students with the highest grades (A+) is increasing by leaps and bounds but the quality of students' English language proficiency is not up to the mark. That raises the question "is EIA successful?" We think, the answer is not that positive. May be, the trained teachers couldn't deliver their lessons as they were taught by EIA. Almost all university teachers are the highest degree holders, no doubt and they are not trained as the primary, secondary and college teachers. Nevertheless, they can try to develop learner's English language skills in a much more innovative way because they are not confined by the national curriculum and syllabus as the teachers of schools and colleges are. They are free to choose the content of a course and testing systems unlike the primary, secondary and college teachers. That is why, if they are properly trained on how to use MALL techniques and if they allow students to use their cell phones both inside and outside their classes for language learning purposes, it will bring a radical change in EFL education in Bangladesh.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research has applied a quantitative technique. The quantitative element involves asking some open and close-ended questions eliciting responses via two paper-based questionnaires prepared differently for students and teachers. Total eighty (80) learners and ten (10) teachers from four different universities took part in this study. 23 students of different semesters from Bangladesh

Agricultural University (BAU), 26 from Presidency University (PU), 21 from Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) and 10 from Southeast University (SEU) took part in this research. 3 teachers from BAU, 3 from IUB, 2 from PU and 2 from SEU responded to the questions given to them. Though it is a very small scale-study, the data collected through random sampling will give some valuable insights into the use of M-learning by the university teachers and learners.

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Students

All students except one (around 99%) have smart phones and browse internet on their smart phones. 65% students (52) said that they were not allowed to use their phones in language classes whereas 79% students (63) wanted to use their phones in English language classes.

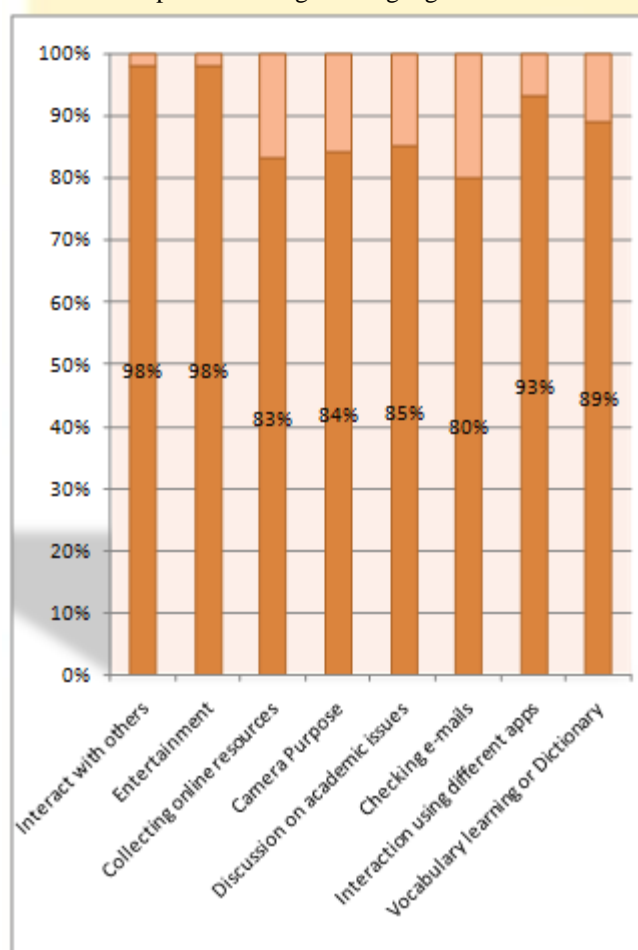


Figure 1: Learners' different uses of cell phones

Although 86% students (69) thought using smart phones in class have some drawbacks, 90% students (72) felt that MALL should be applied with CALL in language classes. Almost 98% (78) interact with other students/teachers through Facebook, Class blog or other sites while most learners (98%) watch/listen to songs/other video clips from YouTube. Approximately 83% students (66) find online

resources for test/assignment, 84% (67) take snaps of notes and other important documents with the camera while 85% (68) interact with other students and people to discuss academic issues. 80% (64) check emails where classmates/teachers/other people send attachments. Bluetooth, SHAREit, Chameleon, WhatsApp, Viber, imo, Messenger are used by around 93% learners (74) while 89% (71) find vocabulary and references or check dictionary. [Figure 1](#) is a chart mentioning different uses of mobile phones by learners.

6.2 Teachers

All teachers (100%) have smart phones and browse internet. 70% teachers (7) said they allowed their students to use phones in classes (very contradictory with students' responses). Not a single teacher has any training on how to use smart phones in language classes. Most teachers (90%) think that allowing phones in class has a few drawbacks. Many teachers (80%) interact with students/colleagues through Facebook, Class blog or other sites and (70%) choose songs/other video clips for learners from YouTube.

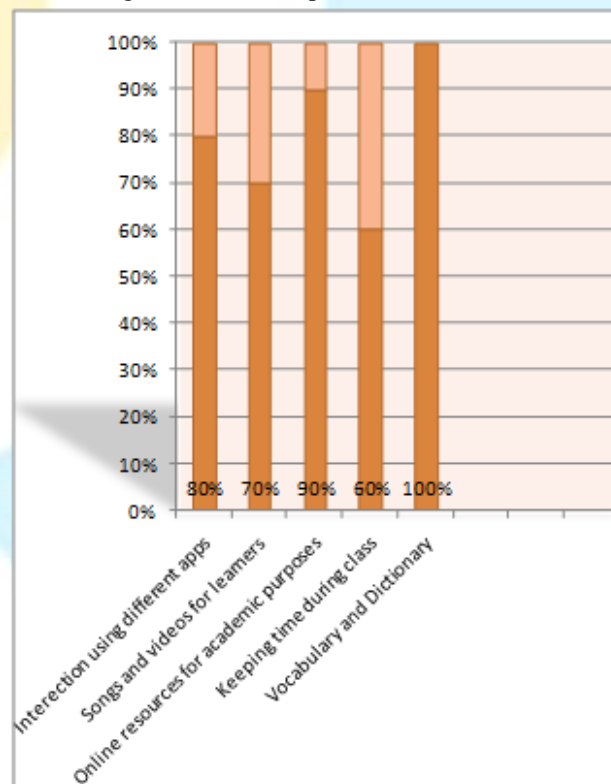


Figure 2: Teachers' academic uses of cell phones

A good number of teachers (90%) find online resources for students/themselves, check emails where students/colleagues send attachments or write emails, use Bluetooth, SHAREit, Chameleon, WhatsApp, Viber, imo, Messenger for sharing files and documents and interact with students, colleagues and other people to discuss academic issues. 60% teachers keep time while students perform in class. All teachers (100%) find vocabulary and references or check dictionary. [Figure 2](#) is a chart

mentioning different academic uses of mobile phones by teachers in percentage.

7. PRESENT CHALLENGES

In Bangladesh, language classrooms are usually teacher-led and it is tough for the teacher to control the big classes ensuring every learner's participation. For the language teaching methodology, ELT practitioners in Bangladesh followed Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). The shift in the paradigm from GTM to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) occurred around the year 2001. And now it is the official government education policy....A large number of teachers implement this in their teaching practice, and where this has not been implemented yet, there is a pressing urge to move to this direction. (Hasan & Akhand, 2009, P.45-46) [5].

Prensky (2001, p. 2) [9] warned us, "Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach." He went on to describe how these "digital natives" are being exposed to more gadgets and technology than was ever thought possible. They are more engaged in learning when using the latest technological gadgets, because it is what they are most used to interacting with. Our students don't just want mobile learning, they need it. Language teachers and learners are entering into an era of M-learning from e-learning.

The education sector of Bangladesh is beset with many obstacles associated with technology use. Although almost all university teachers and students own cell phones, they rarely use them in language classes and in many cases the cultural mindset is not to use them in class. Considering the importance of M-learning, teachers and educators need to come forward with the mind to allow students use mobile phones in class because it can be a wonderful way of motivating learners to learn the language perfectly.

Still some important issues need to be taken into account before using it in classroom context-

- Controlling students while using mobile phones i.e. whether they are busy with academic activities or others
- Techniques should be applied consulting with peer teachers or colleagues to minimize the problems that may occur in a big size classroom
- Application of M-learning in classroom can create some difficulties for teacher i.e. it can take more time than estimated.

To Katz, n.d. (as cited in Aamri & Suleiman, 2011, p.145) [1], "there are many studies that outline and describe the disadvantages of using mobile phones in education. Some opposers of mobile phones in education call out to ban mobile technologies from schools. Their reaction to the mobile phone is that it is "a source of irritation, delinquency and even crime."

There are some disadvantages of mobile phones but if we as teachers are not willing to utilize it for teaching-learning purposes we will be automatically hundred miles back

from the globalized world of CLT. So, this is the time to change our theory of traditional classroom receiving M-learning in EFL classrooms of Bangladesh. Therefore, it can be claimed that mobile phones should not be hidden in the students' or teachers' bags and pockets or under the desks but they should be used as more effective tools of language learning both inside and outside the classroom particularly in the universities of Bangladesh.

8. RECOMENDATIONS

- Teachers must be trained to use mobile phones in a more effective way.
- Many user-friendly apps need to be developed for both learners and teachers.
- All the drawbacks should be listed and then measures to minimize them must be adopted.
- Awareness of the benefits of cell phone usage should be raised among the learners.
- Teachers have to use the apps and sites prior to recommending them for the learners.

9. CONCLUSION

In Bangladesh, use of mobile technology has got a rapid booming success in comparison with other developing countries. Therefore, it is high time educators and learners used cell phones as educational tools especially in the universities to support learning facilities to a greater extent. Mobile learning is an exciting opportunity for teachers and learners who can effectively explore the modern high-tech gadgets if training and access approval are given to them. Finally, it can be said that M-learning and MALL should be encouraged both inside and outside the classrooms rather than banning them.

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Authors' Biography

Md. Ziaul Karim is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Languages at Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh. He has more than twelve (12) years of teaching experiences. He has worked with Presidency University, IUB, Southeast University and BRAC University in Bangladesh. Mr. Karim also served as a Survival English Consultant for the refugee migration programme at IOM. He is the present Regional Coordinator, Dhaka Zone of Medical English, a certificate course conducted at all public medical colleges by Oncosys International Ltd. and assigned by DG Health, Bangladesh. He achieved a Certificate in TESOL from the University of South Carolina, USA. In addition, he obtained B A (Hons) in English and MA in Applied Linguistics and ELT from the Department of English, Dhaka University.



Marium Jamila is an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Languages at Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh. She has been in teaching for 9 years. She has a B.A. (Hons.) in English and an M.A. in Applied Linguistics & ELT from University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.