

REVIEW OF *MOBILE LEARNING: LANGUAGES, LITERACIES, AND CULTURES*

<p>Mobile Learning: Languages, Literacies, and Cultures Mark Pegrum 2014 ISBN: 9781137309792 US \$95.00 276 pp. Palgrave Macmillan London, UK</p>	
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While the targeted audience of Mark Pegrum's *Mobile Learning: Languages, Literacies and Cultures* is not made explicit, its content is best suited to those endeavoring to understand MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning) within the broader context of mobile learning. In this regard it is much more contemporary than historical, with nearly two thirds of its references dating from the past six years (2008–2013). The work is commendable for the background it provides on mobile learning across a wide instructional spectrum. Of particular note is the attention paid to initiatives in developing countries endeavoring to exploit mobile technologies to remedy high native-language illiteracy rates and overcome the educational disadvantages of women, especially in rural communities. This information is all the more valuable in that it derives mostly from international project reports, which is otherwise largely absent and unobtainable from published academic research sources. What the work gains in breadth in regard to mobile learning in general, however, it loses in depth in respect to MALL in particular. Of the book's seven chapters, the first three are entirely devoted to general issues concerning mobile learning. In fact, only the fourth and fifth chapters focus explicitly upon language teaching. The sixth chapter concerns literacy in its broadest possible interpretation, of which reading and writing are but two of eight abilities discussed. Lastly, while taking most of its examples from language-based projects, the focus of the final chapter of the book is very much on the general issue of teacher and student training needed in the digital age.

As a reference text, the book has much to recommend it. Given the acronyms that abound in the mobile learning field, readers are sure to find convenient the list of abbreviations that precede the text. So, too, the book is very well indexed. Also, though a monograph, every chapter contains short contributions from other authors that serve to provide a broader perspective on the topics covered. This unusual feature takes

two forms: *vignettes* and *case studies*. The vignettes are personal reflections by well-established scholars in the field of mobile learning. The case studies describe at greater length specific project implementations. The end of the book contains a useful section of *Recommended Reading* of recent book-length publications for getting up to date as well as mobile learning websites for keeping informed. The references at the end of the book are quite extensive and include nearly 640 entries. Once again, however, the broadness of mobile learning coverage comes at the expense of a more limited focus on MALL. Of the recommended readings and websites, only two relate directly to MALL. Likewise, only about 20% of the bibliography relates to language learning or teaching.

Chapter 1, *The Mobile Landscape*, provides a broad overview of mobile learning between 2002 and 2013. Most notable in this chapter is the pervasive contrastive presentation of information. It begins with a review of the evolution and spread of mobile devices in developed and developing countries. The following subsection describes the features that distinguish m-learning from e-learning. The technological divide between developed and developing countries is addressed again in a subsection that discusses the issue of affordability versus affordances. Another subsection opposes the global aspects of mobile device usage, its anytime/anywhere accessibility, with context-sensitive and individualized applications. Another opposition is highlighted in a subsection dealing with the episodic, bite-sized, informal learning typically targeted with mobile devices compared to extended applications entailing the synthesis of pedagogical activities into a coherent, formal, learning experience. So, too, the personal usage of mobile devices is opposed to their use within social networks, especially Personal Learning Networks (PLN) and Personal Learning Environments (PLE). The last section of this chapter provides an informative discussion of mobile learning relative to three parameters of mobility: the devices, the learners, and the learning.

Chapter 2, *Agendas for Mobile Learning*, is organized around three very far-ranging themes relating to the promotion of digital technologies in education: transforming teaching practices, developing digital skills, and fostering social justice. Although greatly a proponent of the exploitation of digital technologies, Pegrum takes a very measured and critical stance in this regard. Quickly passing in review a number of post-behaviorist learning theories which in turn are related to several methodological approaches, Pegrum adopts the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition (SAMR) model proposed by Puentedura (2011) to measure the extent to which these learning theories and pedagogical applications may be judged to transform educational practices. While favoring modern approaches, Pegrum does not exclude the usefulness of more traditional behaviorist, transmission model practices. Ever mindful of the local cultural and educational practices in developing countries, he also urges caution and sensitivity before trying to apply such constructivist, learner-centered approaches in non-western contexts. M-learning is seen as a promising means of promoting numeracy, local, and national language literacy, and English as a language of economic development and social advancement as well as digital literacy skills. Despite the positive attitudes expressed towards the transformative benefits of m-learning, Pegrum cautions against technological determinism and the risks of attempting to impose foreign cultural values and pedagogical approaches that are at variance with local cultural ecologies.

In chapter 3, *The Technological Ecosystem*, Pegrum returns to technical considerations raised briefly in the first chapter, focusing particularly upon the role of mobile devices within the framework of current digital technologies. It is organized into two main sections dealing with hardware and software plus a concluding section devoted to the challenges that mobile technologies present. Mobile software issues are discussed in subsections devoted to network connectivity, operating platforms, and pedagogical applications. The vast majority of educational apps are judged to be very traditional, predicated on transmission model learning and behaviorist drill and practice approaches. Notwithstanding, Pegrum concedes that such pedagogical approaches may be well regarded, indeed expected, in non-western cultural and educational settings around the world, especially in contexts of limited educational resources. In concluding this chapter, as a counterbalance to techno-enthusiasm, Pegrum runs through a comprehensive list of the limitations and caveats that must be kept in mind when adopting mobile

technologies.

The fourth chapter, *How to Teach Language with Mobile Devices*, is organized into three main subsections. The first focuses on second language acquisition theories and related pedagogical approaches. The second describes the kinds of uses to which MALL has been applied. The third deals with the assessment of MALL. Pegrum begins by summarizing, all too briefly, the learning theories and pedagogical methodologies that underlie CALL and MALL applications. Behaviorist versus communicative approaches to language teaching are dealt with in one paragraph each while a third paragraph even more sketchily presents eight sociocultural-related pedagogical approaches. Although he foresees Intelligent CALL (ICALL) and Intelligent MALL (IMALL) taking communicative language teaching in new sociocultural, context-aware, socially sensitive directions, he cautions that such interactive, learner-centered, approaches may not necessarily find favor everywhere, citing examples where students preferred passive learner roles and where simple content delivery was more highly valued.

MALL applications are described relative to four, increasingly interactive, pedagogical approaches which progress from behaviorist through communicative and sociocultural paradigms: content delivery, tutorial exercises, artifact creation, and interpersonal communication. Like content delivery, behaviorist mobile-based tutorial exercises are said to lend themselves well to autonomous learning outside of the classroom. Pegrum considers that the greatest promise of tutorial MALL lies in IMALL applications that permit exercises to be tailored to individual oral and written competency levels and provide recommendations for practice. As ever, however, he is quick to return to current realities in developing countries and the constraints imposed by technological infrastructure and cultural expectations that favor old-fashioned behavioristic drill exercises.

In the final subsection of this chapter, Pegrum discusses at some length the challenges that assessment poses for MALL. He points out that a great deal of formative feedback and guidance is provided by mobile technologies themselves, such as digital records generated by applications, transcripts of online discussions, and recordings of voice chats. Moreover, he envisages in the foreseeable future the application of automated learning analytics to the processing of such data, from which IMALL programs can be used to generate individual profiles based on user-generated materials in real-world learning contexts. This very optimistic, not to say rosy, prognosis of formative assessment in MALL is, however, counterbalanced by his down-to-earth appraisal of the fundamental problem that the requirements of summative assessment pose to realizing the pedagogical potential of MALL. In his view, the integration of MALL into the curriculum remains fundamentally at odds with deep-seated testing regimes, which pose a major obstacle to the innovative pedagogies made possible by mobile technologies.

Of all the chapters in this book, chapter 5 (*What Language to Teach with Mobile Devices*) goes into the greatest detail regarding the content of MALL applications, with a focus on successful MALL projects. It considers the linguistic areas that MALL has targeted: vocabulary and grammar, reading and writing, listening and speaking, and integrated skills. It thus covers MALL project implementations in some breadth, with reasonable depth, but not without some notable shortcomings. Critical details are omitted, for example, the preponderance of Japanese and Taiwanese projects, the domination of ESL studies, and the primary focus on adult tertiary level learners. In highlighting MALL successes, the chapter takes at face value published claims of language improvement without regard to research design flaws (i.e., small group sizes, short treatment durations, uncontrolled variables, lack of statistical analyses). Likewise, no mention is made of the paucity of reliable accounts of learning gains, nor is any sense given of the marginal status of MALL in the foreign language curriculum.

In summarizing MALL applications for the teaching of vocabulary and grammar, this subsection follows an essentially chronological progression from basic through more sophisticated technology (i.e., mobile phone, PDA, smartphone, tablet) and passive behavioristic drilling to active constructivist and collaborative approaches. MALL programs targeting grammar are treated in a single paragraph, it being

explained that they are essentially like those that use SMS for vocabulary acquisition. While mindful that the reading of digital texts requires the acquisition of different sets of skills, Pegrum stresses the increase in comprehensible input that can be gained from mobile-based applications which provide vocabulary and grammar assistance. More active mobile-based reading applications allow students not only to incorporate their own annotations and translations, but also to collaboratively share them with other learners. Though limited by screen size and keyboarding constraints, mobile devices are said to lend themselves well to short note taking and to offer learners essential scaffolding through the incorporation of spelling and grammar checkers.

Pegrum draws attention to the abundance of online listening materials intended for native speaker access in real time (e.g., radio broadcasts, news reports) or via download (e.g., audio books, podcasts). Examples are given of MALL listening projects that provide such features as vocabulary and content support, access to translations, and playback speed control. Video provides further scaffolding to support the comprehension of pragmatic, paralinguistic, and sociocultural aspects of language within listening activities. Among the mobile-based speaking activities which Pegrum notes, are simple pronunciation practice and the recording of task-based activities such as reports, interviews, role-plays, audio blogs, and situated audio commentary with location-aware devices. The most active and challenging form of speech production involves oral interaction, which can be undertaken asynchronously via audio discussion boards and blogs or in real-time via automated conversations or with other speakers via VoIP services that can include video and text as well.

Chapter 6, *Teaching Literacies with Mobile Devices*, discusses the potential of mobile devices to address issues of literacy, which is taken to include not just reading and writing in one's native language but also a whole range of digital literacies. Returning to the needs and resources in developing countries, Pegrum stresses the important contribution that even basic mobile telephones can make in tackling widespread illiteracy. In developed countries, the focus is placed upon the need to complement reading and writing skills with multiple digital literacies that are integral to social life and employment prospects. As he explains, owing to their multimedia nature, digital documents are not just printed words but collages of text, audio, graphics and video which students need to learn to interpret, interact with, create and, ultimately, critically evaluate. However, beyond effective text processors, he insists that users of digital technologies need to be informed consumers, possessing at least a basic understanding of how computer hardware and software work. So, too, with the shift from acquired knowledge to information retrieval brought about by digital technologies, he stresses that learners must be able to identify sources of information, compare what they discover for consistency and coherence, and track the development of information over time, a task made all the more demanding given the constant flux of digital resources. While stressing the importance of digital technologies in fostering the development of intercultural literacy through constructive interaction with interlocutors across different cultural contexts, Pegrum cautions that this demands of students a level of technological preparedness and social readiness that even now cannot be taken for granted.

Chapter 7 (*Preparing for a Mobile Educational Future*) covers much of the same ground as the preceding one, but from the perspective of the professional development required of teachers in the 21st century. The discussion, largely based on *case studies* and *vignettes*, is organized into four subsections dealing with digital training, digital literacy, digital networking, and educational research.

The discussion of teacher training requirements focuses on two complementary contexts, firstly that within the educational environment and secondly that within the wider community. For classroom teachers, Pegrum bases his recommendations for training in new technologies upon the twin scaffolds of the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) framework of knowledge integration (Mishra & Koehler 2006) and the SAMR model (Puentedura 2011) of technological transformation. The most transformative exploitation of digital technologies necessarily entails a pedagogical shift from teacher-centered transmission and behaviorist approaches to learner-centered communicative and collaborative

methodologies. This frequently requires a fundamental mindset change, which Pegrum is at pains to point out may be slow-in-coming in developing countries. He stresses that many factors outside of the classroom require the development of academic, social, and political leadership skills essential for the effective implementation of new technologies.

As discussed in the previous chapter, literacy is broadly taken to encompass a range of digital skills, which teacher training can provide through practical contact with mobile technologies. Unfortunately, in dealing with this issue, Pegrum focuses only on the developing world, neglecting to mention any of the dozens of documented projects, primarily in the US and Europe, that could illustrate the exploitation in teacher training of mobile technologies and digital literacy at higher levels. Network literacy is discussed in the context of PLN viewed as an adjunct to pre-service and in-service professional mobile education development. Mobile technology adds to this an anywhere, anytime, access dimension that makes mobile social networking sites an ideal platform for a PLN. Again, despite the many examples of existing mobile-accessible PLN that could have been referenced in developed countries, Pegrum restricts his attention to a single Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) mobile phone-based project that was still on the drawing board at the time of writing.

The last subsection of this chapter is in effect an epilogue of the entire book, which focuses on multiple research parameters associated with the promotion of mobile education. It begins with an ambitious call for classroom-based action research as a way for practicing teachers to contribute to the knowledge base of effective mobile technology applications and student's use of technologies for learning, and in so doing provide research-based evidence to inform educational leaders. However, Pegrum is quick to add that, in order to realize the full global potential of mobile education, micro-scale studies need to be complemented by large-scale, funded, development projects integrated into a network of governmental, non-governmental, educational, and commercial organizations. Such projects need to generate research leveraged to inform and persuade political, corporate, social, and educational leaders and influence future policy and project implementation for sustainable, long-term development.

CONCLUSION

The great strength of *Mobile Learning: Languages, Literacies and Cultures* is the very broad coverage it gives to the overall mobile learning context in which MALL is embedded. As frequently noted, within this framework, particular attention is paid to the real-life situations in developing countries in which constraints relating to technological infrastructure as well as social and cultural issues have to be carefully considered. So, too, the discussion of mobile-based language learning profits greatly from general reflections on the impact of mobile technologies upon teaching and testing, literacies, and the professional development of teachers. While it does suffer from a few shortcomings, notably its cursory presentation of learning theories and pedagogical methodologies and its failure to vet claimed learning improvements in cited studies, overall Pegrum handles issues of theory and pedagogy well and strikes a very good balance between techno-enthusiasm and the realities, positive and negative, of digital technology implementations. In sum, the book is well worth considering for anyone with an interest in MALL.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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