Students' Attitude Towards Using Smartphones and Portable Devices for Studying Writing

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ABSTRACT

| **Keywords:** CALL, MALL, writing | Mobile devices are now ubiquitous, which leads to a load of sequences, including mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). This notion has attracted various scholars to research so as to provide a spotlight on it for better exploitation. This study aims to shed light on the students' perception of the usefulness of mobile learning toward writing in terms of searching information and fluency, which did not support the spotlight in traditional study. The participants are the students coming from the English faculty of Dong Nai Technology University; they were at least sophomores with the obliged condition of being experienced in writing courses. Data collection from the questionnaire was conducted randomly by the students. The survey revealed that the learners enjoy m-learning as this framework performs well in helping students with information reaching. Besides, the research also indicates that the MALL system provides writing learners opportunities to enhance the ability to generate text regarding accuracy and fluency. |

Introduction

The mobile-assisted language learning system or MALL is defined as a part of e-learning (Georgiev et al., 2004), has been ubiquitous in various subjects, including writing learning since 1994 due to the efficiency of reaching the information, especially under the circumstance of the pandemic has occurred since 2020 up to now (Tran, 2021). In fact, using mentioned tool greatly provides both learners and instructors opportunities to personalize the knowledge (Chen, C-M., & Chung, C-J. 2008 as cited in Burston, 2013, pp. 167) as the devices allow learners to search the information individually. With the development of internet and wireless network like the third-generation (3G) and the fourth generation (4G), m-learning enables students the ability to reach information at any corner and provides the perfect opportunities for students to have a collaborative learning environment (Bui et al., 2021; Tran, 2021; Van et al., 2021). This circumstance, hence, really helps students in writing much. In terms of brainstorming, for instance, the students might search for the ideas, critique that idea, and generate other unique sequentially. Furthermore, the learners might look for structures and grammar lessons on the internet while composing the text, both in the class or outside the academic institution. Briefly, the MALL has been being applied on a wide range scale because of the reaching information ability.

In addition, mobile learning in writing is considered a platform to help learners with writing skills, which results in the enhancement of the learners. In academic writing course, although the m-learning has been implemented for years in some nations to help enhance student' ability, this genre of teaching approach still stay unlit in Viet Nam generally and particularly at the research location. Cahyono and Astuti (2019) and Pham and Nguyen (2019) concluded that the video-based for mobile phones bettered the students' ability to compose essays in terms of creativity. On the other hand, this framework has also been utilized in writing courses to enhance student grammar, vocabulary, and autonomy. By employing some means of the mobile-learning system, researchers (Gangaiamaran & Pasupathi, 2017) concluded that the quality of text generated by the learners increased. With the hope of taking advance from the mobile learning system, some schools and universities in Viet Nam have employed this system for a wide range of language skills teaching (Luu et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2021; Nguyen & Ngo, 2021). Therefore, this study investigates the students' attitude toward the mobile learning system in terms of searching information and fluency combined with precise terms in writing. The study implies that learners are keen on utilizing smartphones and other portable devices to reach more information for brainstorming ideas and background knowledge by analyzing the questionnaire results. They also share the similar concept that writing ability of accuracy and fluency might be improved.

Literature Reviews

The mobile-learning has motivated an array of scholars for years since its appearance in late 1997, when the internet came out and caused simultaneously positive and negative impacts on human being life, generally. Burston (2013) reviewed a load of three hundred and forty-five studies in a stage between 1994 and 2012 and created a bibliography, which implied the drastically increasing development of m-learning. Since then, a lot of notions and terms have appeared, which resulted in the fact that researchers have implemented numerous works in the field. Most of the studies revealed the merits of MALL in some terms. The circumstance of the current pandemic all over the world of covid-19 prevents conventional classrooms, which leads to the fact that distance learning is the last choice. Accordingly, there comes the need to implement E-learning to not slow the study process (Tran & Nguyen, 2021; Tran, 2021; Pham & Tran, 2021). From the perspective of writing learning, mobile learning is considered a good framework with an array of means for mentors and learners to take an advance. Some authors stated the usefulness of MALL for students to enhance vocabulary (Chen & Hsieh, 2008) or sentences structure and organization(Fattah, 2015). Li and Hegelheimer (2013) and Noriega (2016) suggested that using means of mobile learning in writing contributes to students' better writing skills. All following studies present the effectiveness of MALL in detail of writing aspects of accuracy, fluency and attitude of learners.

Alemi et al. (2012) 's research focused on the retention of learning academic vocabulary via instant message (SMS) system in the long term and short term. The study was employed with forty-five non-English-majored freshmen at a university in Iran. The participants were divided into two groups of experimental with twenty-eight students and the control group with seventeen individuals. Both groups took part in a reading course with the same material. During sixteen weeks, the experimental group has instructed the material with an SMS vocabulary system whilst the dictionary taught the control group. The finding showed that the SMS system really helped the learners in the long term via the post-test, while there was no difference between SMS and dictionary-based instruction in the short term. Hence, the study stated the positive impact of one of the MALL learning means regard in the area of vocabulary.

In another study, Li & Hegelheimer (2013) explored the development and implementation of a web-based mobile software so-called Grammar Clinic for English as a second language (ESL) writing class. Nineteen intermediated students from an intact class at a university in the USA joined in the study lasting sixteen weeks. At the beginning of the course, a pre-test was held to measure the students' proficiency. Then, a demonstrating class of using the application came. During the semester, the students were asked to use the application outside class, which comprised grammar exercises in terms of error sentence structures, lexical errors, and "ambiguous expressions" to develop writing skills by feedback and self-regulation. Simultaneously, the learners took part in paper process composing activities at the class of increasing length of work with through alternatively the first, the second, the third and the fourth. Between the first and the third draft of the text, learners were required to fulfill three sets of the Grammar Clinic assignment. Due to the partly positive effect of the web-based software for mobile phones, most of the participants, at the same time, through a load of the process of writing like drafting, revising, editing, regulated their work and got enhanced.

Besides, Fattah (2015) examined the usefulness of WhatsApp messenger in order to increase the students' writing skills. The number of participants whose age ranged from twenty to thirty-five was thirty totally, and they were at level four of English major at Qassim college. There were two groups of participants, which were alternatively controlled and experimental. The experiment group used WhatsApp to enhance their skills, while the controlled group was taught by the prescribed book during a writing course last forty-five days. Pre-test analysis indicated that there was no difference between the groups in terms of the mean score. The post-test leads to the finding that the experimental group members who used the application outperformed the control group in terms of structure.

In addition, Noriega (2016) conducted a study with a freshman in a narrative English course at a university in Colombia in order to explore the usefulness of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in terms of text genres and features in the second language. During eight weeks, the student composed "personal recounts, autobiography and the short story" (Noriega, 2016) before receiving the instruction in class. After that, the writer was given a mobile device for weeks with the podcast about the lesson. In the third week, the student took a test and rewrote the composition after using the podcast. The standard to evaluate the learner's text quality was based on coherence. The author reported that via the analysis of the series of texts generated by the learner, using mobile learning in English learning could greatly help students improve writing in the field of the organization together with the structure. The learner also claimed the improvement of grammar and vocabulary, and motivation appeared in a short period in the interview after the course.

Cahyono and Astuti (2019) explored the effectiveness of mobile-based video learning in the process of writing at a vocational high school in Indonesia. There were sixty-one participants divided into experimental groups with thirty-one members and a controller group with thirty individuals. The whole study comprised five sessions with pre-test and post-test in which both control and experimental groups were taught to write procedure text. The control group was treated with the conventional method to write, whilst the experimental group was asked to conduct a video-based mobile assignment. Through a creative questionnaire, the author reported that students who were in the experimental group achieved better writing skills than the control group members.

In another elsewhere move, Yan (2019) conducted a study with the WeChat platform with eighty-eight undergraduate students from two classes to explore the idea of collaboratively learning writing applications. The students had to change the account into real names combined

with student numbers in small groups of five or six students. The teacher could publish materials, upload requirements, give instruction through this platform. Hence the students had opportunities to discuss together in writing activities. With the alternative turn of being a leader and peer feedback as well as discussion on the ideas, expression, structure and grammar points that occurred for every two days, the procedure showed that there were positive effects in terms of students writing due to the self-evaluation, peer-evaluation and teacher-evaluation under the setting of WeChat application- one means of MALL system. Through the second draft and questionnaire post-test, the researcher proved that the m-learning system could enhance students' ability to write efficiently.

All the precede literature indicated the effectiveness of the MALL when it was used to teach or learn writing. The mentioned previous studies successfully showed the effective impacts of MALL on learners' writing ability in terms of enhancing vocabulary (Saran & Seferoğlu, 2010) or grammar improvement (Baleghizadeh & Oladrostam, 2010) that cover the writing accuracy and writing fluency as well as autonomy (Sato et al., 2015), nevertheless, the student's attitude as well as perception toward using mobile phones and handy devices in writing as a tool to reach information still in debate. Furthermore, learners' perception of using portable facilities to improve writing skills, including fluency and accuracy, still needs shedding light on.

Research questions

To this end, this study addresses the following questions:

Research question 1(RQ1): To what extent do the students perceive m-learning in a writing course?

Research question 2(RQ2): What is learners' attitude in applying m-learning in studying writing to improve accuracy and fluency?

Methodology

Participants

This study was conducted at a second foreign language course of English- majored students at Dong Nai Technology University. Twenty- six students whose ages ranged between 19 and 21 took part in the survey. The students taking the class were at least sophomores, had taken academic writing courses as an oblige in the curriculum. Accordingly, the participants had some experience in writing. They understood the process of composing text in the academic writing field and the method to generate the work effectively. Moreover, the learners also experienced the e-learning system of the university at home due to the covid-19 pandemic resulting in the social distance campaign, which created the impression toward mobile learning and computer-assisted language learning system (CALL).

The questionnaire, Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire survey was designed and uploaded through system so-called Google form. The survey was designed with two central portions of searching information and fluency element combined with the accuracy proportion to investigate students' perception of m-learning in writing. Table 1 shows the total questions of the research on the attitude of learners.

Table 1. The Likert scale questionnaire on the attitude of students toward m-learning in learning writing.

No	Code	Questions	Disagree	Agree	Entirely Agree
1	SI1	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classrooms) helps you search for sentence models.	1	2	3
2	SI2	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you search for suitable vocabulary.	1	2	3
3	SI3	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you search for ideas.	1	2	3
4	SI4	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you search for the styles.	1	2	3
5	SI5	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you search for expressions, collocation and idioms.	1	2	3
6	AP1	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you shorten the time to generate the text.	1	2	3
7	AP2	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you have diversified expression and avoid repetition.	1	2	3
8	AP3	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you use transactive words logically, leading to coherence.	1	2	3
9	AP4	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you have better unity in the text.	1	2	3
10	AP5	Using smartphones and portable devices (internal and external classroom) helps you lengthen your text.	1	2	3

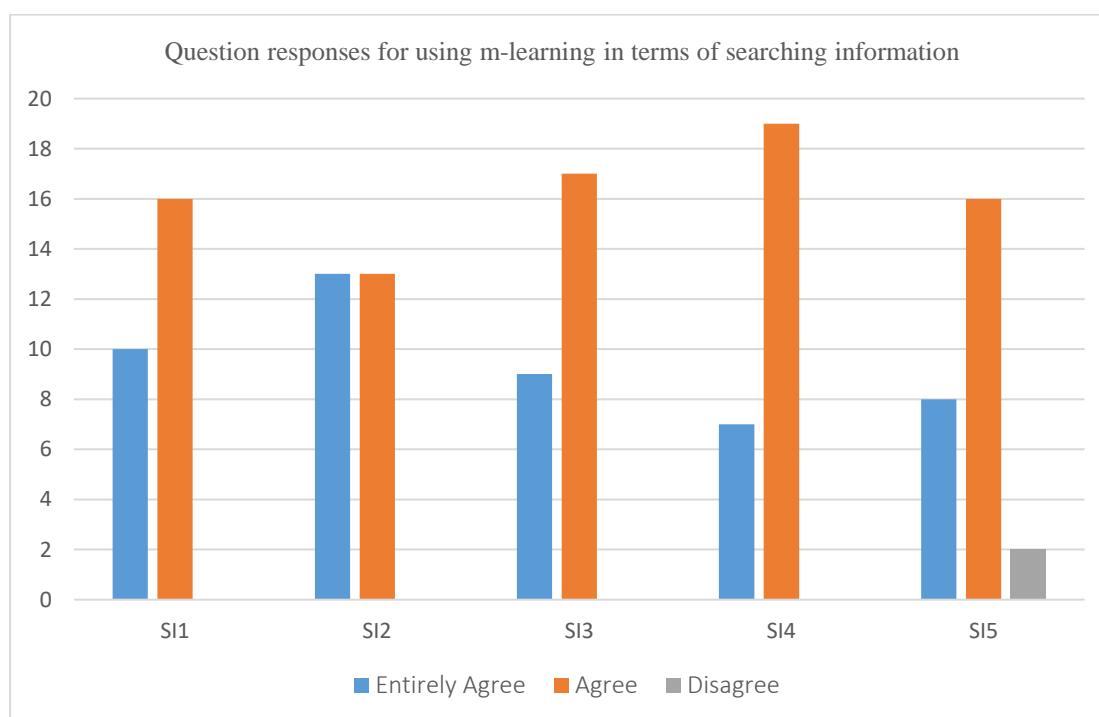The survey was designed as prior mentioned points due to the following hypotheses:

According to Lan and Sie (2010) (as cited in Chanprasert & Han, 2013, pp. 99), m-learning is defined as the activity of learning that learners could be able to take materials, lessons and instruction at any corners with the connection through wireless network and internet. This definition implied mobile phones, laptops and other handy devices like iPod, iPad and tablets. Similarly, Ozdamli and Cavus (2011) also pointed out that mobile learning is a model of pedagogy that provides learners more freely opportunities to access the materials and knowledge as well. The accessing the information in need, specifically, in writing periods. Hence, the first part of the questionnaire, with the questions range from 1 to 5, focuses on the searching information use of mobile learning.
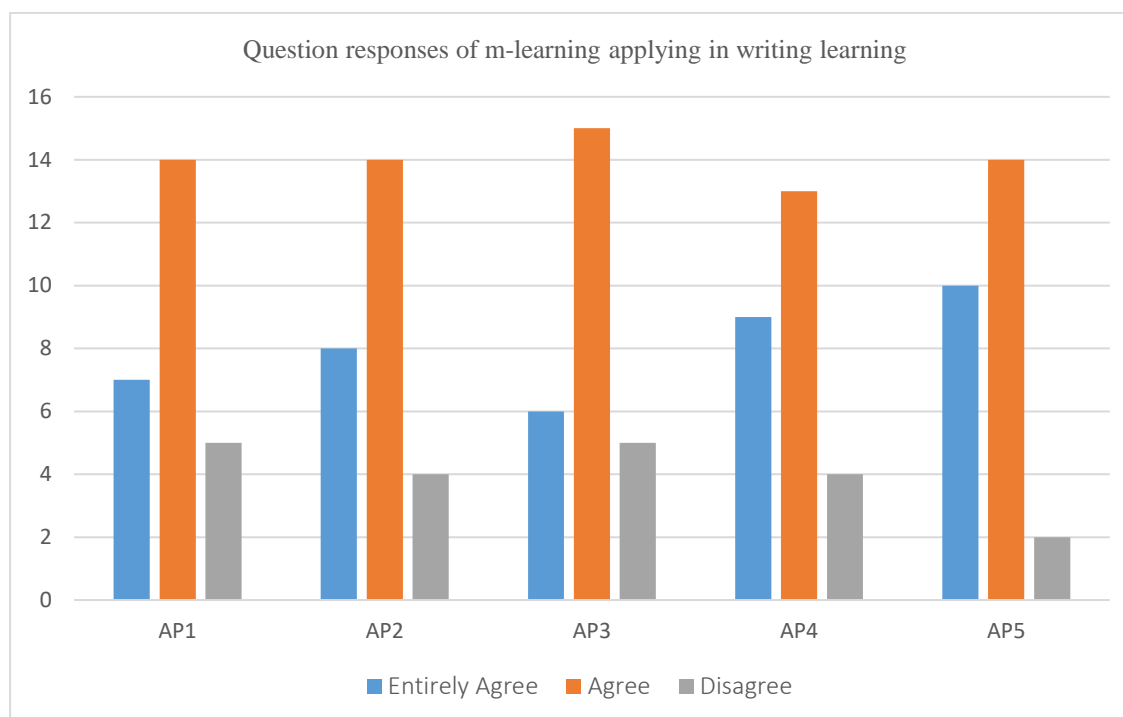
In terms of writing fluency, Biria and Jafari (2013) (as cited in Pham, 2021, pp. 5) concluded that writing fluency is "the total number of words or sentences written within a given allocated time, and they measured writing fluency by numbers of words or length of a text" (Pham, 2021). On the other hand, in terms of writing accuracy, Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998) (as cited in Hartshorn 2008) defined the notion of accuracy by the statement:" the ability to be free from errors while using language to communicate." In broad meaning, the accuracy and fluency of

writing are mentioned in the second part of the questionnaire under the perspective of applying these points.

The questionnaire was uploaded publicly in order to give permission of access to all participants. The participants joining the survey chose the most suitable answer for each question, recorded and summarized by the platform Google. At the end of the study, 26 students from a second-foreign language class of foreign language faculty did the survey. A record including the information of the time, students' code and their response is being kept as a basic database for the study.

The total number of answers for each question is displayed in the following charts. The questions of the first part concentrating on the searching feature of m-learning in writing class range from 1 to 5 were coded as range SI1 to SI5; meanwhile, the questions range between questions 6 and 10 of the second portion explore the application of them-learning in writing fluency and accuracy are coded to AP1 to AP5.

Question responses for using m-learning in terms of searching information

Question responses of m-learning applying in writing learning

The reliability of the responses for the questionnaire was analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. According to Hayes and Krippendorff (2007), the standard for reliability is based on the figure of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. According to Cronbach, the standard for the reliability of the figure is 0.6. In addition, Cronbach also stated that the good range of reliability is between 0.6 and 0.95. The figure is not reliable if the case is out of this range. The questionnaire was repetitive if the figure of reliability was at 0.95 and over, for instance.

The reliability of the responses from two parts of the questionnaire showed the results alternatively 0.893 and 0.892, which were over 0.6. This implicated that the questionnaire met the standard of the figure of alpha Cronbach, which meant this Likert scale basis could avoid repetition, and the students who took part in the survey understood the questions and made the decision later then.

Findings and discussion

The total number of responses to the survey was 26. All the participants fulfilled the questionnaire of the 3-point Likert scale completely. The aim of this study is to investigate the attitude of students toward m-learning in writing in two criteria. Table 2 shows that most students taking part in the survey have a positive outlook toward utilizing mobile phones and mobile devices in searching information for writing classes and writing activities. And table 3 reveals the attitude of learners toward using mobile phones and portable devices for enhancing writing fluency and accuracy via the mean figure of all responses.

Research question 1(RQ1): To what extent do the students perceive m-learning in a writing course?

The purpose of this question is to explore students' attitudes toward using mobile phones and other portable devices in learning writing as a tool to access information. Table 2 shows that the mean figures of each question tend toward the positive point of totally agree that the m-

learning system creates merits in searching data in writing class. Accordingly, the results implied that the student enjoyed utilizing the portable devices for taking information for studying writing. The big picture behind this phenomenon via the mean figure of the questions stated that m-learning gives students more chances to reach information of writing in terms of sentence models, vocabulary, ideas, styles, collocations and idioms. On the other hand, these results indicated the fact that mobile learning freely enables students to better the text.

The needs of the students for employing m-learning in writing class with the function of reaching information and materials are also revealed through the results. For the fact that the learners have a positive point of view toward the use of mobile learning in writing activities (including generating the text, reviewing, editing and rewriting), it is apparent that the students need the great support of the mobile system in terms of personalizing their studying, generally and in writing specifically. The process of composing the text with support coming from the smartphones was proved positively through the learners' attitude in the survey. Hence, through the questionnaire, the need coming from students to utilize the MALL is showed.

Table 2 The descriptive analysis of students' attitude toward using m-learning in terms of searching information.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
SI1	26	2,00	3,00	2,3846	,09730	,49614
SI2	26	2,00	3,00	2,5000	,10000	,50990
SI3	26	2,00	3,00	2,3462	,09515	,48516
SI4	26	2,00	3,00	2,2692	,08871	,45234
SI5	26	1,00	3,00	2,2308	,11513	,58704
Valid N (listwise)	26					

Research question 2(RQ2): What is the attitude of learners in applying m-learning in studying writing to improve accuracy and fluency?

In response to this question, the results for each question of the second part of the study implied that most students agree that using mobile learning in writing activities can enhance the writers' skills. In fact, accuracy and fluency are made up of a series of mentioned components in the hypotheses about accuracy and fluency. Through the questionnaire, these components are supported by them-learning. As the mean figure of the responses showed that m-learning provides the students some tools to apply in the writing course. Therefore, the quality of the text generated by the learners becomes better. In addition, through their answers, the students indicated their sense of demand for utilizing mobile devices in writing.

On the other hand, according to Table 3, the mean figures are approximately 2, which means the number of students' disagreements in the second part appeared. This revealed the fact that the students have some difficulties in using the mobile learning means in writing in terms of fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, this also pointed out that applying them-learning in writing fluency and accuracy is not so effective compared to the searching function. In greater detail, according to the responses coming from the students, utilizing mobile phones and portable devices in writing to enhance accuracy and fluency still have difficulties. All things considered, questions responses figure out the potential effectiveness of them-learning in the application of information reaching capability as well as writing accuracy and writing fluency. Additionally,

the application of MALL appeared to be an issue that needs further research with the more profound method of quasi-experimental research, pre-test and post-test with appropriate treatments and a larger number of participants which focus on the deployment of the concerned approach in terms of utilizing portable devices in writing accuracy and fluency.

Table 3 The descriptive analysis of students' attitude toward applying m-learning for studying writing

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
AP1	26	1,00	3,00	2,0769	,13500	,68836
AP2	26	1,00	3,00	2,1538	,13234	,67482
AP3	26	1,00	3,00	2,0385	,12986	,66216
AP4	26	1,00	3,00	2,1923	,13609	,69393
AP5	26	1,00	3,00	2,3077	,12114	,61769
Valid N (listwise)	26					

Conclusion, discussion and suggestion

Generally, the study found that the students have a positive attitude toward their learning in writing. The study results showed that the searching machine function of mobile learning dominates the applying function in terms of fluency and accuracy in writing courses. Besides, the findings of this article also revealed that m-learning provides learners tools to enhance the quality of the text, which are partly similar to previous studies (Sipra & Ahmad, 2016; Noriega, 2016; Li & Hegelheimer, 2013). Briefly, the learners enjoy the idea that m-learning greatly helps in writing study for searching information, accuracy and fluency enhancement.

Nevertheless, the study just concentrated on the attitude of the students with a small scale of samples. It would have been more successful if the study could handle a greater number of participants. Further research on the application of m-learning should be conducted with another research method of pre-test, the course of applying m-learning in writing and post-test so that the merits of mobile learning and more apparent attitude of learners will be provided spotlight. In addition, the difficulties in utilizing MALL are also a heated topic.

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Biodata

The author has experience in instructing English for over ten years, now he is in the phase of studying master degree at Dong Nai Technology University, Viet Nam. So far, the topic of collaborative writing as well as the effectiveness of MALL have stimulated the writer.