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Juxtaposing Teachers' with Students' Considerations in the Implementation of MALL in the Algerian EFL Context: Practices, Policies, Perplexities and Prospects

مقارنة بين تطبيق أساتذة وطلاب اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات الجزائرية لطرق تعلم اللغة بمساعدة الاجهزة المحمولة: استخدامات، سياسات، تحديات، وآفاق.

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Abstract :

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, or simply MALL, is a rapidly evolving field due to the continuous advancements in education and technology. With English being the world's lingua franca, MALL has made digital literacy a necessity for English language teachers and learners. This paper reports on the findings from a study of the different uses of mobile technologies among Algerian University EFL teachers and students. The study aims to bridge the gap between teachers and learners regarding the use of MALL by establishing a clearer foundation for the next generation. It sheds light on the discrepancies in perspectives, policies and challenges faced by practitioners. The mixed method was implemented to collect quantitative and qualitative data using two questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed and administered through Google Forms with responses from 47 teachers and 113 students from three Algerian universities. Although MALL is a relatively new field to the Algerian EFL context, the study revealed that both teachers and students are well-aware of its importance in language learning. Despite the common awareness, the study exposes major differences in uses and policies between teachers and students and among teachers themselves. The study also uncovers the differences within the challenges that both groups face and suggests solutions to these.

Keywords : Mobile-Assisted Language Learning; EFL teachers; EFL students; policies; challenges and prospects

ملخص :

يعد تعلم اللغة بمساعدة الأجهزة المحمولة مجالًا سريع التطور بسبب التقدم المستمر في التعليم والتكنولوجيا. نظرا لمكانة اللغة الإنجليزية في العالم، أصبح من الضروري لمعلمي ومتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية تعزيز مهاراتهم ومعرفتهم في مجال التكنولوجيا. تقدم هذه الدراسة استقصاءً شاملاً حول الاستخدامات المختلفة لتقنيات الأجهزة المحمولة بين الاساتذة والطلاب في الجامعات الجزائرية. تهدف الدراسة الى سد الفجوة بين المعلمين والمتعلمين فيما يتعلق بتعلم اللغة بمساعدة الأجهزة المحمولة من خلال إنشاء أسس أوضح للجيل القادم. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على التناقضات في وجهات النظر والسياسات والتحديات التي يواجهها الطلاب والأساتذة. تم جمع البيانات الكمية والنوعية باستخدام استبيانين. تم تصميم الاستبيانات وإدارتها بمشاركة 47 أستاذا و113 طالبًا من ثلاث جامعات جزائرية. على الرغم من أن تعلم اللغة بمساعدة الأجهزة المحمولة هو مجال جديد نسبيًا على التعليم في الجزائر، فقد كشفت الدراسة أن كل من الاساتذة والطلاب يدركون جيدًا أهميته في تعلم اللغة. ومع ذلك، تكشف الدراسة اختلافات كبيرة في الاستخدامات والسياسات بين المعلمين والطلاب وضمن المعلمين أنفسهم. تكشف الدراسة أيضًا عن الاختلافات في التحديات التي تواجه كلا المجموعتين وتقترح حلولا لها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعلم اللغة بمساعدة الأجهزة المحمولة، أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية، سياسات، تحديات، آفاق

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1. Intorduction:

In a fast-paced world of technology and innovation, language teaching and learning is experiencing profound changes inside and outside the classroom. Mobile technologies, in particular, have undoubtedly transformed the way the English language is taught and learned. The unceasingly growing body of literature on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is proof of the rising interest from researchers, educators and students around the world. The Algerian EFL context is yet another setting where MALL is being implemented by students and teachers. New pedagogical practices often create new challenges. When these challenges are analysed and resolved, they culminate in better learning and teaching. Therefore, this study aims to examine the ways in which mobile technologies are being implemented by teachers and students by juxtaposing the differences between the two. The comparison will focus on their use of MALL, their attitudes towards it, the challenges they face, and their prospective ways of overcoming these challenges.

2. Literature Review :

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL):

MALL is a subfield of the relatively new field of mobile learning, also referred to as m-learning. Due to the rapid evolvement of this field, there is still no agreement on what defines m-learning. However, many researchers attempted to discuss the 'mobility' aspect of m-learning. For example, Naismith, Sharples, Vavoula, & Lonsdale (2004) describe it as simply learning through mobile devices such as smartphones, PDAs, iPods, tablets, etc. Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008) described mobile learning as formal or informal education facilitated by handheld devices that are accessible anywhere and at any time. The "anywhere anytime" aspect has been heavily emphasised in the literature. This makes it one of the main characteristics that distinguishes mobile learning from other types of learning including Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008) affirm that the use of portable and personal devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops is what distinguishes MALL from CALL.

There are numerous advantages to the use of MALL that have been thus far accounted for in the literature. As their name indicates, mobile devices are mobile and portable. The ability to easily carry and move these objects around is a shared feature that makes them convenient to use for various purposes including language learning. As indicated by Pachler, Bachmair & Cook (2010), students are no longer limited to learning a second language in a classroom setting. Studies have shown that distance learning is becoming easier and more effective due to the efficient use of portable devices. It is also undeniable how ubiquitous mobile devices have become. Their ubiquity allows access to educational materials for people who had limited, if any, learning opportunities. Being able to directly connect to the internet without any other device or wiring is another advantage of using mobile devices for language learning. Kukulska-Hulme (2018) claims that Wi-Fi connection and GPS (Global Positioning System) can increase learning opportunities on the move, especially when there is free access to the internet.

It is generally agreed that interactivity is a crucial attribute to language learning. Mobile devices can support interactive activities for language learning as they can connect students with each other inside and outside the classroom. Learners can exchange ideas and use language on various academic and social platforms. This also allows students to use the target language in different contexts which increases their cultural and pragmatic competencies. In their study, Hwang Shih, Ma, Shadiev & Chen (2016) implemented a mobile learning design where students applied the skills they acquired to authentic situations and produced relevant learning content leading to better language use. Not only do they encourage students to interact and collaborate with their instructors and other learners, mobile devices also enhance autonomous learning through personalised

content and skills for each student's distinguished learning style. This can, in turn, improve self-assessment as mobile devices can help learners recognise their individual errors and, therefore, learn from them. In large classes with limited time for classroom instruction, teachers may not be able to pay close attention to each student's individual needs.

The instruc, Lee, & Schmidt (2016) attest that many mobile applications have the potential to accurately and reliably record complex usage input and customise learning experiences for individual learners. Introverted learners, in particular, can benefit from the privacy and the sense of safety that mobile devices offer in terms of receiving feedback, which can encourage them to learn.

Moreover, modern-day mobile devices enable users to multitask as they combine multiple functions in one device. The same device can be used for daily communication through phone calls, messaging, emails, social media, etc. and other multimedia functions such as cameras, voice recording, videotaping, creating content, reading and listening to texts. These functions continue to rapidly evolve. Several researchers concur that these features, and others, make mobile devices cost-effective and worth implementing both in academic and lifelong learning situations.

Despite all the above-mentioned benefits of using mobile devices in language learning, there are still several tor can overlook some serious errors that mobile devices can help detect. Heil, Wu challenges that both educators and learners face when trying to implement MALL. The literature reports some technical limitations linked to mobile device use such as small screens, limited storage space, battery life, lack of cross-platform functionality and the unreliability of Wi-Fi connections. Kukulska-Hulme (2018) also raises some concerns regarding the excessive use and misuse of mobile devices and other related safety and health concerns. Furthermore, the multifunctionality feature of portable devices creates a challenge for MALL practitioners in the sense that it makes it hard for them to draw the line between learning, leisure and personal use. Researchers like Gauerdau, Miranda, & Gareau (2014) argue that mobile devices may distract learners or provide irrelevant content.

Certain pedagogical challenges have also been discussed by several researchers/educators. Mainly, experienced teachers find it difficult to adapt some of their pedagogical practices to comply with modern technologies. This is due to the constant change in both education and technology. Kohler & Mishra (2008) attest that technology is dynamic, and, therefore, it has become necessary for educators to continuously advance their digital literacy in order to keep up with the latest trends. Walsh (2019) believes that it is hard for teachers to find a balance between professionally advancing in their field and learning how to use and apply MALL in their classrooms. Additionally, not all applications of MALL are based upon sound pedagogical practices. Researchers such as Park & Slater (2014) have underlined the lack of instructional design in current applications of MALL. The difference in expertise between teaching practitioners and app developers and the lack of cooperation between the two parties is predicted to negatively affect the use of MALL, according to Kim, Rueckert, Kim, & Seo (2013).

Current Trends on the Use of MALL:

The literature shows that language teachers tend to have conflicting opinions when it comes to the use of MALL as an instructional tool. Some teachers acknowledge its usefulness in language pedagogy while others refrain from using it. Overall, there is an increasing interest in the implementation of mobile-based language instruction. In their study, Toffolli & Sockett (2015) reported that more than half of the teachers they questioned showed a willingness to incorporate formal and informal mobile learning in their teaching practices and that their students influence their choice of content and materials used for these purposes. Pereira (2015) studied teachers' use of MALL and categorised it into four ways: content delivery, practice or revision, students' creation of

content and both sharing and collaborating on work. The study also linked the teachers' implementation of MALL to "a higher level of learner involvement, more engaging learning opportunities and a move from teacher-led instruction to student-centred pedagogy" (Pereira, 2015 p. 25).

The vast majority of present-day students are digital natives i.e. those who are born into the digital world. Mobile learning, in particular, seems to attract those students as they become more receptive to its use when positive outcomes are clearly outlined. Most studies that investigated students' use and attitudes towards MALL have reported positive responses. To exemplify, more than 80% of the respondents in the Zou and Li (2015) questionnaire were pleased with their experience of incorporating mobile technology as a learning medium. They further commented on the use of the language learning apps used in the study as being motivational, convenient and timesaving. Kim et al. (2013) established that most learners consider mobile devices valuable learning assets, mainly when it comes to language learning. The researchers linked this to the personalised and meaningful learning experiences that mobile learning offers allowing students to expand their learning spheres. However, studies have advised against assuming that younger learners will naturally enjoy using mobile devices for learning, even when they are expert users of mobile phones in their daily lives (Kukulska-Hulme, 2018).

3. Methodology and Data Collection:

This study applies a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative research that was conducted in order to juxtapose teachers' with students' considerations in the implementation of MALL in the Algerian EFL context. To do so, two questionnaires have been designed and administered: a teachers' questionnaire and a students' questionnaire. Both questionnaires have been administered through Google Forms. They encompass a combination of multiple choice, scale and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was deliberately selected as a data gathering tool as it serves the purpose of the study and is appropriate for a large number of participants.

Subjects of the study are 47 EFL teachers and 113 EFL students at the English departments of three Algerian universities, namely, the University of Kasdi Merbah, Ouargla, the University of Badji Mokhtar, Annaba and the University of Hama Lakhdar, El Oued. Sampling was random with the prerequisite of being a university EFL student/teacher in the Algerian context, and participation was voluntary. Students' ages ranged between 17 and 35, while teachers' ages ranged between 26 and over 60. All participants were ensured of the confidentiality of their responses and were asked to answer objectively. Key terms were explained to them in the introductions of the questionnaires.

4. Results and Discussion :

Q1. Mobile Device(s) Ownership:

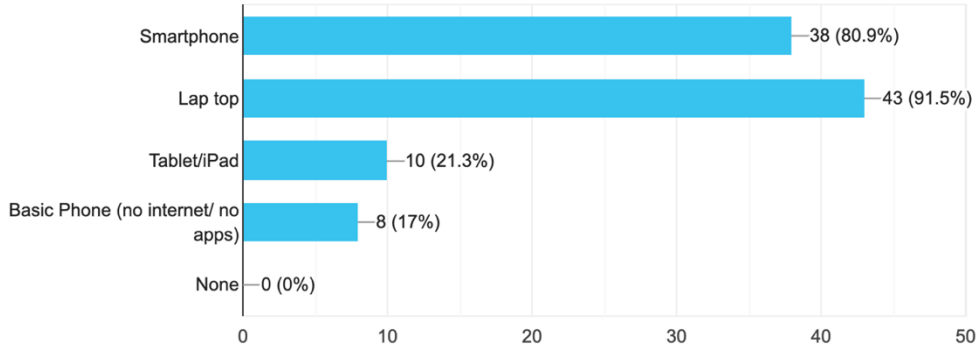

Figure 1: Teachers' Mobile Device(s) Ownership

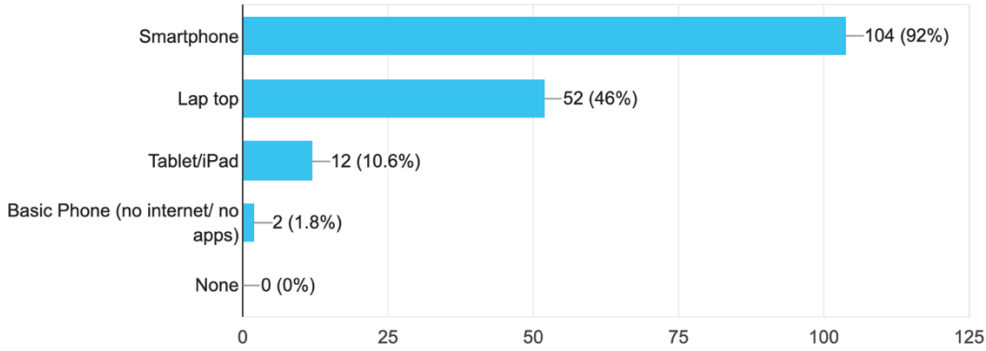

Figure 2: Students' Mobile Device(s) Ownership

In the first question, we asked all participants, teachers and students, to indicate which mobile device(s) they own and use. They were given five options: smartphone, laptop, tablet/iPad, basic phone, and none. They were also given the possibility to choose more than one option. Figure 1 illustrates teachers' responses while Figure 2 illustrates students' responses. From these two figures, we can see that most of the participants in both groups (80% of the teachers and 92% of the students) own and use a smartphone. Laptops, on the other hand, seem to be owned more by teachers (91%) than by students (46%). Compared to smartphones and laptops, tablets seem to be less popular among both groups with 21% of the teachers and 10% of the students owning a tablet/iPad. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between the two groups in the ownership of a basic phone (a phone with no internet and no apps). Whereas 17% of the teachers claimed to have a basic phone, less than 2% of the students stated that they do.

Q2. Mobile Device Use

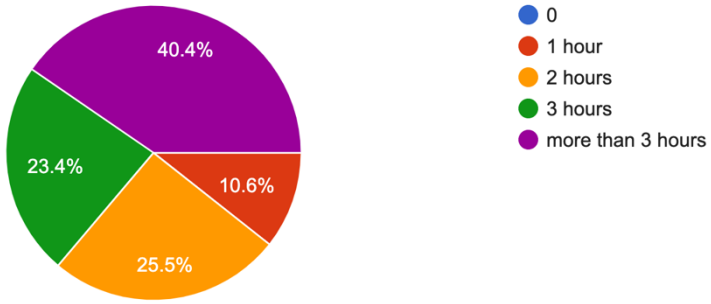

Figure 3: Teachers' Average Hourly Use of Mobile Devices per Day

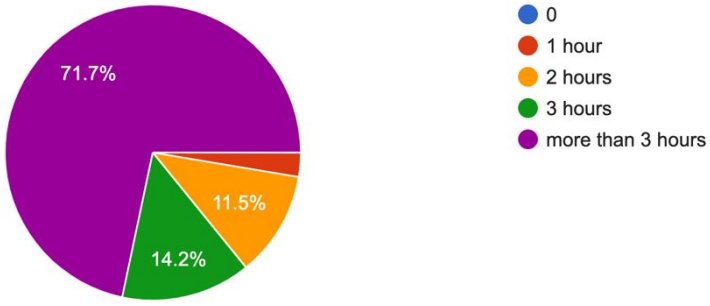

Figure 4: Students' Average Hourly Use of Mobile Devices per Day

Participant teachers and students were also asked to indicate the average number of hours they spend on their mobile devices in a day. For the sake of comparison, the two pie charts (Figures 3 and 4) represent the differences between the two groups. Overall, students seem to spend significantly more time on their mobile devices compared to teachers. 71% of students use their devices for more than 3 hours while only 41% of teachers use their mobile devices for the same number of hours. Almost half of the teachers (49%) spend 2 or 3 hours a day on their mobile devices while a few (11%) spend only an hour. For students, 14% claimed to use their mobile devices for up to 3 hours, and 11% claimed to use them for up to 2 hours a day. Very few students (3%) use their mobile devices for only an hour.

Q3. The Importance of MALL

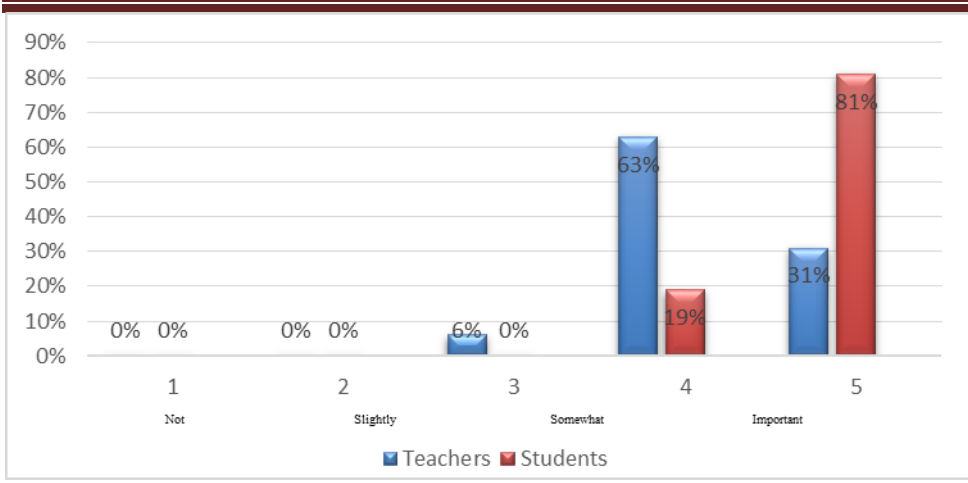

Figure 5: Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on the Importance of MALL

The next question aims at comparing teachers' and students' perspectives on the importance of MALL. Both groups were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the importance of mobile devices with regard to learning English where 5 = very important and 1 = not important. As shown in Figure 5, the vast majority of the students (81%) believe that mobile devices are very important in learning English in the modern world and rated it at 5. However, only 31% of the teachers agree with the latter statement as the majority of them (63%) rated it 4, which is interpreted as "important" on the given scale. Only a few teachers (6%) think that mobile devices are "somewhat important" with a rate of 3 on the scale. This indicates that both teachers and students agree, with varying degrees, on the importance of mobile devices in language learning.

Q4. Policies

	Allowed only inside the classroom		**Allowed only outside the classroom**		**Allowed both inside and outside the classroom**		**Not allowed**	
	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students
Read texts online or offline	8.51%	10.62%	31.91%	35.40%	55.32%	50.44%	4.26%	3.54%
Record audio files of myself	12.77%	4.42%	29.79%	50.44%	42.55%	10.62%	14.89%	34.51%
Record lectures or lessons	19.15%	6.19%	8.51%	11.50%	19.15%	14.16%	53.19%	68.14%
Take notes via typing or voice recognition dictation	19.15%	23.01%	21.28%	16.81%	53.19%	35.40%	6.38%	24.78%
Research through web browsers	0.00%	2.65%	36.17%	26.55%	61.70%	70.80%	2.13%	0.00%
Use social media to	0.00%	0.00%	68.09%	52.21%	17.02%	29.20%	14.89%	18.58%

create posts								
Use social media to interact with other English language users and learners	0.00%	4.42%	76.60%	53.10%	17.02%	30.97%	6.38%	11.50%
Use messaging or video chatting apps to interact with others in English	0.00%	2.65%	76.60%	55.75%	17.02%	23.89%	6.38%	17.70%
Listen to audio files in English	4.26%	7.08%	38.30%	59.29%	57.45%	29.20%	0.00%	4.42%
Use apps with practice tests to improve language skills	4.26%	2.65%	63.83%	49.56%	31.91%	30.09%	0.00%	17.70%
Use an online or offline dictionary	10.64%	7.08%	8.51%	15.93%	76.60%	76.99%	4.26%	0.00%
Watch videos in English	4.26%	4.42%	46.81%	62.83%	44.68%	30.09%	4.26%	2.65%
Play language games	8.51%	4.42%	48.94%	53.98%	38.30%	16.81%	4.26%	24.78%
Use translation apps and websites to translate texts	8.51%	7.08%	38.30%	26.55%	40.43%	62.83%	12.77%	3.54%
Read and send emails in English	8.51%	2.65%	65.96%	60.18%	21.28%	32.74%	4.26%	4.42%
Create, edit, and share content	6.38%	3.54%	61.70%	50.44%	31.91%	40.71%	0.00%	5.31%
Take pictures or screenshots of texts as copies	4.26%	13.27%	23.40%	23.89%	70.21%	61.06%	2.13%	1.77%
Organise and manage study time	6.38%	3.54%	42.55%	40.71%	46.81%	26.55%	4.26%	29.20%
Submit assignments on study platforms such as Google Classroom.	0.00%	7.96%	48.94%	44.25%	42.55%	19.47%	8.51%	28.32%
Engage in study-related discussions	6.38%	10.62%	61.70%	43.36%	25.53%	32.74%	6.38%	13.27%

Table 1: Policies on Different Uses of MALL According to Teachers and Students

Table 1 represents the second part of the questionnaire. Students were asked to indicate how they use their mobile devices for the purposes listed in the table while teachers were asked to indicate their policies towards these uses. The table reflects on the major

discrepancies not only between the teachers and the students but also among teachers themselves. For example, although some teachers allow their students to record lectures or lessons using their mobile devices in the classroom, others do not. Similarly, while some students claimed that they are allowed to use their mobile devices to take notes, read texts, or listen to audio files, an almost equal number of students claimed they are not allowed to do so in the classroom. Nevertheless, there seems to be an overall consensus on the use of online/offline dictionaries as 76% of the students and 76% of the teachers voted that dictionaries on mobile devices are allowed for use inside and outside the classroom. This mismatch in responses among teachers and between teachers and students is believed to be the result of the unclear understanding regarding the use of mobile devices in the EFL classrooms of Algerian universities as explained in the following segment of the questionnaire.

Q5. Challenges with MALL Implementation

The fifth question is an open-ended question that seeks to analyse and compare between the challenges faced by teachers and the challenges faced by students when trying to use MALL. Again, the same question was used in both questionnaires, and answers were provided in the form of bullet points or a short paragraph. The following is a synopsis of the results collected from both groups.

Teachers :

Almost all the teachers that participated in our study stated that the quality of the internet is the biggest challenge they face when trying to implement MALL. Some explained that the internet does not allow for "a smooth task performance" and that they had to either download files at home and bring them to the class or refrain from using tasks that require the use of the internet. Another challenge that was frequently highlighted is the large number of students per class which makes it hard for teachers to monitor their students' performance when they are on their mobile devices. Teachers have also raised the concern of distractions caused by other apps and websites such as social media apps and video games. They reported that this might interfere with the flow and effectiveness of the learning process.

Some of the teachers accounted for several technical difficulties. It was stated that the brightness in the rooms makes using laptops and projectors difficult. The low quality of sound on the loudspeakers makes it challanging for students in the back of the classroom or students with hearing impairment to listen to audio or video content. Another technical issue that was mentioned is the device battery life. It was reported that there are not enough outlets for students to charge their portable devices while being used and that some devices run out of battery life swiftly. A few other teachers stressed the issue of differences in file format and differences in app compatibility with iOS and Android platforms.

There were also some pedagogical concerns that were underlined in this study. The most mentioned pedagogical concern was the obscurity of policies on MALL use both on the administrative level and on the classroom level. This is believed to cause confusion among teachers as well as students. It was also mentioned that MALL is a dynamic field that needs constant learning and training and that this can be time-consuming, especially if the teacher is not an expert technology user. Moreover, the content of some apps and websites is thought to be unreliable or informal for an academic learning environment. Lastly, one of the respondents noticed that a few students do not have smart devices which may cause psychological learning barriers.

Students :

For students, not only is the quality of the internet the biggest challenge but also the cost of the internet. Universities either do not provide free Wi-Fi or have very poor internet reception which requires students to connect to the internet using their own cellular data. A

considerable number of students also stated that they can be easily distracted by notifications from other apps, mainly social media and messaging apps. According to some students, it is more difficult to manage their learning with MALL in comparison to the traditional classroom learning due to the lack of face to face interaction and teacher feedback. These students tend to associate their mobile phones with leisure more than with learning. It was also mentioned that lengthy exposure to screens causes eye discomfort or irritation. Clarity of guidelines seems to be another perplexity that the students face when it comes to MALL implementation. They reported that different teachers have different policies on using mobile devices in the classroom and that these policies are not clearly communicated to the students. We created the following Venn diagram (Figure 6) to summarise and compare the challenges faced by Algerian EFL teachers and students.

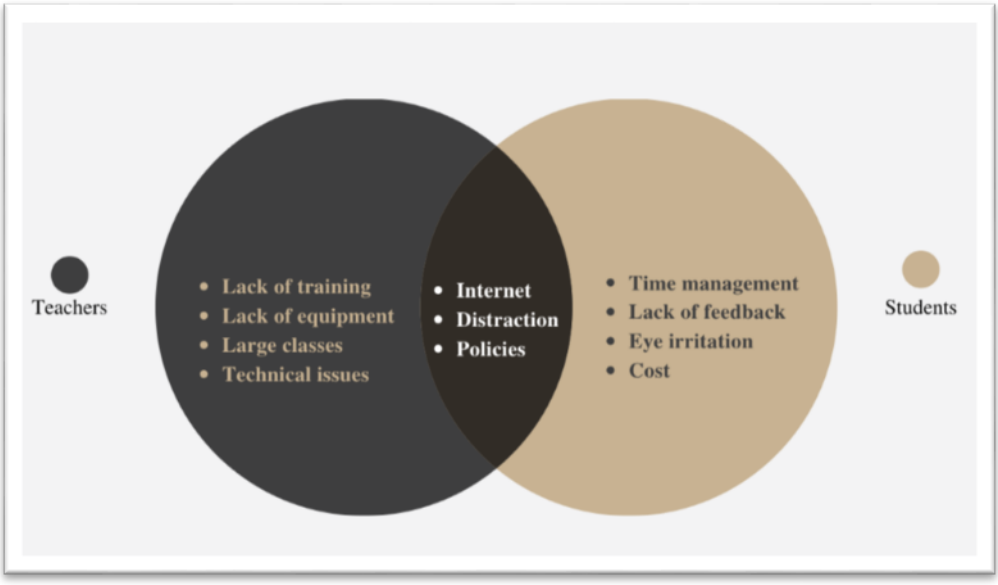

Figure 6: Challenges with MALL Implementation

Q6. Prospects

In the last question, we asked teachers and students to suggest solutions to the above-mentioned problems. Both teachers and students agree that improving the quality of the internet will improve their experiences with MALL and will motivate them to implement and experiment with new MALL practices. Additionally, some teachers recommended the use of smart classrooms. In brief, a smart classroom is one that is equipped with technology-enhanced materials that allow for interactive and active learning. This is often contingent on the university budget and administrative decision-makers. When possible, reducing the number of students per class can help teachers closely monitor their students' performance and provide better feedback. Participants from the two groups further argue that it is necessary for every teacher to outline policies regarding the use of mobile devices and include these in their syllabi in order to provide clearer direction. Certain participants stressed the importance of continuous training on how to use MALL effectively for teachers and students. Another prospect idea that was suggested by some students was creating virtual study groups where students and teachers can interact, exchange

information, submit assignments and receive feedback. This is predicted to help reduce distractions and create a more productive learning environment.

Limitations of the Study:

It is worth mentioning that the study was conducted during the time of quarantine imposed by the Algerian government due to COVID-19 (Spring 2020) which urged the researchers to use Google Forms to reach participants and collect data. This may imply that all participants have access to mobile devices and that other teachers and students with limited access, and possibly different perspectives, did not participate in the study.

Conclusion:

This study is an in-depth comparison between Algerian EFL teachers' and students' perspectives, policies and challenges with implementing Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The data collected shows that teachers and students are both conscious of the important role that mobile devices have come to play in the modern English language learning experience. Nonetheless, the two groups have major discrepancies in their experiences with MALL use. Students seem to have more expertise than teachers with mobile devices as they own more mobile devices and use them more often than the teachers do. The study also uncovers significant policy gaps among teachers themselves and between teachers and students. Despite some common challenges such as the internet quality and the ambiguous policies, students and teachers reported on diverse obstacles that they encounter when trying to incorporate MALL. This study suggests facing these challenges by crystalising policies, improving the learning-teaching conditions, and training both teachers and students. Based on the findings of this study, we predict that MALL will gain more interest in the future from both teachers and students. We, therefore, highly encourage further research on MALL practices in the Algerian EFL context.

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