

Impacts of Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment (MALA) on EFL Students' Beliefs About Language Learning (BALL)

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ABSTRACT

Based on 21st-century learning framework, in order to support the students' skills, knowledge and expertise, assessment becomes one of the critical systems necessary that should be mastered to succeed in work and life. At the same time, new assessment mode has been developed during the time since the wireless technologies such as personal mobile electronic devices are used in assessment procedures. Under this scope, this qualitative case study aims to investigate the impacts of using a Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment (MALA) application (WhatsApp) on Indonesian EFL students' Beliefs About Language Learning (BALL) in the Indonesian context. The open-ended questions and focus group interview were used to collect the data. The findings reveal that students have positive opinions towards the usage of mobile devices and applications for assessment and evaluation in an online classroom setting and changed their BALL. The results of the study contribute to a future study that concerns with mobile-assisted language assessment issue in the English language teaching field in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Beliefs About Language Learning (BALL), English as Foreign Language (EFL), Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment (MALA)*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of mobile technologies and the extensive usage of mobile devices, there is a constantly increasing adoption of mobile learning in not only formal but also informal educational settings (Nikou & Economides, 2018). As a result, the uses of mobile devices are getting more relevant currently. Learning and working environment have got the impacts of it. In learning context, mobile technologies provide many positive impacts which give current and enhanced learning opportunities. The impacts cover such as seamless bridging between contexts in both formal and informal learning and personalization and adaptivity context-awareness and ubiquity, interactivity, communication and collaboration among learners, (Sung, Cang, & Liu, 2016; West & Vosloo (as cited in Nikou & Economides), 2018).

In order to support the students' skills, knowledge and expertise, assessment became one of the critical systems necessary that should be mastered to succeed in work and life (Batelle for Kids, 2018). As the learner-centered approach has been widely suggested in the

foreign language field, researchers' and educators' innovations are commonly requested for more effective assessment method that could reflect the multifaceted nature of students' learning (Cong-Lem, 2019). Hence, Nikou and Economides (2018) suggest that besides providing a time-and location-independent medium for delivering personalized and context-aware learning content, mobile devices also facilitate a new delivery mode of assessment with the use of mobile devices called Mobile-Based Assessment (MBA).

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is one of the most innovative current technology forms to support language learning. Moreover, its role in language assessment also could be specifically significant, especially when it comes to the alternative to the present static form of language testing called Dynamic Assessment (DA) (Tarighat & Khodabakhsh, 2016). The product of this is a method called Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment. The term Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment (MALA) has been coined from the combination of those two different disciplines such as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and Portfolio Assessment that is, in turn, a

subdivision of Dynamic Assessment in the online language classroom (Tarighat & Khodabakhsh, 2016). The intention is to expand the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of the EFL learners and put MALA learning and assessment integrated each other so that the opportunities could be maximized.

Although a significant number of studies that concerned with mobile learning existed, the fact showed that not many studies provided insight into mobile-based assessment in particular. In a literature review research, Nikou and Economides (2018) reviewed forty-three articles regarding mobile-based assessment published in seven major educational technology research journals from 2009 to 2018. Despite some significant positive impact on student learning performance, motivation and attitudes, the study also identified several gaps in the mobile assessment literature. The study indicated that more research is needed in order to investigate issues and concerns related to negative perceptions against the mobile assessment. Further, a stronger alignment needed to be developed between student motivation and different mobile-based assessment practices.

The urgency of the importance of understanding the impact of technology-based peer-assessment usage on students' BALL is supported by the fact that there is a consensus among researchers in the field of language teaching that individual language learners seem to have different beliefs about how languages are learned (Costa & Han, 2017). According to Barcelos (2003), this individual learner beliefs refers to "beliefs about the nature of language and language learning". Thus, individual beliefs about language learning could affect learners' approaches to their behaviors in language learning, either consciously or unconsciously.

However, the previous study regarding the use of MALA issue indicated that that fairness and lack of authentic communication mainly became the concern on the students' attitudes towards MALA (Tarighat & Khodabakhsh, 2016). Both of indications were caused by the lack of information about the perspective of EFL students' belief about language learning. Meanwhile, Munassir (2019) emphasizes that it is important to understand students' beliefs about their ability to attend language classes and to learn so that their behaviors and expectations could be understood. That kind of phenomenon urges the importance of understanding the impact of mobile-based technology usage on students' BALL.

In fact, not many existing works of literature investigated particularly on the impact of the use of MALA in EFL classes settings on the students' Beliefs About Language Learning (BALL). Therefore, under this scope, this study aims to bridge the gap by examining how EFL students describe their experiences in using MALA in online classes and how those

experiences influence their beliefs related to learning English.

2. METHOD

2.1. Design

The research employed a qualitative approach and case study design in order to explore more the changing beliefs of EFL students who joined an online English class using Mobile-Assisted Language Assessment through WhatsApp mobile application.

2.2. Subject

In order to gather the required data for this study, a group of 20 Pre-Intermediate Nurse students joining Health Care Language Program were selected randomly.

2.3. Instruments

In order to collect the data, Horwitz's (1988) questionnaire of Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was administered to the selected respondents. The students will also be interviewed for their attitude to MALA by the researcher in their own native language. Some questions were adapted from the questionnaire used to collect learner attitudes by Vahdani & Tarighat (as cited in Tarighat & Khodabakhsh, 2016).

The present study utilized the WhatsApp mobile application as a MALA application in order to implement the research design. WhatsApp mobile application gives its users the opportunity to share not only texts but also voice and video recordings and even files in mobile.

2.4. Procedure

The collecting data process in this study was conducted in 4 meetings in 4 weeks which consisted of several phases. In the first phase, the background questionnaires were distributed to 40 nurse students in 3 different classes at the same level. Those questionnaires consisted of 5 open-ended questions which were used in order to observe their BALL before joining the class. Then in the second phase, the researcher chooses one class to be observed, and the students were informed about the procedures and how the activities would be done.

Each meeting, the students were given a task which provided the performance of them on four different topics. The topics were step by step performance of handwashing on the first week, positioning a patient on the second week, washing patients' hair on the third

week and giving injection on the last week in the form of video. They shared their video recording on the WhatsApp group consisting of all class members as well as the teacher, which also the researcher. After their video recording was shared, the owners were not provided with a solid score but with comments on several aspects such as their grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, media, gesture, and their overall performance. After all, members had posted their comments, the teacher gave their concluding comments, pointing out to the errors not mentioned as well as resolving any disagreements among the learners on a particular point regarding the recording. Eventually, the teacher scored each recording as Not Acceptable, Acceptable or Good to be included in the students' overall score at the end of the course. All of these activities were done repeatedly every meeting from the first week until the last week.

Finally, on the last week, the last phase was conducted. A random sub-sample of six students among the members of the class attended focus group interviews via Google Meet and Zoom video conference. Semi-structured interview questions were asked and delivered to students after they finished the activities in the class. They were asked and discussed their feelings after experiencing the activities. The interviewees discussed in their native language, which was Bahasa Indonesia, in order to get more deep and complete results so that the answer would be more accurate. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed then converted into English.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

3.1.1. Pre-course Data Analysis (Open-ended Questions)

There were five questions (open-ended) which were given to students who join the class. The intention was to investigate students' beliefs about MALA before the experiment was conducted. Therefore, it could be compared to the post results of the study.

Students' perception of the usage of WhatsApp became the first open ended-question that were asked about. Of the 20 students, all of them responded to this question. In total, there are 20 individual answers received. Basic repeated themes symbolizing major opinions were determined and analyzed. There are 4 major themes identified such as usefulness, indispensability, easiness and permanence. The Table 1 shows a summary of these answers.

From the 40 individual answers received, usefulness became the largest percentage of students' opinions. As we can see in Table 1, it shows the majority of the

students selected MALA usefulness with 25 responses. As from Table 2, they believed that WhatsApp usage in their language classrooms is quite useful and helpful for them.

Table 1. Students' opinions regarding the idea of using MALA

Opinions	Total
Usefulness	25
Easiness	6
Indispensability	6
Permanence	3
Total	40

Table 2. Students' attitudes towards learning to speak English through WhatsApp

Opinions	Total
Positive	33
Neutral	7
Total	40

Six students responded to the easiness of it. They mentioned that mobile devices ease their learning activity. Then 6 of the participants also mentioned the indispensability of the WhatsApp. They stated that these devices were indispensable parts of learning. There are only 3 students who mentioned that when they use WhatsApp, what they learn becomes permanent.

The second question asked about students' beliefs and opinions about learning to speak English using WhatsApp. Of the 20 students, 18 of the students responded to this question, for a total of 20 answers. General attitudes of the respondents were categorized as summarized in Table 2.

Mostly, all of the students responded positively to their answers. They mentioned how effective this activity was for them, and also, they answered that they feel more enjoy using WhatsApp in their class. 7 of the students replied as neutral. In fact, there were no students responded negatively towards the use of WhatsApp to learn English.

Students' opinions about the important skills of English to be learnt became the third open-ended questions that were asked. 40 students responded to this question, for a total of 40 individual answers received. Here are seven items in terms of the basic repeated themes of the students' opinions, such as speaking, vocabulary, listening, all, grammar, writing, and reading.

As seen from Table 3, most of the answers from the students showed that speaking became the most chosen skill rather than the other skills. In fact, almost half of the students assume that speaking is an important skill to be mastered. The rest of the students assume the other

skills such as grammar, writing, vocabulary, and listening were all of equal importance.

Table 3. Students' opinions about the importance of English language skills

Opinions	Total
Speaking	20
Grammar	9
Vocabulary	5
All	3
Listening	2
Writing	1
Reading	0
Total	40

Table 4. Students' opinions about the easiness of English language skills

Opinions	Total
Reading	20
Vocabulary	10
Listening	4
Speaking	4
Grammar	2
Writing	1
Pronunciation	0
Total	40

Grammar became the second most skill to be mastered with 9 respondents which were followed by vocabulary with 5 students. 3 of students responded that all of the skills are important. 2 students determined that listening was the most important, while 2 students chose writing, and none of the students chose reading.

There are 7 open-ended questions asked in terms of the easiest skills of English for students. All of the 40 students responded to the question, for a total of 40 answers. Here are 7 basic repeated themes items such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation.

According to students' answers, it showed that reading became the easiest skill chosen by students. As we can see in Table 4, it shows that approximately there were 20 students choose reading as the easiest skill to be learnt while 10 of the students indicated vocabulary is the easiest. For speaking and listening, each of these was chosen by 4 students. Grammar skill was only chosen by 2 students, and writing skills were chosen by 1 student while pronunciation skills were chosen by no one.

The last open-ended question was to investigate the students' opinions about how language skills can be learnt better for them. All of the students answered the question, and a total of 40 responses were determined in terms of themes symbolizing major opinions. Here are the responses grouped as five keywords practice, social

entertainment, speaking with natives, pleased, and vocabulary.

Table 5. Participants' opinions about how language skills can be learnt better

Opinions	Total
Practice	22
Social Entertainment	9
Speaking with natives	4
Pleased	5
Vocabulary	0
Total	40

As we can see in Table 5, it shows that there are 22 of the students favor practice. These students assume that practicing a lot by repeating that particular subjects or skills are important. Other 9 students are favoring social entertainment tools, such as watching Movie or You-tube video in English language, reading books, newspapers in English, and listening to their favorite songs in English, are the best way to learn English skills. 4 students responded that the best way to acquire such skills is to live in an English-speaking country so that they could speak with native speakers of English every day. 5 of the students are satisfied with the current methods used to teach them English while none of the student who chooses vocabulary.

3.1.2. Post-course Data Analysis

As stated before, the data are gathered through qualitative interviews. The questions are open-ended and also adopted from the student attitudes interview by Costa and Han (2017) and also Vahdani and Tarighat (as cited in Tarighat and Khodabakhsh, 2016). Those are designed to fit this current study. The interview is based on the following questions:

- What are your opinions about these activities?
- How did these activities affect your language learning process?
- What do you think of this method as a system of assessment?
- What advantages does this method have compared to similar classroom activities?
- How should we assess a foreign language using WhatsApp be?
- Would you like to try this method again?

The intention of the first question is to investigate students' opinion about the activities they joined. The results of the interview discussions show that students most interested in the idea of using WhatsApp in their online classrooms. They state that they enjoyed the activities even they mentioned some benefits they got from the usage of WhatsApp in their activities. For instance, student 1states "I enjoyed this activity because

it used WhatsApp, which is easy to be accessed by me". Other statements also come from student 2 who states *"I'm happy, and I enjoyed this kind of learning method."* Moreover, student 3 states *"At first, I was a little bit confused, but during the time, I can follow and enjoy the whole activities"*. Therefore, based on the students' interview, making them enjoy and less nervous in their speaking assignment became the majority answers in terms of benefits they got from the use of WhatsApp in their online class.

Identifying the effects of the WhatsApp activity on students' language learning process are the intention of the second question of the interview. The results show that this activity, for some reasons, helps students in their learning process. Some benefits are mentioned by the students in the interview such as reducing their anxiety while they spoke in English, giving them more free time to practice, and making them easier to give or to get feedback. For instance, student 4 states *"Somehow, it makes me less nervous rather than do a speaking performance in person or in front of the class"*. Other statements come from student 5 who states *"It gives me an opportunity to practice more before I submit my video performance and get a better result"*. Moreover, student 6 states *"I can learn more since I get some feedback from my other friends and my teacher"*. Therefore, in general, the students have positive attitudes towards the use of WhatsApp in their online class.

Regarding the third question, from six students who are interviewed, half of them believe that this system of evaluation was good and quite fair. Especially when it comes on the Online Class, which not allowed a static assessment to be conducted, in contrast, the rest of students argued that it was not fair to assess someone's speaking ability just from a video, face to face test must be conducted instead. As student 2 states *"I think overall it was fair and I don't have a problem with it since this is an online class"*. And then student 5 states *"For learning, I think it is good, but for the test, in my opinion, face to face or real class is necessary"*. Therefore, it can be concluded that they preferred to be assessed based on their class performance rather than online performance or video-based performance.

The intention of the fourth question is to see students' opinions on the advantages of this method compared to similar classroom activities. In general, they have positive attitudes toward it. From all of the students who are interviewed, all of the answers refer to the time efficiency aspect of this method. For instance, student 1 states *"Sharing our video performance in the group and commented by the others somehow make me learn more to speak English. Moreover, I can fix it directly since I have a lot of time"*. Moreover, one of the students adds it by mentioning the better outcomes he got on WhatsApp since he has more time to think about what and how he is going to do it and chose more proper

words sentence form it in good sentences. It is reflected from the statement of student 3, who states *"I can check the pronunciation of some words before I took the video, which I could not do that in the class test"*.

This next question is intended to learn the opinions of the students about the way WhatsApp can be used for language learning assessment. The majority of responses point out the same opinion, which is the fairness of the assessment in speaking skill. Students generally feel that speaking is a skill that should be assessed directly. Therefore, a video form is not a good media for it. One of the students even suggests the video call feature on WhatsApp that should be used for assessing speaking performance. It is reflected from the statement of student 4 who states *"Instead of making a video performance of speaking and posting it to the group, a group video call, in my opinion, could be fairer"*.

The last question asks the participants about whether they want to use the method again or not in future learning. Six out of the six students, which means all of them answer positively. For instance, student 1 responds *"Yes, sure, why not"*. Moreover, student 2 states *"I enjoyed it, and it was easy, so I wished this method is still be used"*. Therefore, they answer positively since was enjoyed the activity even though they are some of them who did not like it, but in general, they have nothing bad about it to use it again.

3.2. Discussion

During the process of experiencing 4-weeks using MALA in their online class, self-correction, peer-correction and then feedback from the teacher are done as planned without any crucial problems. In fact, the results show that according to all of the students who are interviewed, time becomes an important aspect contributing to their learning process using MALA. The students state that having more free time to think and also fixing their performance produced a better result of their speaking video performance. There are also a couple of students who argued that this kind of method is different at all from face to face performance in the class, which is not fair in terms of assessment and evaluation. Thus, they prefer this kind of method is used for exercise activity rather than as a final student assessment. It is like what Tseng and Tsai (2007) have already examined that both learners and teachers require sophisticated support to compute relationships among different concepts and learners' products. In the end, they may face some confusing moment during the times working with online systems caused by their own lack of expertise in this new system. However, during this activity, MALA, in fact, provides a method of teaching as it assesses while the students are learning. This is in line with the study from Tarighat and Khodabakhsh in 2016 which stated that in MALA, assessment and

practice are taking place simultaneously; therefore, some opportunities are created at the students' place of choice, either at their home or at their workplace, or even everywhere they are.

Both pre-course and post-course data show that using WhatsApp as MALA has any significant impact on students' BALL. It changes students' beliefs about language learning. In fact, the results show that it has a positive impact on students' beliefs about using a mobile device in an online language class. Students reveal that using WhatsApp as MALA helps them improve their language skills from the feedback they got. Moreover, according to students' statement, what they feel from this kind of method are its effectiveness and efficiency in terms of time and flexible in terms of place. It is supported by Al-Fahad (2009), who stated that learning via mobile devices can be very effective for students; therefore, students had a positive attitude towards using such mobile devices in language learning.

However, the data results showed that students could maintain their positive opinions towards MALA since they are still interested to learn no matter what the instructions were. This is in line with Barcelos (2003) who states that individual beliefs about language learning could affect learners' approaches to their behaviors in language learning, either consciously or unconsciously. In fact, it enables them to learn easier since it was a mobile-based. It is in line with Nezarat and Miangah, in (2012) who claimed that mobile learning gives the students the chance to learn not only whenever but also wherever that suits them. The study also revealed that even though they are some of them who did not like this method but in general, they still wished to use this method again in the next meeting. This is in line with the theory of BALL by Horwitz (1988) which states that individual beliefs about language learning also seem to have direct relevance to the understanding of learner expectations of, commitment to, success in, and also satisfaction with their language classes. In other words, it could be concluded that MALA has a significant impact on students' beliefs about language learning in their online classroom, and also it confirmed what students thought.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, as mentioned earlier, the present study explores the impact of Mobile Assisted Language Assessment on the EFL students' beliefs about language learning. During the process, MALA creates the opportunity for students to participate more in the learning process by giving feedback to one and another. Both pre-course and post-course data show that using WhatsApp as MALA has any significant impact on students' BALL. It changes students' beliefs about language learning. Furthermore, students reveal that

using WhatsApp as MALA help them improve their language skills from the feedback they got. Therefore, MALA has a significant impact on students' beliefs about language learning in their online classroom, and also it confirmed what students thought.

This study implicates that certain mobile applications could support EFL students in developing their attitudes toward language learning to be positive. This research is limited in the following ways: a number of study participants, duration of application and data collection tools. The results of the study contribute to future study who concerns to mobile-assisted language assessment issue in English language teaching field in Indonesia. Further research is suggested to investigate teacher attitudes towards this issue and its challenges.

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