



Implementing Mobile Language Learning Technologies in Japan

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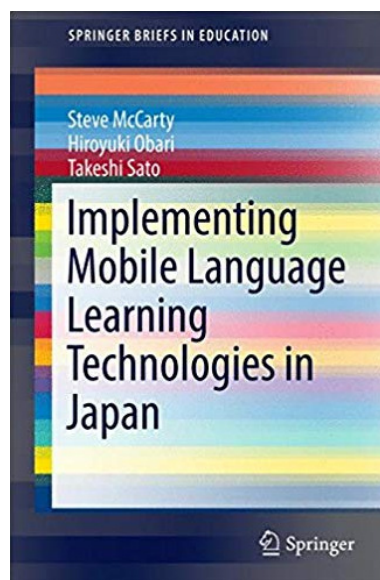
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ABOUT THE BOOK :

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Implementing Mobile Language Learning in Japan is organized into six chapters highlighting case studies conducted in three Japanese universities. Chapters one and two present a foundation of mobile language learning (MLL) for the case studies that follow. Topics covered in these chapters include a history of MLL in Japan both before and after the introduction of the smartphone, and an explanation of a key theoretical framework for MLL, the sociocultural perspective.

Chapters three to five, contain case studies of MLL in Japanese tertiary institutions. The case studies are divided into similar sub-sections including institutional and technological context, implementation, and conclusions. The first case study described how the social media application LINE was used to research group interactions in English.

The study took place at a university in Tokyo. The author stated that while the university was not focused on English study, students were generally motivated to learn both in class and autonomously because they saw language skills as essential for their careers. For the quasi-experimental research highlighted in this chapter, two groups of participants used their personal mobile devices to interact for a month in English using the LINE application. A TOEIC test and short writing exam were given to the students before and after the treatment. In addition, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire at the conclusion of the study.

The first group of participants interacted in English for one-month on topics that were familiar to them. The second group communicated in Japanese, but a program automatically translated their messages into English.

Both procedures yielded positive results in terms of TOEIC and essay writing improvement. Increased participation in the LINE application was associated with greater linguistic gains. Overall, participants were positive towards this implementation of MLL.

The second case study outlined the findings of a technologically innovative all-female university and junior college's use of faculty made e-books that had been integrated into the curriculum. The university and college introduced iPods for all students from April 2004 until 2011, and then iPads from 2012 until the present day. The author explained that the iPods were pre-loaded with English listening materials and were also used for listening to original podcasts developed by students. The student made podcasts were popular with a wider audience from outside of Japan which proved to be a motivational factor for students. Although there were many positives to using the iPods, other language learning devices soon superseded them.

The university and college featured in this case study were the first in Japan to provide iPods to students and eventually gave all incoming students an iPad with faculty developed e-books and listening materials. The author emphasizes the difficulty for faculty members in providing training sessions on the use of the iPads due to the varying schedules each person had, and the lack of technical support or user manuals in any other language than Japanese. The author suggested that the introduction of mobile devices showed positive results, with many students preferring them over traditional textbooks. The chapter concluded with several helpful suggestions for other institutions looking to implement similar programs into their curriculum.

The final case study described in the book explained how MLL was used as an intervention to improve tests on standardized exams. The author used a variety of innovative applications to conduct a blended learning class such as TED Talks (listening and writing of summaries), Newton m-learning (vocabulary and grammar), and Global Voice CALL (pronunciation).

The results of this intervention showed a significant increase of TOEIC scores among students participating in the classes.

Based on the success of the blended learning program, the researcher examined how a flipped classroom paradigm could further improve the results. The first attempt had students from an experimental group utilize an e-textbook, Lecture Ready, to watch videos and access course content outside of class, and then used class time to present their findings via PowerPoint. A control group used the paper version of the book in a traditional classroom setting. Greater gains were seen in the TOEIC post-tests in the experimental group when compared to the control group. Two additional interventions involved a hybrid of the blended and flipped classroom methods.

In these classrooms students were exposed to activities from both the blended learning and flipped classrooms mentioned above. Examination of various proficiency tests and a questionnaire revealed significant improvements to English ability as well as positive changes to students' worldview.

In Japan, like much of the world, mobile devices are ubiquitous and are quickly replacing other technologies, such as laptop computers, as one's primary device used for work, study and leisure. The potential for anytime, anywhere learning as well as the portability of these devices (Sung, Chang, and Liu, 2016; Viberg & Grönlund, 2012) make them ideal for language study. In Japan, the context of this book, a shrinking population and increased globalization has made English-language proficiency a necessary goal for individuals, companies and organizations hoping to prosper in the coming decades. Therefore, research into the field of MLL in Japan will be needed to capitalize on the opportunities and challenges presented by the coming situation. *Implementing Mobile Language Learning in Japan*, written by three well-respected researchers in the field, will serve as a basis for these future studies.

The strength of the book is that it highlights the implementation of mobile technologies and applications rather than concentrating only on the theory behind such application. The case studies in the book show how researcher-practitioners can identify problems in their institutions or classroom and apply technology to solve address these issues in a methodical way.

By sharing these experiences with others, a framework for successful implementation can be derived for other classroom contexts and research problems can be found to be studied in future research. However, the benefit of sharing case studies of implementation is that it becomes difficult to isolate the particular applications and technological affordances that made an impact on learning. In addition, it was unclear in some parts to see how the use of a mobile device rather than a desktop computer, for example, played a vital part in the research outcome. It is recommended that these issues be addressed in future works on the subject of MLL. Despite these drawbacks, *Implementing Mobile Language Learning in Japan* fills a vital gap in the academic literature for researchers in the Japanese context and will be a valuable asset for those hoping to conduct research in MLL.

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