

The Potential Impact of Mobile-assisted Language Learning on Women and Girls in Africa: A Brief Literature Review

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Abstract

The mobile phone is a technology that allows users to receive and make calls and compose, send, and receive text messages anytime and anywhere that mobile phone network coverage is available. In Africa, mobile phones represent the latest, most prominent technology to have taken hold and mobile phone usage and ownership on the continent has surpassed that of the Internet (United Nations, 2008). Mobile phone ownership in Africa varies from country to country and area of the country (urban vs. rural) but one thing that is uniform is that on average fewer women than men own mobile phones (The GSMA Development Fund; Cherie Blair Foundation for Women; Vital Wave Consulting, 2010). For those African women and girls that do own mobile phones, some of the challenges in mobile phone usage and ownership include the lack of knowledge of how to use the mobile phone. But these issues are being addressed with the help of programs like the Jokko Initiative in Senegal and the m-Literacy project in South Africa. Both of these programs are laying the foundation for teaching people how to use mobile phones, and specifically how mobile phone text messages can be used as effective literacy-building tools in Africa. In the case of the Jokko Initiative, the focus of the development work is to study the impact that mobile-assisted language learning can have on the literacy rates of African women and girls (RapidSMS, 2010)

Goal 5 of the United Nations' Education for All policy aims to provide equal opportunities for education, regardless of gender, by the year 2015 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1995-2010). By using mobile phone technology, women in Africa could be provided with equal access to language education, at the least. The proliferation of mobile phone usage and ownership in Africa and the need to narrow the current gender gap present in the educational systems of many African countries present a ripe opportunity to use mobile-assisted language learning as a way to promote and increase the participation of educated African women on the world stage.

This literature review will examine the applications and intersections that mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has with gender in Africa, and will propose new areas of research in this emerging field of study. Questions to be explored include:

- What are the current barriers to language learning for African women and girls?
- Is there potential to use the mobile phone as a medium for African women and girls to learn a second language, especially a language of trade in the region of Africa that they live in?
- If there is potential for implementation, how could the lives of women and girls in Africa be impacted by mobile-assisted language learning?