

The Effect of mobile phone in the area of English language learning and teaching

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the use of mobile phone in the field of English language teaching and learning. What makes this possible is the wide use of the mobile phones in the poorest regions of the world. Accessing the internet is a significant feature of mobile devices today, with mobile phones no longer being just a phone but a portable multimedia device. Social media, internet services, multimedia and other applications are in constant demand by users which has therefore led the rapid improvement of mobile phones and tablets. For example, in 2013 the average download rate was nearly 1.4 Mbps which had almost tripled the average speed from 2012, which was only 520 Kbps.

Keywords: mobile phones, constant demand, social media, teaching and learning

1. Introduction

The influence of ICT in education has been proven in different studies as it is able to make teaching and learning more interesting, motivating as well as meaningful (Chapelle, 2001). Despite using computers, mobile devices are seen to have proven as potential tools in increasing the learning of the language. At present, technology in the language classrooms has been noted for improvement of speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills (Zurita & Nussbaum, 2004). Thus, technology is important for enhancing students' achievement, engagement, and overall participation in language learning (Cobb *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, technology also provides students unlimited access to different resources and tools that facilitate language learning. In English language teaching and learning, Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) are the predominant areas which reflect the adoption of technology to support English language learning. Both CALL and MALL have impacted language acquisitions which distinguish between a modern language classroom and a traditional language classroom in the teaching and learning of English language. Today, mobile technology is changing the landscape of language learning and is seen as the next frontier being researched for its potential in enhancing the teaching and learning of English language.

Apparently, the portability of mobile devices is believed to bring new methods that can shape learning styles and pedagogies which could become more personalised and allow learners to learn on the move (Ros i Solé *et al.*, 2010) thus enhancing the English language teaching and learning. The personal nature of mobile phones and their portability suggest that the use of mobile devices for learning may have even bigger potential than e-learning (Vogel *et al.*, 2010). The potential benefits of using mobile devices for learning have been widely touted from a range of purposes which include cost savings, ubiquitous communications, and location-based services (Cheon *et al.*, 2012). The use of mobile devices for learning is becoming widespread and research in this area is urgently needed (Economides & Grousopoulou 2009). In the past several years, many researchers have investigated the use and effectiveness of mobile devices for second language learning (for example; Stockwell, 2007; Chen & Chung, 2008) and until today, Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) has continued to attract the interest of several researchers. Despite of that, Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) is still considered one of the new research areas in language teaching and learning (Mandlakayise Patrick Mthethwa, 2014).

For learning English as second language, mobile phone is a good media for drills & practices for vocabulary, English expressions, and practices in English communication (Kwon & Eun, 2010). Since, mobile technology could act as an efficient mediator for enhancing the area of English language learning; Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) is proposed to support students' learning needs as well as achieving the target needs of their English language courses. In the past few years, a surge in the use of mobile devices as educational tools has led to an increase number of educational institutional exploring the possibilities of using these ubiquitous devices by their students, both within the classroom and beyond (Engel & Green, 2011; Messinger, 2011). While the decisions are made, technology

continues to impact students' life inside and outside the classrooms to an extent that they use technology to enhance their classroom learning experiences. The following sections discuss the definition of Mobile-assisted Language Learning (MALL) and various research done related to MALL, the affordances and the constraints of the use of MALL among ESL learners.

2. Statement of the Problem

The aim of this paper is to find out how students are currently using their smart devices during their learning, including classroom use and learning activities. In addition, the aim is to find out how they utilize the learning tools provided by university learning, with an emphasis to educational technologies at general. How students feel about using these tools on mobile devices in terms of usability, reliability, relevance and personal preference will also be analysed.

The paper aims to clarify the use of smart phones as different from a computer lab filled with computers or a cart of netbooks putting into consideration that cell phone is personal technology. Most students have invested a great deal of time learning about the features of the cell phone, how to navigate and the limitations of the phone

Questions of the paper

The study attempts to address the following questions:

1. Do students use mobile phone for learning purposes?
2. What English learning purposes have they ever used mobile phones for?
3. What are students' attitudes towards the use of mobile phones for English language learning in the future?
4. What English skills and sub-skills would students like to learn on mobile phones?

Objectives of the paper

The aim of this paper is to explore for what educational and English language learning purposes students use their mobile phones, and how they perceive the adoption of mobile phones for English language learning. The objectives were raised as follows:

1. To explore students' experience of using mobile phones for educational purposes.
2. To find out if students' experience of using mobile phones for learning English
3. To find out whether students would like to use mobile phones to study English in the future or not.
4. To illustrate what English skills and sub-skills students would like to learn on mobile phones.

3. Methodology of the Paper

This is a small scale study focusing on the topic of students' perceptions of using mobile phones and smart phones in language learning. It tries to explore the topic by answering one research question. A qualitative research method is used. This approach is appropriate to find out students' views about using mobile phones and smart phones in language learning. The data were collected by asking the participants general questions, and then the data was analyzed to get the themes.

Participants

The participants of this research are two undergraduate students majoring English Education at Sudan University, Sudan. In choosing the participants, convenience sampling technique was applied where the participants are considered to be available for this research and familiar with the use of technology in language learning.

The first participant is currently in the 4th semester. Based on her explanation during the interview, she has been familiar with the use of technology in language teaching and learning. She said that most of the time her teachers use computer in the classroom. In addition to computer, she is also familiar with mobile phone because she has one. She sometimes uses her mobile phone to learn English. I will discuss about her activities with her phone in relation to language learning more in the findings.

The second participant is currently in 6th. He is also familiar with technology. He also uses his mobile phone to read and learn English language.

Data Collection

The data were collected by making use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as suggested by Mann & Stewart (2000). The data were collected in June 2013. The participants were informed that they could choose to do the face to face interview. The date and time for the interviews were set up in according with the participants' convenience. They were interviewed individually.

4. Data Analysis

In analyzing the data I was informed by Creswell's discussion of approach to analysis (2008). He describes two stages of data analysis in a qualitative study, namely data exploration and data coding.

In the process of data exploration, I firstly imported the data from interview. I read the data as a whole to get a general idea of what each of the participants said in answering the interview questions. I read the transcript many times.

The next stage is data coding. It is defined as —the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data (Creswell, 2008). It is the time to explore more details of the data and begin to establish themes in them. I put the transcripts of each participant into a table of data analysis. The table consists of interview questions,

participants' answers, and coding which contains two additional columns; main themes and sub themes.

5. Findings and Elaboration

In introducing the findings of this study, narrative method is used because as Creswell (2008) points out, narrative form can be used to present a detailed summary of data analysis in a qualitative study. From the interview, I found out that both of the participants are not really exploring the potential of mobile phones and smart phone to support their English learning. However, they described some activities they usually do with their phone.

Those activities can be considered as using mobile phones and smart phone to support their learning. Based on the interview results, two themes emerged which are advantages and challenges of using mobile phones and smart phones in language learning.

In deciding the themes, I adopted several themes emerged from the study conducted by Gikas & Grant (2013) about some advantages of using mobile devices in learning. The themes I adopted from their study are about the advantages (accessing information quickly, variety of ways to learn, communication and content collaboration) and challenge (device as distraction). I decided to do so because after analyzing the data

I got from the interview chat, the responses given by my two participants were about the same themes as the finding in Gikas & Grant study. For the other themes in my study, I just made them based on the responses of my participants.

Advantages of using mobile phone and smart phone in language learning

Both of the participants have the same perceptions that mobile phone and smart phone provide some advantages to support their language learning. The advantages include accessing information quickly, variety of ways to learn (doing task, practicing English, self-taught, vocabulary), flexibility in time and place, communication and content collaboration, and improving four skills.

Accessing information quickly

One of the advantages provided by mobile device is enabling students to access information about campus stuffs quickly.

Variety of ways to learn: doing task

Mobile devices provide variety of ways for the students to learn, including in Supporting them when doing task given by their teachers. Both of the participants agree that mobile devices can help them in doing task.

In reference with abovementioned, it can be seen that the two participants make use of their phone to learn English language. Therefore, mobile devices can be the best educator in language learning for students.

Variety of ways to learn: practicing English

Language learning can take place not only in the classroom, but also outside the

classroom. Mobile devices can facilitate students to learn English outside. One of the participants described how she used her phone when chatting with her friend with the purpose of practicing her English.

The responses above show how mobile devices can help students improve their English especially writing skill when chatting with friends. Furthermore, improving writing is not the only thing the students can do with their phone. Interestingly, both of the participants also use their phone to practice their pronunciation.

Variety of ways to learn

One of our participants agrees that learning can be self-taught. She said that her phone has helped her a lot when learning at home because she can find any material she likes on the Internet using her phone.

Flexibility in time and place

One of the great things mobile devices offer related to learning is about flexibility in time and place. Both of the participants are in line with this. The participants describe how their learning becomes more flexible. Learning facilitated by phone can be done by them anywhere and anytime. It is so because the device is always with them. They always bring their phone to the class, to the market, before going to bed, and so forth. Therefore, they agree that students should use their phone effectively to support their English learning.

English out-of-class as extension learning activities in addition to the face-to-face classroom activities.

I personally think it is a good idea so that the students can learn more not only in the classroom but also outside. For example if the teachers post something on the group, maybe a question to be discussed before face-to-face meeting. It means I can be more prepared to learn in the face-to-face meeting because I have got some ideas from the discussion on the group.

Improving four skills

Some practical ideas improving language skills

Here we suggest some practical ideas and innovative ways to enhance both receptive and productive language learning skills.

Listening skill

- We can improve our listening skill by listening to some authentic listening materials.
- We can record our teacher's voice while reading a text and listen to it out of the classroom so many times.
- We can listen to someone talking on the phone.
- We can ask one of our classmates to record his voice while reading a passage and send it to us via Bluetooth. (peer education)

- We can check the pronunciation of the new words by using the talking dictionaries of mobile phones and save their pronunciations in the history section to listen later.

Speaking skill

- We can improve our speaking skill by talking on the phone. (But it is expensive)
- We can listen to or watch an audio or a video material and talk about it. (integrating listening and speaking skill)
- Teachers can write some questions on paper and ask their students to answer them orally and record their voice.
- We can work in pairs or small groups debating on a topic and record the event. •We can have a oral chat with our friends or teachers. (Of course it costs a lot as well and we can benefit from our school facilities.)

Reading skill

- We can take a picture of a reading passage and read it so many times.
- We can listen to a recorded text and practice reading that text many times in order to get mastery in reading.
- We can refer to the dictionary to check the meaning of the new words for a better comprehension.
- We can get some extensive reading materials via internet. Or our teachers also can send some extra materials via Bluetooth.

Writing skill

It seems that the learning opportunities provided by the mobile phones to enhance the writing skill is both diverse and more practical.

- We can use the note feature to write anything.
- We can send SMS or emails. (It is a bit expensive but we can purchase text message bundles available.)
- We can have a circular writing activity where students create a story together. Each student writes a sentence or two and then sends this on to the next student, who adds another message, and so on until the story is complete.
- We can have a written chat with our friends and teachers.
- We can check our spelling by predictive dictionary.
- We can display some of new words on the monitors for more practice. •Teachers can write some questions on the board and ask their students to write the answers on their mobile phones using the note feature. The answers can be saved and sent to other students or the teacher for correction.
- We can inactivate a dictionary and then have a spelling test. The test can be self, peer or teacher corrected if a dictionary is activated

Challenges of using mobile phone and smart phone in language learning

Today's phones, though, have many features the students can use to their advantage when learning English and allowing them in the classroom may just help your students learn. Here

are some activities you might want to try in class that will also convince you cell phones really can be put to positive use in class.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has shown students' positive perceptions of using mobile phones and smart phones in language learning. As a result, the research question is answered. They believe that mobile devices bring many advantages to support their learning both inside and outside the classroom. Mobile technologies can provide greater learning opportunities for students if teachers can make use of these technologies effectively. The technology is available, now—it is the instructor who must lead effective ways to implement devices in learning (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

The findings inform me as an English teacher that the students in my context, Sudan University students like the idea of learning by making use of mobile device. Therefore, I should find interesting activities which can provide fun and greater learning opportunities in my future teaching practice. This small scale study can also be used to inspire fellow English teachers in Sudan University for science and Technology to use mobile technologies to support language teaching and learning. The integration of mobile technologies can provide more opportunities for the students to learn English. Furthermore, the challenges emerged in this study can make me and other teachers more aware and find ways to counteract them when deciding to make use of mobile technologies. Future research can be to find out teachers' perception of using these technologies in their teaching. It is useful to see from both sides; students and teachers.

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Appendix 1 Interview Questions

Date of the interview: 3.6.2013

Name of the interviewee:

Open

1. What is your university major?
2. What semester are you?

Exploring students' perceptions of using mobile phones and smart phones in language learning

1. Do you have mobile phone or smart phone?

Probing question:

What features does your phone have? (SMS, Camera, video recorder, internet access, voice messaging, etc)

2. What activities do you usually do on your phone?

Probing questions:

- a. Do you read online English newspaper on your phone ?
 - b. Do you send SMS in English from your phone?
3. Do you think mobile phone and smart phone can be used in learning English?

Probing questions:

- a. Have you ever used your phone to learn English at home or in the classroom?
 - b. Do your teachers encourage you to use a mobile phone in and outside the classroom for language learning?
 - c. Are you willing to install learning applications such as BBCE, dictionary, , etc to improve your English proficiency?
 - d. Do you use the voice recorder of your phone to practice your speaking or pronunciation? (Reference: Begum, 2011)
 - f. How did you interact with classmates/teachers using the device? (Gikas& Grant, 2013)
 - g. What type of activities did you use the device for in your course?(Gikas& Grant, 2013)
4. What do you think if your teachers set up online class as an extension learning activity in addition to face-to-face meeting, for example using LINE?

Probing questions:

- a. Would you like to participate in online discussion on your phone (via LINE)?
- b. Do you mind paying for Internet connection for your phones in order to learn English?
- c. Do you think you can improve your English skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing) by participating in online class on your phone? Any idea how your English skills can be improved?
- d. In your opinion, do you feel comfortable to learn English on your phone?