UNIVERSITY STUDENTS’ RESPONSES ON THE USE OF MOBILE PHONE FOR EFL LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

This present study was conducted to explore the possibility of using mobile phone for learners to use for learning purposes. The aim of the study was to find out the students’ responses on the use of mobile phones for off-class listening activities. Method of the study utilised was descriptive and questionnaires were used as instruments to collect data both on the ownership of mobile phones and students’ responses. The responses were based on the joy, motivation, challenge, independence, and flexible learning schedule. The findings show that 100% of the students own mobile phones while the means of students’ responses for each of the above variables are 3.49, 3.29, 3.00, 3.59, and 3.51 respectively.

Keywords: flexible learning, mobile learning, responses

Introduction

The use of technology for foreign learning learning has been widely experimented to improve the learners’ achievements and direct them to the goal of education. Communication technology, more specifically, has been revolving very fast, trying to catch the users’ demand for a smaller product with more sophisticated features for mobilizing purposes. Moreover, the technology also enables learning to be more engaging and more ubiquitous. Ubiquitous learning can be enhanced by the support of technology. When learning becomes part of daily activities, part of the learners’ dress accessories, it is where the ubiquitous learning has already taken place.

When ubiquitous learning can take place, learning will be a daily activity. It takes place without being intentionally controlled. Learning will be self automated as it happens without being realised by learners that they are learning. They will be addicted as game players are mad about playing game everyday. This is the role of the technology where it can support learning to be more engaging, individualised, and creative (Zheng & Dahl, 2010).

Most of mobile technologies have been designed to suit the user’s daily activity. Mobile phone is one of the example. It is realised or not that mobile phone has become part of its users’ life. In terms of learning, mobile technology can be used as a tool to provide learners with authentic learning activities after classroom hours (Morales, 2010).
The initial survey found that 100% of the university students own a mobile phone. This shows that mobile phone is a gadget that becomes not merely for fulfilling its main function: communication. It, however, is also part of their life style.

Today, as the features of the mobile phone becomes more and more sophisticated, the idea that activating a mobile phone in a classroom bring disadvantages should soon be reconsidered as it is considered to distract the class concentration. Besides, ethically, it is considered impolite to ignore the instructor while being busy with receiving phone calls or text messages.

A standard mobile phone now is equipped with an mp3 player, a dictionary, and a browser with wireless connectivity tool, and a camera. A high end mobile phone is planted with an endless list of features useful for learning tool, such as pdf Reader, office documents reader, browser with HSDP connectivity, and messenger. Those features, when used wisely, can support learning both during and after classroom instruction. The use of mobile computer, on the other hand, is not as frequently as mobile phones that it is not so ubiquitous to be part of learner's daily life (Barbosa, Barbosa, & Wagner, 2012).

Empirically, A study found that using text messaging through mobile phone for learning English vocabulary in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class could increase the learners vocabulary mastery (Goojari & Tabatabei, 2012). Further, the study also found that there was significant difference between group with and without mobile phones in terms of vocabulary mastery improvement. Despite those studies above, a study on Android-based mobile learning, however, warned that there are possibilities of weaknesses in using mobile phones for online learning. One of the weaknesses is the issue of compliant between the web server and mobile devices used (Chao, 2012). Another study also asserted that there are difficulties in developing applications for mobile phone devices (Daniels, 2012). Besides, the study also revealed that the size of common mobile phone screens are too small to read texts.

Based on the two different pools of findings above, the current study was conducted to use mobile phones for “homebytes” listening assignments. The study was conducted for the purpose of improving learning to be more engaging and more ubiquitous, especially in EFL listening class. The supporting learning activities are in forms of additional listening materials accomplished at home using mobile phones.

Method of Study

The present study was conducted on the basis of descriptive study. Subject of the study were 41 university students taking Listening 2 in their semester 4. Data were collected using questionnaires distributed at the end of the semester to find out their experiences in learning with mobile phones.

There are two different questionnaires used. The first questionnaire is about ownership of mobile phones which consists of only two choices: yes and no. The other questionnaire is about the learners’ perception in using mobile phone for learning listening skill exercises. This questionnaire uses Likert scale: Totally disagree, disagree, don’t know, agree, totally agree, each of which is scored 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, respectively. In this type of
questionnaire, there is a blank space where subjects can write their further specific comments about their experiences during working out listening skill exercises using mobile phones. Data collected were analysed and interpreted descriptively.

Findings and Discussion

The study was conducted as the previous web-based listening exercises were considered ineffective in terms of learners’ access to internet connection and technical constraints. The web-based exercises link is available at www.bhsinggrispekerti.org. During the two-semester implementation of the listening learning model, it was learned that the web-based learning was not considered to be very handy in that learners had to rely on the internet rentals to work out the exercises. The learning process was not anymore taking place anywhere and anytime because of the internet connection constraints.

Furthermore, problems even got worse when technical failure took place during the learning session. Four learners fail to access the web-based exercises while their student registration numbers had already been input to database. It was a minor problem but still very frustrating for both the learners and the instructor. Until the semester was over, the learners’ scores could not be retrieved from the site’s database and hence they did not have score for the listening 1 mid term test. Additionally, an issue of learners integrity also appeared (Suarcaya, 2011). One learner wrote in his questionnaire that few of his friends were cheating the assignments. This issue was unfortunately beyond the control of the instructor. It was also reported in major Asian countries (Latchem & Jung, 2010; Sangi, 2007)

Using the problems above as the starting point, the current study was conducted to explore the possibilities for the learners to experience a more ubiquitous and pervasive learning, especially on listening exercises for refreshmen college students. The method was made even more simple by distributing digital audio files and student worksheets. They then could listen to the audio materials using their mobile phones to understand the content of the recording before working out the given worksheets. The exercises were take-home assignments, familiarly termed homebytes assignments, which should be accomplished in a week-time.

Findings

Data collected consist of two different categories, namely: data about ownership of mobile phones which are in a form of “yes/no” question and learners perception about using mobile phones for listening skill exercises. The following table depicts data about ownership of mobile phone and features available in the learners mobile phones. There were 41 students from Listening skill 1 class at the Department of English D-3 participating in the study.
Table 1  
*Mobile phone ownership and features*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a mobile phone</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating system for mobile phone</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to read pdf files</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text message application</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone call application</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Information searching</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet browsing</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network applications</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messenger chats</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music player application</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skill exercises</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading skill exercises</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows that 100% of the subjects have a mobile phone. What makes a difference between one mobile phone to the other is the features/applications available in each of the mobile phones the subjects have. Most of the subjects’ mobile phones have standard features for making phone calls, text messaging, playing music, as well as organiser. In terms of functions served by the mobile phone, most subjects use their mobile phones for searching information and internet browsing. However, only 33% and 22% of the subjects activate social network and messenger apps. Furthermore, the table above also shows that subjects almost never read learning materials from their mobile phones. It is only 13% of the subject reading learning materials from their mobile phone. In contrary to reading activity, all subjects use their mobile phones for accomplishing their listening skill exercises.
Table 2

Mean Learners’ perception on the use of mobile phone for learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Minimun</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using mobile phone to accomplish Listening exercise is fun</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>109.822</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using mobile phone to accomplish Listening exercise is motivating</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.98092</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using mobile phone to accomplish Listening exercise is challenging</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>119.829</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using mobile phone to accomplish Listening exercise makes me to be independent</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.94804</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using mobile phone to accomplish Listening exercise can be done in my free schedule</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>102.767</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows that the means for the five items of the questionnaire: motivating, being fun, challenging, being independent, and being free to schedule the listening activities are not so convincing in that each mean ranges from 3.00, being the lowest, up to 3.56, being the highest. Item 1-3 fall closely within the third category, don’t know. On the other hand, item 4-5 are slightly closer to the fourth category: agree.

The result of the learners’ perception above are confirmed by the learners’ comments they wrote in the last section of this second questionnaire. The comments are grouped into three different ones. The first group of comments, dominating most of the comments, addresses the learners’ lack of collaborative discussion in working out listening skill exercises as it is shown by the following figure.

Figure 1. Learner’s preference on learning
University students’ responses on the use of mobile phone for EFL learning activities

The other complained about the preference of using language lab rather than mobile phone as it can be seen in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2.** Learner’s preference on where to learn best

![Figure 2](image1.png)

And the last group of comments of which number is the fewest mostly agree with the homebytes activities as they think the exercises help them improve their listening skill. Figure 3 in the following shows one of the comments.

**Figure 3.** Learner’s agreement on the take-home listening tasks using mobile phone

![Figure 3](image2.png)

**Discussion**

Judging from the result of the first questionnaire about ownership of mobile phones, the second questionnaire should show corresponding positif result. The result , however, is disappointingly low as it is tabulated in the previous Table 2. The following is discussion of the findings.
Learners’ perception on mobile learning: The questionnaire

One of the goals of mobile learning is to implement the idea of ubiquitous and pervasive learning that is to make learning as part of the learners’ daily habit (Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler, 2005). To be ubiquitous means that learning is available everywhere and everytime. The learning activities can be initiated wherever and whenever the learner wants to start learning (Ng, Nicholas, Loke, & Torabi, 2010). Additionally, to be pervasive means that learning activities are embedded in the learner’s daily activities that he is unaware that the learning is taking place. The goal then directs the use of mobile phones for working out additional exercises using mobile phones.

The findings of the present study, however, are not promising so much in that the learners’ perception about mobile learning using mobile phones as the tool for learning is not yet considered a learning need by the learners. The learners perceive that working out listening skill exercises through a mobile phone is neither fun, motivating, nor challenging. It seems this is due to the learners’ learning experiences which mostly involve learner to learner interactions and learner to instructor interactions in a conventional classroom during instructional processes. During the classroom interactions, learners can physically interact with the rest of the class in various different ways. This learning mediated by physical interaction is much easier to do than doing independent-type of learning. In other words, the absence of a teacher and friends in an online learning demotivated online learners (Alberth, 2011).

Furthermore, from the perspective of the learners, learning styles influence the success of learners in learning. Learners who are extrovert tend to prefer group learning through discussion and an introvert learner, on the other side, prefer learning individually (Pritchard, 2009). These two different types of learning styles, to mention a few, will have different preferences to certain modes of learning delivery (Alberth, 2011).

Additionally, it is not guaranteed that learners who are ICT literate can be successful in an online learning programme (Jenkin, 2006). Internet for social activities requires only limited specific skills. Online social activities do not demand complex cognitive processes such as deducing and concluding, analysing and synthesising, linking complex web of meanings, as well as skills to manage and locate appropriately useful information to support learning. Online independent learning requires all those cognitive processes and skills above, much more complex activities than a traditional learning requires. In a traditional learning, a confused learner may ask a friend next to him quickly. Yet a lost learner on the Internet will have no one to ask but keep trying or giving up the learning. This is one of the reasons why learners easily gave up the online learning (Suarcaya, 2008). Therefore, in relation to the constraints in online/mobile independent learning, it is suggested to provide learners with both technical and content supports (Collis & Moonen, 2004). In the context of the present study, however, no technical support is required because of the nature of the exercises. Learners need only to save the mp3 files in the learner’s own mobile phone and play it with the phone default audio player. What seems to be needed is the existence of friends or an
instructor support when the learner comes to a dead end as they frequently experience in the classroom.

**Technological perspective**

Technologically, mobile phone was originally created for serving mobile communication purposes. As the technology develops, mobile phones are equipped with built in applications such as: text messaging, dictionary, audio and video player, camera, picture viewer, organiser, and other latest applications useful to support various activities. So, with only one mobile phone, a user can do many activities; world is in his hand.

Despite those features, mobile phones are lack of specific learning tools for users to support learning. It is because the reason behind the emergence of mobile phones is to overcome the limitation of fixed house phone that is to provide mobile communication solution for its users. So, naturally the reason people buy mobile phones is for the purpose of doing mobile communication not for learning purposes. The case is very much different from buying a notebook or a tablet pc from which the owner can learn to use office applications, check spellings and grammatical errors, consult a dictionary, learn how to edit pictures, and many other useful applications to support learning.

The kind of mind set above seems also influence the learners about what a mobile phone is for. So, when they were introduced with learning using a mobile phone, socioculturally they were not yet ready. It still takes sometime before learning with mobile phone can widely accepted by learners.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the results show that using mobile phones for learning activities need further preparation on both the learners and instructor as this shown by the learners perception about using mobile phones for learning. They perceive that using mobile phones for learning stay them away from others though most of them admitted that they could be an independent and flexible learner.

**References**


