

EFL College Students' Attitudes towards Mobile Learning

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Abstract

Recently, cell phones have received much attention in the context of EFL/ESL learning. Mobile learning, in general, and distant learning, in particular, in educational contexts has been approached by educationalist all over the world (Hwang & Chang, 2011). Presently, countries pay ample attention to mobile learning in education. Despite the fact that devices such as cell phones might divert students' attention, yet, no one can deny their importance as high-tech educational tools. This study investigates EFL college students' attitudes towards cell phones learning. For the sake of satisfying the study's objectives, a questionnaire has been designed and randomly distributed to 300 female undergraduate students enrolled during the First Academic Term (2014/2015). The questionnaire is consisted of 3 sections and 39 items. Section 1, students' attitudes towards the usefulness of mobile learning (26 items), section 2, investigation of students' opinions towards reasons where and why they and their instructors use cell phones (12 items), and section 3, an open-ended question, asking students if they have any comments on the importance of cell phones (1 item). The questionnaire consisted 5-Point Likert type scale. Data were quantitatively analysed using SPSS, and ANOVA tests. Percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used for the sake of the analysis. The open-ended question was analysed qualitatively.

Keywords: mobile learning, attitudes, EFL, college students

1. Introduction

Recently, cell phones have received much attention in the context of EFL/ESL learning. Mobile learning, in general, and distant learning, in particular, in educational contexts has been approached by educationalist all over the world (Hwang & Chang, 2011). Presently, countries pay ample attention to mobile learning in education. Despite the fact that devices such as cell phones might divert students' attention, yet, no one can deny their importance as high-tech educational tools. Beyond no doubt, acquiring a foreign or a second language attracts the interest of educationalist worldwide (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009; Al-Ansari, 2006). For example, acquiring lexical items, and developing listening skills in Korea (Nah et al., 2008) are crucial when learning a foreign or a second language. Therefore, educationalist find it necessary to employ mobile learning in their classrooms. Among the fundamental advantages of mobile learning is that it encourages distant learning while students may follow their academic activities off campus (Basoglu & Akdemir, 2010). Both students and instructors could make use of different applications such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Blogs, etc. (Evans, 2014; O'Byrne & Murrell, 2014; Hsu et al., 2008). This paper is an attempt to investigate college students' attitudes towards the efficiency of deploying mobile devices in language learning contexts.

2. Literature Review

In an attempt to know how much effective are cell phones on students' learning, Anastasia (2013) conducted a study where a questionnaire was designed and distributed to 88 college students. The descriptive analysis has shown that the students enjoyed using cell phones in class. However, due to time and space, the students didn't feel that cell phones are effective.

In an attempt to examine the effectiveness of mobile learning among Taiwanese students, Hwang and Chang's (2011) carried out an experiment on one of the academic courses. The results showed that mobile learning occur when Taiwanese students are interested and willing to improve their level of attainment as well. Mathews-Aydinli and Elaziz (2010) were interested in finding how interactive whiteboards and (IWB) technology are effective in language learning among Turkish college students and how would these students

evaluate such devices. To collect data, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to 458 students and 82 teachers teaching in different schools and universities in Turkey. Their findings showed that both students and teachers have demonstrated positive attitudes toward the use of IWB.

Another study in Turkey is Basoglu and Akdemir's (2010) study which examined the effectiveness of smart phones in vocabulary build-up. They investigated the attitudes of undergraduate students enrolled in a Compulsory Preparatory Program (CPP) of a public university. The students claimed that they feel that smart phones helped them tremendously in enriching their vocabulary. Smart phones as educational tools are much effective, they claim, than the traditional vocabulary learning tools.

Studying the efficacy of mobile learning among Saudi Arabian students, Al-Fahad (2009) quantitatively surveyed the attitudes of 186 undergraduate female students at King Saud University. The results indicated that Bachelor of Arts and Medicine program's students at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia found mobile learning to be the best approach to develop their overall achievement. Harmonising with other studies the students believed that mobile learning is the best for distant learning.

In Japan, Thornton and Houser (2005) conducted a three-phase study. In the first phase, 333 Japanese university students were questioned about the reasons they use the email for. The results indicated that 44% claimed that they e-mail their classmates to do pair or group study, while 66% claimed that they e-mail classmates about class cancellation. In the second phase, the researchers have randomly chosen 44 students and sent to their smart phones, at different times, a group of lexical items that they have covered during their lessons to see if such an approach is more effective than the traditional way of teaching vocabulary. The findings showed that students receiving mobile e-mail learned more than those who do not. In the final stage the researchers produced a Web site through which they elucidated some English idioms. The findings indicated that 31% of the students claimed that they encountered technical problems, yet, at the same time, they thought that the Web site is an effective educational tool.

In a similar study of the effectiveness of mobile learning, especially SMS messages, on vocabulary acquisition, Lu (2008) randomly has chosen 30 high school students as subjects for the study. The students were split into two groups. One group was given a list of English words on paper, while the other group was given the same list through SMS messages. Questionnaires and interviews were utilised for data collection. The findings indicated that the students in the second group better achieved lexical items than those in the first group. Generally speaking, the students showed positive attitudes towards acquiring lexical items through mobile learning. The results also compromise with other studies regarding technological difficulties students occasionally encounter.

Examining students' attitudes towards the efficacy of using Twitter in teaching, Evans (2014) surveyed 252 Business and Management undergraduate students. The findings indicated that the students showed positive attitudes towards the use of Twitter in teaching

A study on the effectiveness of text messages as deployed by college students in the presence of the instructor in class was carried out by Wei and Wang (2010). A sample of 228 students was chosen for the purpose of the study. The findings showed that the presence of the instructor in class did not hinder the use of text messaging. Rather, the students viewed text messaging as a daily activity that shapes everybody in the 21st century.

In an attempt to evaluate the use of smart phones in EFL settings, Kierran and Aizawa (2004) conducted a study on freshman university students. The students were split into three groups. The first group was assigned to use text messaging, the second group was to use email, and the third group was recorded while speaking on the phone. Besides demonstrating the advantages and disadvantages of smart phone usage in EFL settings, the researchers called for more examination of the effectiveness of mobile phones in language learning.

Cavus and Ibrahim (2009) examined the effectiveness of SMS messages in vocabulary build-up. Their study was done on forty five freshmen students. The students claimed that acquiring vocabulary items through text messaging is more enjoyable than learning through traditional mediums. The researchers, hence, believed that mobile learning is a fruitful instructive tool in learning language skills in general and vocabulary items in particular.

Nah et al. (2008) studied the effectiveness of mobile learning in developing listening skills among EFL Korean undergraduate students. This has been carried out by investigating the students' attitudes towards using smart phones in listening activities, either individually or within a group. Similar to most studies above, the data analysis demonstrated students' positive attitudes towards the use of mobiles in listening skills activities.

3. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

This paper attempts to find an answer to the growing complaint about the negligence of utilising social media technology by language teachers. Therefore, the study is based on a number of hypotheses. The main hypothesis of the research is the inability and unwillingness of language teachers to come up-to-date with the increasingly developing modern teaching aids such as mobile learning. Unfortunately, the real needs of graduates from these colleges have hardly been sought from the students' point of view. The researchers hope, in this study, to pinpoint the needs of the skills and tools required for the best performance of language teachers. It is, also hoped to encourage teachers to make use of social media development.

4. Methodology

This study investigates EFL college students' attitudes towards cell phones learning. For the sake of satisfying the study's objectives, a questionnaire has been designed and randomly distributed to 300 female undergraduate students enrolled during the First Academic Term (2014/2015). The questionnaire is consisted of 3 sections and 39 items. Section 1, students' attitudes towards the usefulness of mobile learning (26 items), section 2, investigation of students' opinions towards reasons where and why they and their instructors use cell phones (12 items), and section 3, an open-ended question, asking students if they have any comments on the importance of cell phones (1 item). The questionnaire consisted 5-Point Likert type scale as: 1 S. Agree, 2 Agree, 3 Neutral, 4 Disagree, 5 S. Disagree, in order to rate the 38 questionnaire items. Data were quantitatively analysed using SPSS, and ANOVA tests. Percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used for the sake of the analysis. The open-ended question was analysed qualitatively.

4.1 Research Questions

The paper will try to answer the following questions:

Research question 1: Do EFL college students believe that mobile learning is beneficial?

Research question 2: Is there any significant differences among students' attitudes towards mobile learning based on their major and year of study?

Research question 3: Do the EFL college students see that their instructors are up-to-date with mobile learning?

Research 4: Is there any statistical differences between male instructors and female instructors regarding the use of mobile learning?

Research question 5: Do the EFL college students wish their instructors use programs such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Blog, and Wiki?

Research question 6: What are the reasons behind using mobile devices by both students and instructors?

5. Analysis and Discussion

A Cronbach's Alpha was used to investigate the reliability of the questionnaire items, the analysis indicated that Alfa 0.817. To answer research questions 1, 2, and 3, percentages, means and standard deviations were carried out. The frequency results of "strongly agree", "agree" were added up and presented as "agree", while "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were added up and presented as "disagree".

Answer Question 1: Do EFL college students believe that mobile learning is beneficial?

To answer question 1, questionnaire items 1-15 were analysed. Table 1 presents results answering question 1. The analysis shows that 74.6% of the respondents agree that the use of mobile devices in the learning-teaching process is beneficial; 80.3% believe it is enjoyable, and 71.3% claim that it adds value to the learning-teaching process. The analysis also shows that 50.3% of the respondents agree that it develops their self-confidence, 74% agree that it helps them use their spare time in something beneficial, and 72% claim that it encourages them to follow a distant learning program. Furthermore, 75.7% of the respondents agree that it helps them develop self-learning and 83.4% claim that it helps them in conducting research. 81% agree that it helps them enrich their lexicon and 78.3% claim that it helps them overcome grammatical errors. In addition, 60% of the respondents agree that it helps them participate in group discussions over the phone more than participating in class discussions, 61% agree that it helps them in most of their academic activities whenever and wherever they like, and 64% agree that they would be happy to see their instructors use mobile devices in teaching. Yet, on the other hand, only 47.6% agree that mobile devices suit all college courses, and only 25% agree that they'd rather do their academic activities through traditional methods.

Table 1. Percentages, means, and standard deviations on: Whether EFL college students' believe that mobile learning is beneficial

Item	%	mean	Std. deviation
1	74.6	1.86	.937
2	80.3	1.81	1.43
3	71.3	1.98	.941
4	50.3	2.42	1.13
5	74	1.97	.942
6	72	2.00	.969
7	75.7	1.90	.952
8	83.4	1.76	.877
9	81	1.89	1.97
10	78.3	1.77	.916
11	60	2.31	1.02
12	61	2.11	1.09
13	64	2.11	1.02
14	47.6	2.52	1.15
15	25.2	3.11	2.07
16	74.6	1.86	.966

Answer question 2. Is there any significant differences among students' attitudes towards mobile learning based on their major and year of study?

To answer question 2, two-way ANOVA test was conducted. Table 2 shows no significance was shown except for item10. As for item 10, when two-way ANOVA by year by major was conducted, high significance was found at $p=005$. The results show that English major students who have spent more than four years in the college, significantly agree more than the rest of the respondents that the use of mobile devices in language learning helps them overcome grammatical errors where the students mostly "strongly agree".

Table 2. Significance found in item 10: Whether there are significant differences among students' attitudes towards mobile learning based on their major and year of study

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	34.216 ^a	43	.796	.939	.584
Intercept	84.833	1	84.833	100.119	.000
Year	3.387	4	.847	.999	.408
Use	7.783	9	.865	1.021	.424
Major	.132	1	.132	.156	.694
year * use	7.597	18	.422	.498	.958
year * major	9.277	2	4.639	5.474	.005
use * major	1.746	5	.349	.412	.840
Error	216.914	256	.847		
Total	1191.000	300			
Corrected Total	251.130	299			

It is clear from Table 2 that significance occurs when year interacts with major.

Answer Question 3. Do the EFL college students see that their teachers are up-to-date with mobile learning?

To answer question 3, the questionnaire items 16-19 were analysed. The results in Table 3 show that 43% of the respondents agree that their major courses instructors don't believe that mobile devices are important in language teaching and that only 26.6% believe that their instructors do use mobile phones in teaching. On the other hand, 68.4% believe that the use of instructors of mobile devices would give them a chance to exchange ideas with their instructors and 71.3% believe that the use of instructors of mobile devices would give them a chance to exchange ideas with other students.

Table 3. Percentages, means, and standard deviations on: How do EFL college students see their teachers as up-to-date with mobile learning

Item	%	mean	Std. deviation
16	43	2.68	1.09
17	26.6	3.09	.987
18	68.4	2.06	.992
19	71.3	2.06	.955

Answer Question 4. Is there any statistical difference between male instructors and female instructors regarding the use of mobile learning?

To answer question 4, the questionnaire items, 20 and 21 were analysed. The results in Table 4 show that only 16% of the respondents believe that male instructors would refrain from using mobile devices due to Kuwaiti cultural norms. In addition, the analysis shows that only 24.6% claim that female instructors make use of mobile phones more than male instructors.

Table 4. Percentages, means, and standard deviations on: Differences between male instructors and female instructors regarding the use of mobile learning

Item	%	Mean	Std. deviation
20	16	3.50	1.01
21	24.6	3.28	1.12

Answer Question 5. Do the EFL college students wish their teachers use programs such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Blog, and Wiki?

To answer question 5, the questionnaire items 22-26 were analysed. The analysis in Table 5 shows that 51.7% wish that their instructors would interact with them via (Instagram), 70% of the respondents wish that their instructors would interact with them via (WhatsApp), 63% wished that their instructors would interact with them via (Twitter). Finally, only 11.3% wished that their instructors would interact with them via (Facebook), and 44.3% via (Blog, Wiki).

Table 5. Percentages, means, and standard deviations on: How students wish their teachers use programs such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Blog, and Wiki

Item	%	Mean	Std. deviation
22	51.7	2.52	1.27
23	70	2.04	1.16
24	63	2.47	3.30
25	11.3	3.80	1.11
26	44.3	2.79	1.22

Answer Question 6: What are the reasons behind using mobile devices by both students and teachers?

To answer question 6, a frequency test was carried out to analyse items 27-38, they are asked about the reasons mobile devices are used by both students and instructors in the learning-teaching process. Table 6 shows the results by ranking High and Low. The quantitative analyses above indicate that the students at the English department and the French department in the College of Basic education favour the use of mobile devices in the learning and teaching process. This is confirmed by the finding that only 25% of the respondents believe that they'd rather do their academic activities through traditional methods. The respondents believe that the use of mobile devices is enjoyable, beneficial, and adds value to the learning teaching process. This compromises with research findings in the literature (Al-Fahad, 2009; Thornton & Houser 2005). They also claim that they are able to learn via mobile devices without being limited by space and time. This also conforms to the findings of (Hwang & Chang, 2011; Basoglu & Akdemir, 2010). The responses conform too with findings which assert that the use of mobile devices help them enrich their lexicon and overcome grammatical errors (Thornton & Houser, 2005; Lu, 2008; Basoglu & Akdemir, 2010). As far as the main hypothesis stated earlier, regarding the inability and unwillingness of language instructors to come up-to-date with the increasingly developing teaching aids as mobile learning, the analyses show that the majority (81%) of the respondents do believe that their instructors do not believe that mobile devices are important in language teaching and that a very few number of their instructors do actually use mobile phones in teaching. On the other hand, the students believe that the use of instructors of mobile devices would give them a chance to exchange ideas with both the instructors and other students. In investigating the reasons why teachers and students use mobile devices, the analyses showed that, the majority (93.3%) of the respondents agreed that teachers use mobile devices to announce cancellation of classes. On the contrary, only (43.3%) of the respondents claim that very few instructors use mobile devices as an alternative to their office hours; (42.6%) claim that their instructors use mobile devices to pass issues to the students to get them prepared for discussions before they come to class; only (34.6%) of the respondents claim that their instructors use mobile devices to exchange ideas- on the phone- related to a given issue in the syllabus. This hypothesis asserts that the instructors are not really taking the issue of teaching via the mobile seriously nor academically. On the other hand, 56.3% of the respondents claim that their instructors allow them to use the mobile whenever they need to look for the meaning of a lexical item or an idiom; 53.6% of the respondents claim that their instructors allow them to copy PowerPoint slides presented by the instructor in class; 51.6% of the respondents claim that their instructors allow them to surf the net for some information; 50.6% of the respondents claim that their instructors allow them to put down notes related to the subject under discussion; 44.3% of the respondents claim that their instructors allow them to apologize for not being able to come to class; 31.3% claim that their instructors allow them to get an audio recording of the lesson, and only 12% claim that their instructors allow them to get a video recording. This suggests that there is no actual academic interaction between students and instructors via the mobile. Finally, the open ended question (item 39) asking students if they have any comments on the importance of the cell phones. Qualitative analysis indicated that students added interesting insights. They mainly brought about the issue of the inadequate facilities in the college campus, although it is a new built campus to which the students have moved in six months earlier. Unfortunately, the college lacks internet connections and Wi-Fi in a number of buildings throughout the campus. This is also a complaint heard from all instructors in the college. One of the practical implications, then, is that the College of Basic Education needs to improve its IT infrastructure, including providing distance access, and to provide formal training in the use of internet resources and mobile devices. Students confessed that the first thing they do at the beginning of the term is to ask their instructors to get their phone numbers to communicate via the WhatsApp. This is because, they claim, is the best way for them to apologize for not attending a class, or the instructor himself announces cancellation of class. The trend now, they claim, is that an instructor leaves his mobile number with one student, and hence this student forms a broadcast list of all students in a given class so that everybody in class knows about class cancellation. Male instructors would always prefer to do that. Even with Twitter, the students claimed that they only ask for their instructor's account, just to apologize or to see if there any class cancellation. These confessions clearly suggest that neither the students nor the instructors are making good use of mobile devices. Surprisingly, a considerable number of students mentioned that they insist sometimes to surf the net in class for some information, but what they do actually is texting their friends. Text messaging has been researched by Wei and Wang (2010).

Table 6. Percentages on: Reasons behind using mobile devices by both students and teachers

Item	Statement	Percentages
27	The instructor uses the mobile phone to announce cancelation of the class at specific day and time.	93.3
28	The instructor allows us to use the mobile phone whenever we need to look for the meaning of a lexical item or an idiom.	56.3
29	I use the mobile phone to copy PowerPoint slides presented by the instructor in class.	53.6
30	The instructor allows us to use the mobile phone in class whenever we need to surf the net for some information.	51.6
31	I use the mobile phone outside the classroom to surf the net for some information.	51.3
32	I use the mobile phone during the class to put down my own notes related to the subject under discussion.	50.6
33	I use the mobile phone to apologise to my instructor for not being able to come to class on a specific day and time.	44.3
34	Instructors use the mobile phone as an alternative to their office hours.	43.3
35	Instructors use the mobile phone to pass issues to the students to get them prepared for discussions before they come to class.	42.6
36	Instructors use the mobile phone to exchange ideas- on the phone- related to a given issue in the syllabus.	34.6
37	I use the mobile phone in class to get an audio recording of the lesson.	31.3
38	I use the mobile phone in class to get a video recording of the lesson.	12

6. Recommendation for Future Research

It is recommended that future research may investigate the following:

- 1) Teachers' attitudes towards the use of mobile in learning and teaching contexts.
- 2) Type of courses in which students and teachers use mobile devices.
- 3) Undergraduate male students' attitudes towards the use of mobile devices to see if there are any significant differences between male and female students.
- 4) Teachers and students' attitudes towards the use of mobile devices in private colleges to see if there are any significant differences between government colleges and private ones.

7. Conclusion

This paper aimed at investigating the attitudes of English major students at the department of English and French major students in the College of Basic Education towards the use of mobile learning in their classes. Results obtained from the questionnaires indicate that the majority (80.3%) of students favour the use of mobile devices in the learning and teaching process and find it important and beneficial. They also believe that it enhances their knowledge of language in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Yet, they hope that their instructors devote more time to using mobile devices in teaching. They believe that the instructors play a vital role in either enhancing or intimidating learning. The instructor could encourage students to learn, and might cause intimidation by neglecting the use of social media in class. Moreover, they would expect that the College of Basic Education should exert efforts in overcoming all technical problems and to provide formal training in the use of internet resources and mobile devices.

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