



ADOPTION OF MOBILE TECHNOLOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING USING SMART PHONES

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ABSTRACT

A change in technology is something that keeps on happening in learning and it creates new challenges for pedagogy. The purpose of this study is to explore students' perceptions of using smart phones and the use of the smart phone during English oral communication activity as a tool to find information by the students. This paper includes the preliminary results of a study on students' perceptions of using smart phones in the English language learning classroom. In total, 150 students using smart phones studying at a polytechnic participated in the study. The growing use of mobile technology in polytechnics campuses can give future in the classroom which includes teaching learning activities and students' communications. A recent study revealed a stunning increase in college-age students using mobile technology, such as smart phones: from 1.2% in 2005 to 62.7% in 2010 (Smith and Caruso, 2010). On the whole, the result showed the positive potentialities and capabilities of the smart phones used in the English Language learning classroom. This indicates that education could advantage from utilizing these new technological tools. The paper reports both opportunities and limitations for incorporating smart phones in learning environments.

Keywords: Future classroom: Learning styles and technology, Smart phone.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the fast growth of technology, and advances in electronic learning technologies, mobile learning began to have an enormous impact on our lives. With the widely use of more sophisticated mobile communication devices with the portability and connectivity functions, teaching in classroom can now be transformed by using this technology.

The smart phone and the internet technologies have resulted in the appearance of the mobile learning (m-learning) concept. M-learning can be realized independently of place and time (Bal and Aricl, 2011). Mobile technologies, which were previously preferred mostly by young people, have been used by all age groups in recent years. M-learning is an education model that emerged with the development of mobile technologies (Odabaş, 2009). Today, smart phones can make a significant contribution to the process of teaching and learning. A study carried out by Tarmer et al. (2010), shows that the use of mobile technological devices is preferred to those that are immobile. As to this, with the development of smart phone technologies, educators teaching in higher institution can easily use this device in English Language classrooms to teach the language.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The number of smart phones users by students in higher institutions is increasing. According to Apple, 63% of all students enrolled in colleges and universities own smart phones. College students are the fastest growing sector of the market expected growth for 2011 and it is almost 50%. As to this, this device can be positively used by educators in classrooms as a teaching and learning device. This is true for the use of smart phones in education in general and especially for its use in teaching English oral communication. On the other hand, this provides new possibilities, opportunities and challenges for the educational environment. Furthermore, some recent studies have found that by using mobile phones may represent new learning opportunities in higher education (Rismark, 2007). With mobile wireless network or service in mobile wireless devices in classroom, students can access network information anytime, anywhere (Hahn, 2008). This implies a new era for smart phone users, where integration of smart phones use in the English language class. The students are asked to use the smart phones to find appropriate details to respond to oral communication task given in classroom. By using smart phones devices in authentic learning, it changes the learning environment from the traditional way of learning by using notes and books to mediated educational activities which allow the students to integrate real life situations where learning can occur in authentic contexts. This is because the authentic materials accessed using smart phones provide students with input for natural language use. According to Ting (2007: 718-720), "Mobile learning can guide a learner to an authentic learning context and incorporate the field objects with closely related information in the handheld device to initiate the process of knowledge acquisition." Within language learning contexts, one of the main discussions about technology is incorporation the technology into the language curriculum. This concept is when the technology is "as invisible and natural as whiteboards and pens" and it is only with this invisibility that technology will "have found its proper place in language education" (Chambers and Bax, 2006: 466). In our research, we want to study the students' perceptions in adopting smart phones as a tool in finding related details to present their oral presentation input in the class. Their knowledge acquisition is initiated during which they use their smart phones to find points for the assigned activity.

Indeed, as stated in "The Horizon Report" (Johnson, et al., 2011), students find it easy and pervasive access to information using technologies become trends in learning, and encourage educators to take a careful look at the ways we can best serve learners to cater to their needs (Johnson, et al., 2011). In the second decade of the 21st century, smart phones offer the greatest potential for such invisible integration of technological hardware into language learning. These devices are technologically superior to standard mobile phones, running on advanced operating systems such as iOS (Apple), Android (Google) and Symbian (Nokia) which allow for the use of high-resolution touch-screen interfaces and smart phone-specific applications. As the students are using the smart phones widely at a relatively low-cost (Johnson, et al., 2011), these characteristics mean that smart phones have the potential to become important device in language learning, as in the case of this study to enhance their oral presentation.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to study the perception of students on the use of smart phones during oral communication class, a 10 item questionnaire was developed to measure students' attitudes and perceptions on the usefulness of using smart phone in performing their oral presentation activity. A five point Likert Scale with strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree was used. This approach is commonly employed in distance education research (Irani et al., 2005). The study was conducted in a polytechnic in Malaysia. A sample of 150 diploma in business studies students in semester three were the respondents of this study. All respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire which included all types of measuring students' perceptions on the effectiveness of smart phone usage right after the hands-on session on oral communication activity given in the class. A set of questionnaire was given as shown in Table 1. The data collected was processed and statistically analyzed through SPSS Ver.16.

Table-1. The percentage of the descriptive statistics for the effectiveness of smart phone in purposeful use as a learning tool in the classroom

Questionnaire Indicator	Strongly Agree	Agree	Un-decided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I find it easy to use smart phone to connect to internet in the class during my English oral communication class.	112 (74.7)	38 (25.3)			
I find learning English oral communication using smart phone in the class gives flexibility to find information to complete my task.	39 (26.0)	76 (50.7)	18 (12.0)	17 (11.3)	
Using smart phone during the lesson improves my communication between student and teacher.	84 (56.0)	42 (28.0)	15 (10.0)	6 (4.0)	3 (2.0)
Smart phone can be an effective method of learning as it can give immediate support.	59 (39.4)	62 (41.3)	13 (8.7)	16 (10.6)	
Smart phone is a quicker method of getting information to respond to the English oral activity in the class.	59 (39.4)	67 (44.7)	6 (4.0)	8 (5.3)	10 (6.3)
Using smart phone in oral communication class improves my performance in presenting information.	94 (62.7)	42 (28.0)	1 (0.6)	2 (1.3)	11 (7.4)
Using smart phone in oral communication class increases my learning English productivity.	41 (27.3)	32 (21.3)	38 (25.3)	19 (12.7)	20 (13.4)
Using smart phone in oral communication class enhances my use of vocabulary during oral presentation.	24 (16.0)	92 (61.3)	18 (12.0)	6 (4.0)	10 (6.7)
Using smart phone in oral communication class gives me confidence to speak with good points and ideas.	78 (52.0)	62 (41.3)		6 (4.0)	4 (2.7)
Using smart phone in oral communication class motivates me to speak in the class.	27 (18.0)	48 (32.0)	45 (30.0)	20 (13.3)	10 (6.7)

Note: figures in brackets indicate percentage.

4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were some limitations related to this study. Firstly, there were a small number of students who are in the class are without smart phones. These students had to share the phone with other students. However, it did not interrupt the lesson. The next aspect was that there were a few students who did not have enough battery power towards the end of the lesson. This is only a technical problem as it can be solved in future classes.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Smart phones seem to be the best device to use in the English oral communication classroom at higher institutions, yet a requirement to use them in a class would deprive a small percentage of students who do not own or use a smart phone. Besides that, the objective of the study is to find out whether the adaptation of smart phone in English oral communication learning classroom has helped the students to find ideas and points to speak in the class. Table 1 shows the percentage of the descriptive statistics for the effectiveness of smart phone as a learning tool in the classroom.

Responding to the usability of smart phone to connect to internet in the class during English oral communication lesson, the result shows 100% of the respondents agreed with the statement. This is one of the credibility to use smart phone as a tool for students to respond during the oral activities given in class. 80.7% of the respondents agreed that smart phone can be an effective tool of learning as it can give immediate support. Therefore, this technology can appear to be versatile and highly compliant for many learning styles and it can give a change from more standard lecture and discussion-based activities in classrooms to hands-on activities.

The responses on the flexibility to find information to complete students' oral task in the class using smart phone shows 76% of the respondents agreed. Only 6% did not agree that it helped them to find information with the use of smart phone. This study findings support the literature that suggests today's students desire and benefit from flexibility and ubiquity, that is, 'anywhere, anytime, and any device' learner engagement" [6]. This proves that mobile technologies such as smart phones can be used to enhance students' learning environment. The respondents, however, indicated undecided (25.3%) and disagreed (26.1%) for the statement where using smart phone in oral communication class increases their learning English productivity. As only 48.6% agreed, therefore, when students gain access to information related to the task, the educators must provide direction so that the learning can become meaningful for the students. The statement on the improvement on communication between student and teacher during the activity shows the respondents agreed (84.7%). In order to maximize the benefit of smart phone use in the class, the educators must carefully adapt the technology to specific learning goals and outcomes to ensure a meaningful learning takes place.

Smart phone provides good support to improvement on the students' performance in their presentation. It has been observed by Habitzel and his colleagues (2006), for example, people can learn more effectively if "information" is broken down into smaller, more easy-to-comprehend units. Therefore, it is suggested here that smart phone is an ideal tool simply because it supports this "new way" of learning during the oral communication activities. 90.7% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that their English oral presentation had improved. As the students are required to present on products and services, it was so handy for the students to use the smart phone to find information and speak confidently. This supports the statements where 93.3% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they could speak confidently with good points and ideas with the help of the device. The study has also found that 77.3% of the respondents were aware of the use of smart phone during the activity had enhanced the use of vocabulary better. However, the use of smart phone in oral communication class did not highly motivate the respondents to speak in the class as only 50% had responded agreed to the above statement. Guri-Rosenblit (2005) observes that our human capacity to respond to and adapt to the pace of new technologies is significantly slower and more limited. Therefore, educators using smart phone in the classroom must be dedicated to learn how to use these devices effectively in classroom instruction.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This study offers preliminary findings on the use of smart phones in the classroom and how the students perceived of their oral communication skills when these devices are introduced in the classroom. The researcher have analyzed the answers to the quantitative questions in the surveys in an attempt to gain an understanding of how current students perceive the use of smart phones in finding information for the given task and presenting it orally in the class. The majority of the students supported the perception that the smart phones increase the flexibility of access to resources in English oral communication class. As the data reveals use of smart phones in oral communication activities can better engage students in the presentation performance. Students in this survey have changed from passive learners to truly engaged learners who are physically and intellectually involved in their presentation activity. After experiencing the use of smart phones in English oral communication classroom, we strongly believe that there are a lot of opportunities and potentials are yet to be realized. We should keep studying the pedagogy behind the use of smart phones in the actual classroom activities and develop appropriate activities that can utilize these devices efficiently. The smart phones technologies are perceived as an effective tool in improving communication and learning in higher institutions.

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