Chapter 36
Language Learners and Mobile Technology:
How They Interact?

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ABSTRACT

In order to understand the influence of mobile social media vs. formal learning platforms on creating effective student-student and teacher-student communication channels and linguistic outputs, this study was conducted. Using a qualitative approach, a number of 30 English language university teachers were interviewed. Evidence from their mobile and non-mobile interaction with their students was analyzed to support data from the interviews. The study evaluates the potential of both formal and informal communication mediums to maintain student-centered language learning experience. The study concludes that teachers still need to be aware of the potential of mobile technology and social media for language learning, and that there was a tendency among some teachers to implement formal technology tools for their teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile technology is being widely used by different users around the world for different purposes. Researchers started to study the behavior of mobile users, and how they are interacting via their handheld devices, and for what reasons. There have been different behavioral patterns that vary between users and contexts. In particular, researchers in education investigated the potential of mobile technology for learning, and attempted to establish specific theoretical approaches for mobile learning.

This study reviewed key pedagogical approaches that have been utilized in different mobile learning contexts. Using a constructivist framework, the study explored human-mobile interactional patterns, and how such patterns can inform mobile language learning. The study investigated prior and current practices of mobile users and their potential for language learning, and how mobile learning has influenced informal learning. Preferred mediums of interaction for both English language university teachers

and students were explored. The distinction between formal and informal technologies, and their affordances for mobile language learning have also been investigated. The study was conducted with 30 EFL (English as a Foreign English) teachers at a Saudi Arabian university. Qualitative data obtained from interviews with teachers illustrated that there were differences in terms of mobile literacy and conceptions of mobile learning between students and teachers. Teachers themselves viewed mobile learning differently based on their technological background, age, and teaching experience. The study concluded that teachers were hesitant to use innovative mobile and social media tools for several reasons. It also illustrated that students needed to be aware of mobile learning potential, and how their mobile devices could be powerful language learning tools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One important aspect of the study of human-mobile interaction is investigating the relationship between users and mobile technology. According to Zimmermann, Henze, Righetti, Rukzio, and Enrico (2009), mobile devices, including mobile phones and mobile media players, have become the most pervasive ways that people interact with technology, and are used for a huge variety of services and applications. In de Sa and Carrico's (2010) words:

Our lives and society are rapidly gravitating towards a world in which mobile devices are taken for granted. These are no longer accessory but become natural extensions to our bodies. Their use has become quasi-permanent, following and supporting us in most of our activities and affecting the way we interact, share, and communicate with others. (p. 176)

This means that many people today are extremely emerged in mobile devices that have dramatically changed and are changing their way of life. Young people, often referred to as mobile or digital natives, are more frequent users of mobile devices since they usually tend to adopt more flexible lifestyles. Mobile devices have greatly changed the way they think, communicate, entertain, and above all, learn. In particular, students' life experiences and home culture can effectively be connected by mobile phone technologies, and students' own cultures were found to be apparent in their classroom learning activities thanks to mobile social media (Kolb, 2008). Traxler and Kukulska-Hulme (2016) note that the next generation of mobile learning is becoming 'context-aware', and that mobile learning takes advantage of students' rich environments inside and outside the classroom. Hence, students are encouraged to capture aspects of their environments, and integrate informal mobile media into their formal learning experiences. The divide between formal technologies, implemented by learning institutions, and informal technologies mobile tools needs to be narrowed.

The integration of technology into learning has considerably improved different pedagogical practices and teaching methodologies, and has helped to obtain better understanding of how mobile context-awareness derives informal learning activities (Clough, 2016). Both students and educators have benefited from the great potentials that technology offered for learning and teaching over the last 3-4 decades. As technology has shrunk into more powerful and portable forms, learning has effectively exploited the potential of these forms, i.e., mobile technologies, particularly when we realize that the vast majority of mobile users are our young students. However, systematic analysis of mobile practices is required

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