

Chapter 6

Factors in the Usage of Mobile Phones in Japanese University EFL Classrooms

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter considers factors that can play roles in the use of mobile phones in university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Japan. While recent developments have made such devices an increasingly attractive alternative to computers in education, issues such as cost and privacy have been noted by other research to be of some concern. This study investigated the use and perceptions of mobile phones by 249 university students studying EFL in Japan. Results indicated that although students declared varying levels of proficiency with their mobile phones, most were able to complete the tasks queried. Among factors that might inhibit successful implementation of the use of mobile phones for education, cost and security concerns were minimal, but student reservations about using mobile phones for educational tasks appeared to be a mediating factor.

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BACKGROUND

Mobile Phone

Technological innovations such as the radio, the television, video, and the computer have brought about remarkable changes in society. A corresponding impact in the field of education is evident for some of these innovations, such as the computer. Others such as the radio and the television were initially hailed as devices that would result in revolutionary changes in education (Collins & Halverson, 2009), yet they were often not adopted for everyday classroom use and failed to reach their potential as it was initially perceived. Reasons for this include lack of access to the devices, expense, difficulty incorporating the devices into existing curricula, and teachers' limited skill using the equipment (Cuban, 1986). Many of these circumstances are no longer obstacles for mobile phone applications in education, and a quick look at the state of the mobile phone market indicates that there are many parallels with the conditions of the personal computer market when Windows 95 was introduced; that time was, of course, followed by exponential growth in the use of personal computers that culminated in the wired reality of today.

Rapid Proliferation

Across the world, the mobile phone sector has expanded at an unprecedented rate over the last few years. The Groupe Speciale Mobile Association (GSMA), a consortium that represents the worldwide mobile communications industry, recently announced that mobile connections have surpassed five billion, just 18 months after the four billion mark was surpassed – in short, three connections exist for every four people on the Earth. Furthermore, GSMA forecasts that this figure will reach six billion connections in 2012 (GSMA, 2010). Reception is available in most areas, and, even five years ago in the developing world, 76% of the rural population was able to receive mobile coverage (International Telecommunication Union, 2008). Convergence of different models is progressing, as major players in the mobile market are increasingly cooperating to create universal applications and standardized operating systems for handsets (Android, 2012; Mformation, 2008; Rao, 2011). Each new generation of mobile phones brings improvements in speed, memory, and functionality that increasingly rival the market share, capabilities, and convenience of notebook and tablet computers (Fray, 2009; Gaudin, 2008; Ipsos Insight, 2006), allowing them to better compete in the lucrative broadband market. Moreover, the functionality of mobile phones and computers has converged, so that the functions of these two formerly disparate devices increasingly overlap.

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