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of Mobile Learning**

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Mobility in a Writing Classroom: College Students' Attitudes and Self-Efficacy of Mobile Learning

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Abstract

The growth of mobile technologies has attracted the attention of the educators and researchers, many of whom consider the very features of this device to be conducive to effective learning. In fact, mobiles can be unobtrusive, require no technology training and they are thought to be unthreatening to users, enabling student centered, personal and ubiquitous learning. As such, they make it possible to learn anywhere and anytime. Several studies have analyzed the implications of the use of mobile devices for learning and the effects on students' motivation and performance reporting its usefulness especially for English language students. This was particularly true in reading comprehension, vocabulary and spelling. However, little is known about the usefulness of a mobile in writing classroom. Additionally, no research has investigated, particularly in Lebanon, the utility of m- learning. The purpose of this study was to examine the role m-learning plays in motivating learners. It also attempted to study the relationship between learners' self-efficacy and their attitude. The sample group comprised three writing classes in a private university in Lebanon: beginners, intermediate, and advanced. All three classes were exposed to a variety of reading material and were expected to produce writing material ranging from paragraphs to essays and research papers. At the beginning of the semester, students in each class were enrolled in a WhatsApp group to allow exchange of material using different mediums such as pictures, recordings, texts, or hyperlinks. They were encouraged to post inquiries and expected to complete tasks or assignments they receive, which was not restricted to class time only. Results showed that the motivation of the majority of students was enhanced and most of them had positive attitudes towards m- learning. Implications for future research and the practice of m – learning are discussed.

Keywords: m –learning, attitude and motivation, teaching writing.

Introduction

With technology becoming an indispensable part of our world, its utility within the educational framework has become equally essential especially that youth generation is much more interested in technology. Eventually,

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has emerged, which is in association with mobile-assisted language learning. CALL is composed of three phases: Structural CALL, communicative CALL and integrative CALL, the last type of which includes mobile-assisted language learning

(MALL), where learners integrate their learning with technology anywhere and anytime. Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) define MALL as formal or informal learning mediated via handheld devices which are potentially available for use anytime, anywhere. Handheld devices include mobile phones and tablet computers with Internet capability and other devices without Internet access such as electronic dictionaries, MP3 players, and game players. Applications may include playing contents in mobile devices, interacting with small program on mobile device, surfing, searching and subscribing, oral language training, SMS and MMS and online chatting, e-mail and online discussion (Li, 2008; Chinnery, 2006)

Benefits pertaining to the use mobile are many including their portability, the ability to play and record audio, in addition to their being cost effective (Wishart, 2008). However, their use comes with a challenge as it requires learners to be motivated and be able to self-regulate their learning (Sha, Looi, Chen, and Zhang, 2012). Indeed, as Keller (2008) and MacCallum (2009) put it, m-learning students need to be further motivated to use mobile devices to support their learning, for high levels of student motivation and successful implementation of m- learning in class are quite linked (e.g. Hall & Elliott, 2003; McMillan & Honey, 1993; Oloruntoba, 2006).

MALL studies explored the general advantages of mobile technologies, and these include personal, authentic, informal settings allowing continuous access and fostering interaction across diverse contexts (Kukulska-Hume, 2009). The specific communicative aspect of language has also been explored. Many studies have reported that m-learning is useful for English language students in general (Sandberg, Maris, & Genus, 2011, Chen & Huang, 2010). Success has been reported specifically in the different language skills including reading comprehension, vocabulary and spelling (Attewel, 2005; Basoglu & Akademir, 2010; Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009) as well as pronunciation practice (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009), writing ability (Morita, 2003), and listening skills (Edirisingha et al., 2007). Other studies showed how theme-based m-learning activities improved contextual language learning experiences (Tan & Liu, 2004).

As interactivity means that learners are engaged in m- learning, benefits to the whole learning experience have been reported (Cobcroft, Towers, Smith & Bruns, 2006; Corbeil, Pan, Sullivan, & Butler, 2007; Traxler, 2009), the most important of which is students' motivation to learn (Yang, 2012; Organero, Munoz-Merino, & Kloos, 2012). Many scholars' studies show that using mobile technology in language learning makes students motivated and makes learning process enjoyable (Stockwell, 2007).

In fact, several studies have analyzed the implications of the use of mobile devices for learning and the effects on students' motivation and performance (Nihalani, & Mayrath, 2010; Swan, Van'tHooft, Kratcoski, & Unger, 2005).

Implementing m-learning requires a high level of students' self efficacy; otherwise it won't be effective. Self efficacy is defined as one's judgment of his or her ability to organize and execute a certain course of action required to attain a designated type of performance (Bandura, 1977). In this study, it is related to the students' belief that they can integrate m-learning throughout their learning process. Mobile efficacy plays a significant role in students' acceptance of to m-learning environment (Lu & Viehland, 2008). A positive mobile self efficacy has been reported for school students while a cross sectional study including nursing students and staff showed that the respondents had a high level of self efficacy (Kenny et al, 2010). In the Middle East, there is no research on learners 'attitude and self-efficacy towards m-learning. Additionally, no research has yet examined these in a writing class. Informed by previous research, this study aims at examining the role m-learning plays in motivating learners in a writing class. It also attempts to study the relationship between learners' self-efficacy and their attitudes.

Specifically, the paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do students' perceive the use of mobile as part of their learning experience?
2. Do students know how to use the mobile as an educational tool?
3. Is there any relation between students' gender and the way their perception of m-learning?

Methodology

The study comprises 49 students (22 males and 27 females) enrolled in three writing classes in a private university: an intensive/beginner English Level writing class, expected to write informative four paragraphs and one essay, a remedial class expected to produce expository essays, and finally an advanced writing class expected to write an argumentative research paper. All three classes were exposed to a variety of reading material. At the beginning of the semester, students in each class were enrolled in a WhatsApp group. They were encouraged to send any inquiry to each other or to the instructor. The instructor, in turns, sent learning pills, a pill being an audio file summarizing a particular class discussion and eventually promoting reflection and self study (Organero et al, 2012). Instructor also sent snapshots of the answers to a reading or summary quiz directly after class, and the answers were those of students who had the highest mark, and as such capitalizing on the importance of immediate feedback in the learning process and motivation in learning. Feedback on writing tasks was sent to each participant separately in the form of a recording. Links to useful sites relevant to basic concepts were also invested. At the end of the semester, two surveys were administered: a learning attitude survey and a self- efficacy survey (adapted from Tsai & Tsai, 2003) with minor modifications. Fifteen volunteers were interviewed as well.

Results

To answer the first research question regarding students’ attitude, the percentages show a major positive attitude as Table 1 indicates.

Table 1. *Students’ Attitudes towards m- learning*

	D				A
Helping me attain more ideas				6	6
Enhancing my desire to learn			2	8	2
Allowing room for interesting and imaginative work		6	0	4	6
Feeling of discomfort	2	0	2		
Feeling of boredom	0	4		2	
Hoping to apply in various learning activities	4	0	12	56	28

SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree

Particularly, students reported that m-learning helps them attain more ideas (92%), which means they can better comprehend conceptual knowledge which is a prerequisite for writing. For the beginners and remedial classes class, that means students better learned all about paragraph/essay writing in terms of organization, focus, coherence, development and types. They also learned better how to write summaries and paraphrases, the latter being skills reinforced in remedial and advanced classes. Specifically, the advanced writing class learned better, with the help of mobile, the basics and types of an argument, language of argument and documentation. One student said that he used to believe APA was the toughest ever but then, with “that interactive website I accessed on my mobile, things were different”. The above table also shows that m-learning has enhanced students’ desire to learn (80%), and one advanced writing class student expressed his excitement upon receiving something on his mobile and he” could not wait to see what that was” . The use of mobiles also turned to somehow (60%) allow students to do interesting or imaginative work, and that can be due to the fact that specific tasks had been given to students related to their course material and not much room was left for imaginative work, an area to be reconsidered when designing a writing course. Consistent with that positive attitude, percentages were quite low when expressing feeling of discomfort (8%) and boredom (26%). Eventually, a significant majority (84%) expressed their hope to apply m-learning in various learning activities. When further interviewed regarding the benefits of m-learning, 15 students pointed to discussion of assignment and the audio feedback they received on their writing tasks. Others expressed their satisfaction with the sample answer keys to quizzes and the snapshots of good pieces of writing. They were all happy with the freedom to do search in class,

and in particular, the intensive writing class students enjoyed the freedom to use Google translate when needed. The one thing that bothered most of them, regardless of their level, was the side conversations that took place on the WhatsApp group, which were not particularly relevant to the course itself.

As for self-efficacy or ability to use the mobile for course designated purposes, almost all students expressed the ability to use the mobile without other's help and in that context, a teacher's or a classmate's. Additionally, with a mobile, almost all can key in a website address, download a figure from the internet, and check a hyperlink to enter another website.

Table 2. Students' Mobile Self-efficacy

	SD	D	N	A	SA
I can use a mobile device independently without other's help.			8	8	20
I can key in a website address to enter the site using a mobile device			0	6	42
I can download a figure from the internet using a mobile device.			10	4	32
I can check a hyperlink to enter another website using a mobile device.			8	6	24

SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree

Finally, there turned to be no gender difference in students' attitudes and gender as Table 3 indicates:

Table 3. Gender and Attitude towards m- learning

(In an) m -learning environment,	Gender
helps me to attain more ideas.	.008
Pearson Correlation	.954
Sig (2 tailed)	
enhances my desire to learn.	-0.41
	.783
allows me to do more interesting, imaginative work.	.009
	.953
makes me feel uncomfortable	-.126
	.390
makes me feel bored	-.128
	.382
I hope to have a regular time to use a mobile device	.060
	.683
I hope to apply mobile devices in various learning activities.	.016
	.911

Additionally, none exists between gender and self efficacy (Table 4) as all the participants had equally positive responses to all items and all pointed to their self efficacy. This means that all participants, males and females, know how to use a mobile in a writing course and need no additional help; it also means that their attitude towards mobile learning is positive regardless of their gender.

Table 4. Gender and Self-efficacy

In the m-learning environment, I can		
check a hyperlink to enter another website using a mobile device.	Pearson Correlation	.111
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.448
key in a website address to enter the site using a mobile device	Pearson Correlation	.064
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.661
download a figure from the internet using a mobile device.	Pearson Correlation	.184
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.206
use a mobile device independently without other's help.	Pearson Correlation	.080
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.584

Discussion

This paper has showed that college students in three writing classes of different levels do know how to use a mobile whether accessing a hyperlink, downloading a figure, keying in a website, without any assistance from classmates or instructors. This has made it quite easy for them to make use of images sent to them whether they were snapshots of best essays or an online answer key to activity. It has also better helped them get access to relevant writing components content via links sent to their mobiles, the freedom of which has been a great asset to them. With self efficacy as a pre requisite for investing in m-learning, mobiles have turned to support students' learning, which aligns with previous findings regarding m-learning in an English Language class (Edirisingha et al., 2007; Sandberg, Maris, & Genus, 2011, Chen & Chung, 2010; Attewel, 2005; Basoglu & Akademir, 2010; Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009) as well as writing ability (Morita, 2003). This might be attributed to the motivational effect of mobiles as (Swan, K. Van'tHooft, Kratcoski, & Unger, 2005; Stockwell, 2007; Nihalani & Mayrath, 2010; Organero, Munoz-Merino & Kloos, 2012) the mobile learning environment enhances students' desire to learn and eventually the participants hoped for its usage in other learning activities.

Conclusions

The benefits of using mobiles in an English language class might not be new, but its investment in a writing class is. Given that the youth generation tends to know how to use a mobile for educational purposes as instructed to, and they are really motivated to do so, it is time that we design our course syllabi in a way decide which parts of the course can be delivered through a mobile and which might be part of class discussion and practice. In a writing course, this can be of great asset to both students and instructors. On one hand, students will have received different modes of instruction addressing the different learning styles one encounters in a regular classroom. They have the chance, in addition to reading from their text book or mobile, to listen to recordings, to watch videos via links sent to them, and to browse for

information. As for instructors, and since teaching writing requires that students practice in class and receive feedback, m-learning is such a time investment as more time can be devoted in class for such purposes. College writing students do know how to use a mobile for writing purposes and are quite hooked to learning, so it is time that reevaluation of current practices takes place.

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