

The Current Use of Mobile Devices among Students and Faculty in EFL Teaching in a Saudi Arabian Context

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ABSTRACT

Mobile technology has significant potential to support learning and teaching in English. However, few studies attempt to explore current use by students and faculty members of mobile technologies to facilitate English language learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia. Even fewer studies capture descriptions of current use in the words of these users. The present study focused on the current use and associated pedagogy related to mobile technologies. It drew on findings from qualitative data gathered through focus group interviews of 49 university students and 30 faculty members. Thematic analysis results showed that students predominantly use their mobile devices informally outside the classroom to facilitate their English language learning. For students, social media are particularly popular and provide opportunities to practise their English language skills outside the classroom. Conversely, faculty members emphasised the use of mobile devices formally in the classroom context, expressing views on how they might improve control of student use of mobile devices. Critically, comparison of such use by students and faculty members reveals that students' informal use of mobile devices to support learning is much better aligned than faculty members' formal use of these devices in terms of what one might consider mobile device best practice.

INTRODUCTION

To learn a foreign language effectively, one should ideally learn it in a country that uses that language, which is seldom the case for many learners (Comas-Quinn, Mardomingo, & Valentine, 2009). However, mobile technologies can provide learners alternative, context-rich experiences that allow them to interact in authentic contexts to improve their language proficiency. With the rapid development of mobile technologies, the concept of mobile learning has emerged to provide opportunities to support language learning both inside and outside the classroom (Comas-Quinn et al., 2009; Fayed, Yacoub, & Hussein, 2013; Jantjies & Joy, 2013). Acknowledging the affordances mobile technology can bring to learning, Martin and Ertzberger (2013) define mobile learning as the learning process that occurs when learners have access to information anywhere and anytime to engage in authentic learning activities.

Successful integration of mobile technologies in formal education requires determining the opinions of students and faculty members on the use of mobile technologies (Sánchez-Prieto, Olmos-Migueláñez, & García-Peñalvo, 2016) and identifying the current practices of informal mobile learning (Lai & Zheng, 2017). Educators should understand how they can incorporate mobile learning formally into their classroom since they will control whether and how mobile technologies will be used (Mercer & Fischer, 1992; Mueller, Wood, De Pasquale, & Cruikshank, 2012). The present study aims to explore how mobile technologies are being used currently to support the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a university in Saudi Arabia.

An essential element of the successful integration of mobile technologies in formal education is knowledge of the opinions of students and faculty members towards both the use of mobile technologies (Sánchez-Prieto, Olmos-Migueláñez, & García-Peñalvo, 2016) and the current practices of informal mobile learning (Lai & Zheng, 2017). Educators should understand how they can incorporate mobile learning formally into their classroom since they will control whether and how mobile technologies will be used (Mercer & Fischer, 1992; Mueller, Wood, De Pasquale, & Cruikshank, 2012). The aim of this study was to explore how mobile technologies are currently being used to support the teaching of English as a Foreign Language at a university in Saudi Arabia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educators and researchers have expressed increasing interest in integrating mobile technologies as a tool in formal learning environments to decrease the gap between informal and formal learning. Informal learning can be distinguished from formal learning because 'there is no teacher, no defined curriculum topic or concept, and no external assessment' (Laurillard, 2009, p. 12). According to Mills, Knezek and Khaddage (2014), the use and availability of mobile technologies have acted to redefine formal and informal learning. This redefinition may be

because of a natural affinity between informal learning and mobile devices. For example, Clough, Jones, McAndrew and Scanlon (2008) found that mobile device owners adapt existing mobile device features to suit their informal learning needs. In using mobile devices for informal learning activities, users are able to take advantage of the affordance offered by the portability and computational capabilities of these devices (Clough et al., 2008).

In response to educators' interest in mobile technologies, studies have investigated the use of mobile technologies as a bridge between informal and formal education (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). The aim such use of educators is to provide students opportunities for autonomous learning that moves the process of teaching and learning beyond the classroom thereby enabling the concept of 'anywhere and anytime learning'. According to Cross (2006), both informal and formal learning have significant roles to play and most experiences of learning blend the two.

In the EFL context, a common theme in the literature is the importance of integrating mobile technologies as formal and informal learning tools. For example, Leis, Tohei and Cooke (2015) studied the importance of using smartphone devices in an English classroom in Japan. They found that students who were encouraged to use their smartphones during class time were inclined to study more in their free time. Further, these students tended to be autonomous by taking responsibility for their learning and considering ways to improve their English proficiency and learning habits. Lan, Sung and Chang (2007) conducted a comparative research study to explore the advantages of using tablet devices in the EFL context to enhance peer collaboration in reading class, as against the traditional classroom context. The findings showed that such use led to increased motivation to read and reduced student stress and anxiety levels. Song and Fox (2008) investigated how learners of English used mobile devices as a self-directed, informal learning tool to increase and support their English vocabulary study. They indicated that mobile devices assisted students to discuss the meanings of new words with their classmates and teachers outside the classroom, thereby developing their vocabulary learning. Similarly, Barr (2011) found that students used their mobile phones in various ways to support their English learning informally, including taking pictures of the board to save notes, recording presentations to improve listening and pronunciation and using applications, such as those of CNN and BBC, to practise reading and watching videos.

In addition, mobile devices and social media applications have increased the opportunities for student interaction and collaboration by allowing students to engage in creating content and communicating in authentic contexts (Gikas & Grant, 2013). The use of these applications on mobile devices for learning purposes supports a more learner-centred approach (Greenhow, 2011) since it enhances the learning experience, making it more authentic and personalised for students (Archambault, Wetzel, Foulger, & Williams, 2010; Bangert & Almahfud, 2014; Gikas & Grant, 2013; Shuler, 2009; Solvberg & Rismark, 2012).

Numerous researchers (e.g., Ahmed, 2015; Alhadhrani, 2016; Alshammari, Parkes, & Adlington, 2017; Kabooha & Elyas, 2015; Kutbi, 2015; Mahmoud, 2014) have examined the importance of social media applications (e.g., *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *WhatsApp*) as English language learning tools. For example, Ahmed (2015) explored whether using *Twitter* influenced EFL learners' writing, that is, the content, ideas, organisation, style and voice. The study indicated that the experimental group taught using *Twitter* outperformed the control group taught using the traditional method of writing on the post-test. Kutbi (2015) explored how students perceived *Twitter* as an educational tool and found that 80% of the participants preferred its use, providing evidence that students have huge growing interest in social media to support their learning. Alshammari et al. (2017), exploring the use of *WhatsApp*, demonstrated that students and their instructors both had positive attitudes towards its use for English language learning. The authors also concluded that *WhatsApp* could be leveraged to enhance peer and autonomous learning, as well as develop learning communities (Alshammari et al., 2017). Mahmoud (2014) examined the impact of *Facebook* on English language learners' achievements in writing, finding that their writing performance improved when taught using *Facebook*. Kabooha and Elyas (2015) explored the effects of *YouTube* videos on student vocabulary achievement. They showed that students considered these useful tools for learning vocabulary and perceived the platform to be easy to use.

Despite the increasingly important role that mobile technologies play in EFL learning and teaching, few studies have explored the current student and instructor use of mobile devices in the facilitation of EFL instruction in the Saudi Arabian context. The present study sought to address this gap.

METHOD

This study explored the current use of mobile devices by students and their EFL instructors as well as the associated pedagogy related to these devices at an all-male university in the central-north of Saudi Arabia. The university study site has a student population of 34,286 and 1,632 faculty members distributed across 12

faculties. The university offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. All Saudi Arabian universities have a Preparatory Year programme designed to improve the knowledge and skills of secondary school graduates before they undertake their chosen majors at university. The Preparatory Year at the university aims to develop student skills across a range of subjects and prepare them for the world of the university. One of these skills is proficiency in English. The study sample comprised male faculty members of the English Centre responsible for English language teaching at the university and their students.

Data from students and faculty members were obtained through a series of 14 focus group interviews. The groups comprised eight student focus groups (SFGs) with an average of six students per focus group (SFG1–SFG8; n = 49 students) and six faculty member focus groups (FFGs) with an average of five faculty members per focus group (FFG1–FFG6; n = 30 faculty members). SFG interviews were conducted as well as initially transcribed in Arabic owing to varying levels of student English proficiency. These Arabic transcriptions were then translated into English in preparation for coding and analysis. Since all faculty members of the English Centre were proficient in the English language, their interviews were conducted and transcribed in English.

As is common for semi-structured interviews, an interview guide was used (Kajornboon, 2005). This guide comprised a series of seed questions for the focus groups. Each series of seed questions, while reflecting a number of common themes, had the wording adjusted to be of relevance to the respective student (Table 1) and faculty member focus groups (Table 2).

Table 1: Faculty focus group seed questions

Item	Question
1.	Do you use any mobile devices (e.g., cell phone, smart phone, iPod, eBook reader, PDA, tablet device) for learning English? If so, how are you using your own mobile device to support your learning of English?
2.	What are your thoughts on keeping the use of mobile devices to outside of the classroom rather than allowing them to be used inside the classroom? Do you see any issues with being allowed to use mobile devices in the classroom?
3.	What do you think might be the major enablers and/or barriers for the university in implementing the use of mobile devices in the teaching of English?
4.	How do you feel about the future of mobile technologies in supporting your learning of English?
5.	Do you have any additional comments about the use of mobile devices in the teaching and learning of English?

Table 2: Faculty focus group seed questions

Item	Question
1.	Do you use any mobile devices (e.g., cell phone, smart phone, iPod, eBook reader, PDA, tablet device) for teaching English? If so, how are you using your own mobile device to support your teaching of English?
2.	How does your use of mobile device for teaching compare to your personal use of mobile device?
3.	How do you feel about the future of mobile technologies in supporting your teaching of English?
4.	What are your thoughts on keeping the use of mobile devices to outside of the classroom rather than allowing them to be used inside the classroom? Do you see any issues with allowing students to use their mobile devices in the classroom?
5.	What do you think might be the major enablers and/or barriers for the university in implementing the use of mobile devices in the teaching of English?
6.	Do you have any additional comments about the use of mobile devices in the teaching and learning of English?

To provide a point of comparison between the use of mobile devices for teaching learning in general and the use of mobile devices in EFL teaching and learning at the study site, this research drew upon the work of Wai, Ng, Chiu, Ho & Lo, 2018 who identified six main ways mobile devices can be used to support learning in general:

1. communication and interaction;
2. accessing academic materials;
3. information organisation and sharing;
4. self-learning;
5. information searching; and

6. course-based learning.

To capture these and other key ideas, thematic analysis was applied to the transcripts of the eight student and six faculty member focus groups to identify and code the emergent themes. The thematic analysis model presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) was adopted and followed. This process involved six phases:

1. data familiarization,
2. generate initial codes,
3. search for themes,
4. review of themes,
5. define and name themes, and
6. produce the report.

Through thematic analysis key themes were identified including how mobile devices were currently being used at the institution. This current use was then able to be compared with the six main ways mobile devices can be used to support learning as identified by Wai et al. (2018).

RESULTS

Thematic analysis yielded 119 codes from both student and faculty member data. These codes were organized into nine categories that emerged to reveal two broad themes: *Current use of mobile devices* and *Pedagogy*. The two themes and their constituent categories are presented supported by representative student and faculty member quotations from the various focus group transcripts.

Theme 1 - Current use of mobile devices

The first theme, *Current use of mobile devices*, is defined as how mobile devices are currently being used to support learning at the university. This theme comprised five categories (Table 3).

Table 3: Current use of mobile devices - associated categories

Theme	Categories
Current use of mobile devices	Types of mobile devices General use of mobile devices Informal use of mobile devices in EFL Formal use of mobile devices in EFL Misuse of mobile devices

Category - Types of mobile devices

This category captures the types of mobile devices used by students and faculty members and their opinions about the various types of mobile devices. When asked what type of mobile devices they use, the majority of students and some of faculty members indicated that they use smartphones. One student cited his personal use of an iPhone and then described smartphones as being the standard for most students, stating:

iPhone devices and Android systems are used nowadays; most people depend on them. (SFG5)

Another student from the same focus group supported this statement, adding:

I agree with my colleague... smartphones are in general the pioneer devices in these days. (SFG5)

However, some faculty members indicated that they use and prefer ordinary mobile phones that are not smart devices. For example, one faculty member said:

I am an old fashion teacher so I have the old style Nokia. Nokia is very simple...I do not use it inside my classroom. (FFG3)

Students indicated their preferences for mobile devices. The majority of students discussed the ease of use of mobile devices (e.g., smartphones, iPads) compared to laptop or desktop computers. One student believed that it was this ease of use that made mobile devices more compatible with student lifestyles:

[Mobile devices] are used easily, as well as carried easily. I can carry it anywhere. (SFG2)

Another student also believed that mobile technology offered students greater flexibility and portability:

Earlier, we were suffering from this problem, a laptop is difficult to be carried everywhere; using it forces you to sit in the one place. As for smart phones, you can transmit with it everywhere. (SFG2)

In contrast, faculty members tended to indicate their preference for laptop computers. There was also evidence of some confusion between the distinction between laptops computers and mobile devices. For example, one faculty member said:

I don't know for the purposes of your research if you consider a laptop a mobile device but I use that daily. (FFG5)

Category - General use of mobile devices

This category captures the daily and general use of the mobile devices by students and faculty members. Both students and faculty members highlighted several general uses of mobile device in their daily life. For example, students and faculty members indicated that they take notes by their mobile devices. One faculty member mentioned:

When I am tired I use my mobile phone to take a photo of the whiteboard to keep notes that I can use for the next class. (FFG3)

Students also found using mobile devices for note taking saved time. For instance, as one student explained:

When the teacher writes on the board, it takes time, and you need time to write whatever is written on the board, but by using a mobile phone, you can take a picture of the board, and when returning home, you can write it down or note the important points. (SFG3)

Another student added:

To make notes or something during the lecture using the device, for example an audio recording. (SFG3)

Both students and faculty members mentioned using mobile devices to check the student attendance on the Banner student information system. For instance, one faculty member reported that mobile devices were:

Very good to check the attendance on the Banner. (FFG6)

Significantly, another student believed the most common use of mobile devices by faculty members was:

To check attendance of students in Banner System directly instead of paper lists. (SFG6)

The majority of students and faculty members reported that they used their mobile devices for searching information on the Internet and browsing social media applications such as *Twitter*, *WhatsApp* and *Facebook*. According to one student:

Searching on Google using the Internet browser on the mobile device shows a lot of information to you; and you can reach to encyclopedia such as Wikipedia (SFG8).

Similarly, another faculty member stated:

I use my tablet a lot to find information, Google stuff read up. (FFG3)

Accessing social media was also a popular use for mobile devices. For example, one faculty member described how he used mobile devices in general:

Personally, I use my device for something such as social networks. (FFG2)

Aside from the general usage of mobile devices, some students and faculty members mentioned various applications of mobile devices in particular discipline areas. This is evidence of the utility of mobile devices. For example, one student reported:

I can use it in Mathematics as a calculator. (SFG1)

One faculty member commented that:

Mobile technology is ideal for the chemist[try] study learner... for the visual learner. (FFG3)

Another popular use of mobile devices mentioned by students was as a communication tool with teachers and other students. For instance, one student reported that when he needed to ask the teacher questions he could contact him via the messaging tool *WhatsApp* (SFG3).

Another student reaffirmed the usefulness of *WhatsApp*:

Social media network applications are easier in contact especially WhatsApp. (SFG6)

Category - Informal use of mobile devices in EFL

This category describes student and faculty member views regarding the informal use of mobile devices to support English language learning outside of formal instruction. It is significant to note that only one faculty member reported that he encouraged students to use their mobile devices informally for their English language learning:

I tell my students to use their mobile devices not for class use but if I am doing an activity and in something in general knowledge. (FFG3)

Further elaborating the faculty member said:

I say if you are doing this activity go to Google. (FFG3)

Students also highlighted various informal uses of mobile devices outside of the classroom setting to support their English language learning. For example, some students stressed the importance of social media applications (e.g., *Twitter*, *Instagram*, and *YouTube*) to provide them with platforms giving them access to a range of English language learning resources, especially native English language speakers. For example, *Twitter* was frequently cited as a useful tool for communicating with native speakers. As one student described:

I think Twitter is currently the most usable communication method in all places and for all people no matter old, young, official person or any person... You can contact any person, whatever his position is important or a scientist; you can communicate easily with him on Twitter. (SGF1)

Other students found *Twitter* useful in finding accounts specifically dedicated to learning and practicing English. One student described using:

A specialized account for learning English language. (SFG4)

and went on to detail how the account:

Shows daily some information. For example, translation and sentences in English, hence I learn daily by following this account. (SFG4)

In addition to *Twitter*, participants in the focus groups noted that the *YouTube* was beneficial in both learning and retaining English. For one student *YouTube* clips were especially useful for reinforcing proper pronunciation of:

Colloquial language on the street. (SFG1)

Students also indicated that they used *YouTube* for learning English by following English lessons on *YouTube* channels. For example, one student reported that:

There is a YouTube channel for [de-identified] presenting wonderful lessons in learning English language...I follow his lessons on YouTube. (SFG4)

The third social media platform that was consistently cited in focus groups as advantageous to learning English was *Instagram*. Students frequently described *Instagram* accounts that offered interactive or daily updated

content as frequently used tools for learning English. One student described a word-per-day *Instagram* account that:

Introduces a word to you, its pronunciation, [and] its common usages in sentences. (SFG1)

The student explained that the account was helpful both in pronunciation and in context, elaborating:

There are also accounts on social media applications, which show you a word has one meaning only and mention an example of its usage, so you can know easily and clearly its meaning from the sentence. (SFG1)

Another student expressed similar experiences, stating:

[As students] we benefit from it through contact with persons. On another hand (sic) they teach me new things. In Instagram, there is an account giving you the word vocally in writing and teach you many words in different fields. (SFG8)

Apart from social media, some students described how they had found applications (e.g., English learning apps) to help improve their learning of vocabulary. For example:

There is an application on the smartphone [that] teaches you the language, First, you test yourself, then it gives you lessons and a weekly schedule to follow. You can choose the lessons of the week from the schedule and at the end of the week, the program gives you a test. If you pass you will move to the next level and so on. (SFG1)

Another student also mentioned the utility of spelling and vocabulary-based applications:

There are some applications in mobile devices such as a game for teaching and training in spelling words and writing them correctly. (SFG8)

Similarly, a student explained his experience with English learning Apps:

On the iPhone, I use an application gives me a paragraph every day, for example, ten lines. Thus, I read and listen. Or I can listen firstly and then read myself. (SFG3)

In addition to using different apps designated for learning English, many students found that using even basic smartphone functions in unique ways on personal devices was helpful in further exposing them to the English language outside of the classroom. For instance, several students noted that:

Changing the setting language of [the mobile] device to English is useful for learning English. (SFG2)

This gave students increased exposure to English in everyday contexts.

Some students emphasized the importance of mobile device dictionaries compared to traditional dictionaries, finding mobile device dictionaries more useful as they help them to learn the correct pronunciation of the words; provide meanings of words; and reduce the amount of time taken to look up the word. For example, one student noted:

The dictionaries of smart phones are better because they give many sentences to the same word, as well as pronunciation. Smart phones dictionaries are also better in terms of quality because pronunciation of some of the words are not clear in Atlas [Note: Atlas is a small portable electronic dictionary]. (SFG1)

Finally, as a novel approach to informal English language learning, one student described how games on mobile devices might be best used in English language learning:

We use games in learning but not so much because they can't teach you the language grammar but you can learn vocabulary. (SFG1)

Category - Formal use of mobile devices in EFL

Formal use of mobile devices is defined as the use of mobile devices by both students and faculty members to support formal instruction. The majority of students and faculty members indicated that the use of mobile devices increases the opportunity for English language exposure. One faculty member described how the access to authentic material and primary sources provided by mobile devices is a significant benefit in class:

Interesting, however, with tablets and mobile devices you have the opportunity to also expose [students] to authentic texts on demand. (FFG1)

The importance of mobile devices in exposure to authentic English language content was also reflected in student focus group responses. Several students reported their experience with English teachers who encouraged them to have exposure to the English language through watching some lessons on their *YouTube* accounts. As one student reflected:

I was studying in an institution of English language two years ago. The teacher, who was teaching us, informed us of his account on YouTube, as he was uploading educational videos daily. (SFG1)

In discussing the role played by mobile devices in facilitating an in-depth exposure to the English language, many faculty members emphasized that mobile devices help expose students to the correct vocabulary meanings. One faculty member described experiences that reinforced the benefit of students learning new vocabulary words in context:

Or just for example I have used it to like look up images, pictures, in fact last week, the word 'date-palm' was one of the vocabulary words or terms and the students were having, they know the meaning of date, but they didn't know the meaning of palm. And I could attempt to explain palm until I am blue in the face and still they never get it, but just, I was able to you know have them google palm and look at the images and they could see you know different types of palms and then, now they understand clearly what the meaning of palm is. (FFG5)

While less traditional methods were often employed to teach and help retention of new vocabulary, faculty members also described having their students use the online dictionaries on their mobile devices in class. One faculty member noted that it was common to:

Ask the students to look for a word in the dictionary when they encountered new or unfamiliar vocabulary. (FFG5)

Another faculty member explained that mobile dictionaries were the most efficient method for looking up the meanings of words:

I do that in my classrooms. I ask my students to use dictionaries. I mean, e-dictionaries are in their mobile phones and looking for words... it is quick way to do it. (FFG4)

One student recalled being allowed to use online dictionaries during class with the underlying implication that this opportunity was dependent upon the teacher:

Some teachers permit us to translate some words by dictionaries on the mobile phone. (SFG5)

Some faculty members also described more long-term, project-based strategies on the use of mobile devices and technology in class. One faculty member described a highly successful project implemented in class that encouraged student initiative and interaction with English language material:

They [students] have to write about a city, country, village and so forth. So I have put the students in groups. I have my own, you know, Wi-Fi thing, so I make sure that one of the students has a smart device and they select a city, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, whatever New York and then they have to look up, you know, the information about that city. They have to investigate themselves, so they use the mobile to do that, to collect the information and then I go around and I make sure that once they gather all of the information, that they shut it off and then they put it away and then they begin processing the information and using it to compose a paragraph. (FFG5)

Although most of the conversation concerning the incorporation of mobile devices into teaching strategies discussed mobile devices in general terms, specific applications were also frequently mentioned. Several faculty

members discussed the use of *WhatsApp* in their classrooms particularly as a tool for students to interact with each other while remaining engaged during class. One faculty member described the impact of *WhatsApp* on student involvement and engagement:

I am aware of two, two teachers, two of my colleagues who have used WhatsApp with their classes and one of them in particular has told me the students in the class who never ever speak or never get involved will answer a question if you ask them a question, but that's it, they never volunteer anything. Some of these students have come into their own in WhatsApp. (FFG5)

Students also identified *WhatsApp* as a useful tool for formal learning. One student recounted a teacher creating a *WhatsApp* group for the class. The student recalled:

He was sending three words every day and required us to put them in sentences, and by this method we know their meaning and spelling, and if you want to know its pronunciation, you turn on the microphone and pronounce the word and the teacher amends it to you. (SFG3)

This student found this exercise helpful adding:

By this way, you learn every day. (SFG3)

Another faculty member described using *WhatsApp* for a group-based ongoing learning activity outside the classroom:

I had a group of students, just last year, we had like a small reading club where I would post a different text for them to read and follow up questions and we would have a discussion within the WhatsApp group. (FFG5)

Reflecting upon the benefits of using *WhatsApp* one student commented:

The embarrassment [of using WhatsApp] is less than at lecture because in the classroom when you speak, one of your colleagues may interrupt you or another colleague laugh at you because you pronounced wrongly or the conjugation of verb is wrong. On WhatsApp, you're alone, you say the word and the teacher amends it while you are alone. Consequently, there are not many comments. (SFG3)

YouTube was also used in the classroom to give students broader exposure to the English language. In what was a novel way to give exposure to different English accents, one student recalled a teacher using *YouTube* clips by:

Displaying a part of video, whatever the content, in a British accent and an American accent to clarify the difference. (SFG1)

Although the majority of students described using mobile devices in some capacity within their classrooms, several students mentioned how teachers avoided or actively discouraged mobile technology use in the classroom. As one student described:

In fact, regrettably, [the] teacher did not use [mobile] technologies in their teaching. (SFG4)

Similarly, another student believed that faculty members tended to neglect teaching strategies centered on technology and new media. The student noted:

[Faculty members] depend more upon on traditional methods. (SFG4)

Category - Misuse of mobile devices in EFL

This category describes the misuse of mobile devices in classroom settings. Faculty members expressed frustration with students abusing their mobile devices during class time. One faculty member described the difficulties faced when students were distracted by their mobile devices:

There is a problem in the students' behaviour as soon as they become silent or you see them playing with their mobile phones. (FFG3)

He added:

There are two things: one is they do not understand what you teaching them and second is they are totally bored and they are not interested, you know. So as soon as they go to their mobile phone you know that they are distracted, they are bored. (FFG3)

Another faculty member also found that mobile devices contributed to distractions in the classroom, claiming that the students used:

Mobile phones for watching videos and WhatsApp or something like (it) that distract the students in general. (FFG2)

Students also admitted to succumbing to distractions when using mobile devices in class. Several students described logging on to separate games and social media accounts during the lecture portion of class. One student admitted:

I'm sitting at the back of classroom and not using use my [mobile] device for translation. Consequently, I wasted the time of lesson and did not learn anything, rather my [mobile] device became a source of distraction. (SFG2)

Theme 2 - Pedagogy

The second theme *Pedagogy* represents the pedagogical aspects surrounding the implementation of mobile learning as a new style of learning. This theme comprised four categories (Table 4).

Table 4. Pedagogy - associated categories

Theme	Category
Pedagogy	Student role Teacher role Strategies Content & Design

Category - Student role

This category describes students' role and their responsibility for the use of mobile devices to support their English learning. When discussing the student role in pedagogy, most respondents emphasized the importance of student autonomy and self-directed learning. Beliefs were expressed that more autonomous students are better able to motivate themselves, and that their independence was central to their success. A faculty member outlined the benefits of mobile technology for improving student self-sufficiency, stating that the use of mobile technology could:

Begin to teach them to be autonomous... to take responsibility for themselves for research[ing], investigating and learning. (FFG5)

Another faculty member agreed that student autonomy is beneficial for further learning, also suggesting that autonomy is necessary for mobile technology use to be effective in the classroom:

I think we need an alternative service, a learner who is responsible for, for what they should do... We have in Saudi Arabia, autonomy is very, very big, let's say excluded; we don't have it. [So] to let [students] use technologies... in general they must be autonomous, and they aren't... With technologies especially mobile phones we can, you know, implement autonomous learning styles, which is not included in our syllabus. (FFG5)

Related to student autonomy, another faculty member considered the importance of peer learning through which students could correct each other, rather than the burden falling solely on the teacher, noting that these situations are:

Organic development for everybody and peer learning [and] peer - support. (FFG5)

Alongside the discussion on student autonomy, a related idea that emerged was an emphasis on student responsibility in the classroom. According to both students and faculty members, student responsibility is essential in creating a productive learning environment and benefiting from in-class use of technology.

Despite this, some faculty members expressed concerns that students might abuse the mobile technology through being distracted or irresponsible in the classroom. For example, one faculty member worried that students might:

Start to use the mobile devices and playing games, chatting with friends, I think if the student would be serious and honest. (FFG3)

One faculty member stressed that it was essential for students to:

Develop some form of academic decorum about themselves where they already know how to carry themselves in the classroom...they come to us with mechanisms or devices for self-guidance, internal self-guidance. (FFG5)

This need for initiative in self-guidance and cultivating a sense of personal responsibility was also reflected in responses from students. One student maintained:

I think the student is supposed to be responsible for himself. (SFG1)

Category - Teacher role

This category describes faculty members' role and their responsibility for the use of mobile devices to support their English teaching. On this subject, a common belief shared among both faculty members and students was that faculty members were distrustful of students. One faculty member observing this tendency noted:

The administration does not trust students. (FFG5)

The mistrust of students was also observed from a student perspective. One student explaining this sense of mistrust used the example:

Some teachers don't allow [mobile devices] except in specific times, because if the teacher allowed students to use their mobile devices all the time, the teacher would not trust that a student would use it only for searching for a word meaning, for example, or for an educational purpose. (SFG1)

While the majority of responses to questions concerning teacher's roles in pedagogy focused on the mistrust of students, teacher responsibility was also discussed. Participants generally believed that teaching responsibilities and styles varied depending upon the subject and class or study path being taught. According to one faculty member:

It just depends on the nature of the group that you are dealing with, adding that the Humanities path is generally going to have a group of students who... need a teacher basically to... stand in front of them and just give them what they need and no more, no less. As opposed to more motivated groups of students who might require unconventional approaches. (FFG5)

Students similarly framed the issue of teacher expectations and responsibilities around addressing the unique needs of the students:

I think that the teacher's responsibility is explanation and not investigation of each student about if he used his device or not. Because the student's responsibility is understanding and learning, then he knows whenever he needs to concentrate on with the teacher and whenever he can use his device to learn. [Besides] the exam will clarify who has been concentrating and understands the lesson. (SFG1)

Category - Strategies

This category describes faculty member and student strategies for using mobile technologies to improve and facilitate the teaching and learning both inside and outside the classroom. In particular, faculty members emphasized the role of mobile technologies as an additional strategy to enhance their teaching and facilitate student learning in the classroom. Students, on the other hand, highlighted mobile technologies as an important strategy to improve their informal learning outside the classroom. One faculty member stressed the role of mobile technologies as supplementary strategies to increase student interest in the lessons through visual learning and maintaining their attention in the class:

I think it could be useful in a great supplementary way. You know, make lessons more interesting, provide vision ... you know, feedback and know the words that the students are not familiar with. You get a picture of something and get it to the context and bring them back to the lesson. (FFG3)

In terms of the actual practical application of mobile devices, one faculty member suggested an important strategy of using video clips through smartphones to help students practice English skills, especially speaking and listening. The faculty member explained:

I think the use of mobile devices.... Apparently now you can watch movies on your smartphone, things like that, and that can make real conversation, you know, for speaking practice. I mean, you can start a movie and stop it, and the student will be able to speak, you know, right now. They can do the grammar, can make a sentence. They know how to do grammar, but they do not know how to integrate that into listening and speaking, so those things could be really enhanced with using mobile technology. (FFG3)

Another faculty member described using mobile devices to allow students to gain a deeper understanding of English words. As this faculty member explained:

I use this technology during my classes. I ask all students to buy or get an application, for example e-dictionary, and I ask the students to prepare themselves. For example, every day word ... they look for a word. I ask students to prepare themselves to look up a word and write it on the board, okay? And they pronounce it okay, and I ask other students to participate in getting sentences or examples to put that word in a complete sentence. And that technology or that application ... let's say it helps students to learn more and more about words. Okay, how old is the word, let's say, and what is the source of that word ... the use of the word? (FFG4)

One faculty member described mobile technology as being useful in changing the nature of traditional classroom settings and providing focus for group activities to better engage students:

We have large number of students in the classrooms [and] it is better to put them in groups to be interactive with mobile device[s]. (FFG2)

Students also reported their experiences with the use of mobile technologies as an important strategy to facilitate their learning outside the classroom. For example, one student found social media applications to be a useful strategy to allow him to interact and communicate with people from around the world to practice and improve his English. The student stated,:

The mobile devices also contain applications for social networks such as social media enabling you to contact European people and talk to English native speakers. Thus, you can practice the language with them and chat with them either verbally or by typing in other times.... Hence, I think such applications help advance the language learning because I am learning from an English-speaking person. Social media can help me improve my language, and at the same time, I enjoy connecting with the others. (SFG1)

In addition, one student described his experience in following social media accounts as a strategy to improve his learning:

Yes, there are accounts for learning the language. For instance, there is an account called (A word per day) on Instagram; it introduces a word to you, its pronunciation, its common usages in sentences. (SFG1)

Likewise, another student added:

There are programs such as Skype and Facebook, especially Facebook, which are used mostly in European countries, and then a lot of people were learning through contacting with foreigners via video calls. Thus, they were practicing the language. (SFG1)

Another student described using mobile technologies to communicate with his friend in order to improve his practice of English:

My colleague was outside Saudi.... Once he arrived there, he was calling via Tango App and was speaking with me in English. I was telling him, 'Don't talk with me in Arabic.' I tried and tried. An Arabic word and an English word and mixed the languages, but we tried to enhance the skill. (SFG3)

Category - Content and Design

This category describes an issue whereby mobile device applications integrate poorly with English language courses. Students and faculty members both commented that English courses must be better designed to be supported by mobile devices that facilitate and enhance student English language learning. Specifically, mobile device applications:

Should be connected to the students' textbooks because these applications are for learning English in general. (FFG6)

Likewise, some students mentioned that the content of English language learning apps is not appropriate for their levels of English. For example, one student said,

Programs or applications don't give you advanced lessons.... They provide simple lessons. (SFG3)

Further, another student suggested:

To be an official application and certified, for example, by the university (for example, from Oxford University) or from governmental authorities such as the Education Ministry, in order to be a good application, all its content should be correct without mistakes and for all levels of English. (SFG8)

Similarly, one faculty member highlighted that students would be able to access the content more if it were designed not only for computers but also mobile devices:

The university booklet has a CD. The CD is excellent, but students need a laptop for it. If this application was online, then it would be easily accessible to students. If it was, they could use their mobile phones to access this software that has quizzes and revision worksheets. It would be beneficial for students. (FFG6)

Another faculty member suggested the importance of having specialist designers at the university who could design student learning materials that support access by mobile technologies:

Mobile devices can be supported by a good designer for the website. Then, you would be able to use the application through the mobile phone, so if you have a programmer at the university, for example, you could give him the material and he could set it up on the website, so students could access it through their mobile phone. (FFG6)

DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the 14 focus group transcripts identified nine categories situated across two main themes. These categories and themes capture how both students and faculty members in English language learning at the university study site are currently using mobile devices.

First theme - The current use of mobile technologies to support learning and teaching of English

Types of mobile devices

Analysis of the focus group transcripts indicated that smartphones were the most commonly owned devices among the students and faculty members; although some faculty members possessed older, less sophisticated mobile phones. Students expressed a preference for mobile devices speaking of their portability and flexibility. Faculty members however, expressed a preference for laptop computers. In contrast, students saw the lack of mobility of laptops as too limiting. Students, in particular acknowledged the ease of use and usefulness of mobile devices. Domitrek and Raby (2008) make the point that students view mobile devices as essential elements of social life, while many instructors see them as being peripheral to learning. There was evidence of these two mindsets in operation at the study site.

General use of mobile devices:

What was in evidence at the study site was that both students and faculty members used their mobile devices for more than making phone calls. In terms of general use, both students and faculty members mentioned similar general uses of their mobile devices including, data capture, information retrieval and accessing social media.

For data capture, students and faculty members spoke of using the cameras in their mobile devices to capture lecture notes on whiteboards. Students also spoke of using the audio recording capabilities of their mobile devices to record lectures. Elaish, Shuib, Ghani, Yadegaridehkordi and Alaa (2017), also reported on the ability of mobile devices to capture lecture materials through both visual and audio means. Both students and faculty members used their mobile devices for information retrieval. *Google* was a popular starting point for students and faculty members searching for information. The prevalence of using mobile devices to locate and access information is consistent with what has been previously reported in the literature (e.g., Wai, Ng, Chiu, Ho & Lo, 2018). Students and faculty members also made use of their mobile devices to interact with others on social networks such as *Twitter*, *WhatsApp* and *Facebook*.

Informal use of mobile devices:

Students reported a range of uses of their mobile devices to support their informal EFL learning. Social media such as *Twitter*, *WhatsApp*, *YouTube* and *Instagram* were popular uses of mobile devices for informal learning and provided students with opportunities to practise their English language communication skills outside of the classroom. This further confirms the ability of mobile devices to create informal learning settings for language exposure (Almekhlafy & Alzubi, 2016). Students also reported that exposure to the English language through mobile devices assisted them in improving their English language vocabulary and pronunciation skills. Importantly, students often accessed these resources under their own initiative; providing further evidence that mobile devices can encourage students to invest their own time by taking charge of their own learning (Leis, Tohei & Cooke, 2015). Significantly, only one faculty member spoke of encouraging his students to use their mobile devices to support their English language learning outside of the classroom. Research suggests that students and their instructors view mobile devices differently; students see mobile devices as essential while instructors often treat them as peripheral to learning (Domitrek & Raby, 2008). This attitude was in evidence at the study site when comparing the responses of students and faculty members.

Formal use of mobile devices:

Although mobile learning has not been formally adopted at the university study site, both students and faculty members reported using mobile devices to support formal EFL teaching and learning. Faculty members spoke of the usefulness of mobile devices to expose their students to both authentic English language content and contexts. Similar to informal usage, mobile devices were used to help improve student vocabulary and pronunciation. Faculty members also indicated that mobile devices were often more efficient teaching tools than traditional methods. For example, instead of trying to explain the meaning of an English word students can be provided with a visual representation of the word on their mobile devices. Online dictionaries were also popular amongst both students and faculty members.

Wai et al. (2018) reported the popularity of using online dictionaries on mobile devices. Having their mobile devices at hand, students could quickly and conveniently look up the meanings of English words. The social media app *WhatsApp* was also popular amongst student and faculty members. A number of faculty members reported how the use of *WhatsApp* impacted positively on student motivation and engagement. In particular, encouraging reluctant students to engage in the classroom activities. In general, faculty members expressed positive feelings to the use of mobile devices in their EFL teaching. Further, several faculty members were already using mobile devices to support their formal EFL instruction. This is important when considering future intentions to formally adopt mobile devices at the study site because evidence suggests that the more instructors know about how to use mobile devices in their classrooms, the more likely they are to encourage their use in their classrooms (Forkosh-Baruch & Meishar-Tal, 2016). Despite this, students did report that some instructors did not incorporate mobile devices into their EFL teaching preferring more traditional teacher centered styles of EFL instruction.

Misuse of mobile devices in EFL

Both students and faculty members identified instances when mobile devices were being misused. A number of faculty members saw mobile devices as sources of distraction; particularly for students who were bored. According to Hazaea and Alzubi (2018) the way EFL is taught in Saudi classrooms may be de-motivating for students. Whether this is the case at the study site cannot be determined with the data at hand. Evidence does suggest however, that the use of mobile devices in EFL teaching and learning can have a positive impact on student motivation and engagement (Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018). According to Garcia (2007) students believe classrooms without mobile devices are disjointed and artificial. Taking this into consideration, then perhaps the best strategy to avoid potential distractions mobile devices may cause is to formally embrace their use in the EFL classroom. This could lead to greater engagement, motivation and a connectedness amongst students and increase the likelihood that mobile devices could be used to support rather than distract students.

Second theme - Pedagogy

Student role

Faculty members spoke of the need for their students to take greater ownership of their learning. In particular, students requiring higher levels of autonomy and motivation in their English language learning. It was acknowledged by faculty members that mobile devices had the potential to encourage more self-directed learning but associated with mobile device use was the need for students to be responsible users of mobile devices in the classroom. The focus group transcripts revealed a tension between faculty members wishing to make use of mobile devices with their students and concern that students would misuse these devices. Existence of this tension was also evident in some of the student responses with students seeing one reason why faculty members might be hesitant to encourage the use of mobile devices in their EFL classrooms as a lack of trust in students. Research suggests that increasing learner autonomy can motivate learners (Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018). In English language learning contexts, Ramamurthy and Rao (2015) argued that the use of mobiles can encourage autonomous learning. So there is certainly scope for the use of mobile devices to increase learner autonomy at the study site. Evident in the focus group responses, particularly from the faculty member perspective, the difficulty appears to be that until students show greater levels of autonomy and responsibility, some faculty members remain reluctant to use mobile devices in their classrooms. This is problematic because, as discussed, mobile devices have the potential to encourage greater levels of autonomy and responsibility amongst students (Ramamurthy & Rao, 2015). Consequently, until mobile device use is encouraged the desired levels of autonomy and responsibility amongst students may not occur.

Teacher role

A teacher-centric approach was in evidence in the focus group responses. Students often framed Faculty members as authority figures responsible for their learning. This behaviorist, teacher-centered, transmission model of instruction typifies much of English language instruction (Burston, 2014). However, current pedagogical approaches are not necessarily appropriate for the effective use of mobile devices in teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2012). In particular, the teacher directed, spoon-fed approaches which Hazaea and Alzubi (2018) claim often take place in traditional EFL classes. At least one faculty member spoke of the need to move away from traditional ways of EFL instruction although this was dependent upon the student cohort and their existing levels of motivation. Students also saw a changing role for the teacher. One particular student believed that it should be up to the students to determine how they might best learn – deciding when to make use of the teacher or their mobile devices. This casts instructors in a more facilitative role and like mobile devices, a resource to be used when required. This aligns with the view of Khaddage et al. (2015) who argue that “[n]o longer is the teacher the only content expert in the classroom. With mobile devices, students literally have the world at their fingertips” (p. 628). Such a view however, is likely to challenge Saudi Arabian cultural norms and expectations of the respective roles of teachers and students.

Strategies

Both students and faculty members identified a range of strategies for using mobile technologies to improve and facilitate the teaching and learning both inside and outside the classroom. For some faculty members, mobile devices were seen as a useful tool for supplementing traditional EFL lessons. For example, practicing speaking skills, correcting pronunciation and improving grammar. However, apparent in a number of the student responses were strategies that were encouraging a shifting away from teacher centred and directed activities towards more student-centred approaches that have been advocated as necessary for effective learning (Burston, 2014). Further, when comparing student and faculty strategies for using mobile devices for improving English language learning, it is evident that students’ informal use of mobile devices to support their learning is better aligned with what one might consider to be mobile devices best practice than faculty members’ formal uses of these devices.

Content and design

Both faculty members and students identified deficiencies in mobile device applications (apps) due to their poor integration with English language courses. Wai et. al (2018) previously noted the lack of quality mobile applications, in particular, to support larger scale collaboration. To address this the authors encouraged development of mobile apps to better support students and faculty members (Wai et al., 2018). There was also the call at the study site for course materials to be made available online socially for mobile access. This would afford students greater opportunities to access course materials outside of regular class hours.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to identify the current use of mobile devices by students and their instructors in English language learning. To review, Wai et al. (2018) identified six main ways mobile devices can be used to support learning in general:

1. communication and interaction;
2. accessing academic materials;
3. information organisation and sharing;
4. self-learning;
5. information searching; and
6. course-based learning.

Although the use of mobile devices has not been formally adopted at the university study site, five of these six uses could be identified at the study site. The exception was *accessing academic materials*. This is largely due to the university not having courses mediated through a Learning Management System. The results show that students and faculty members are using mobile devices to support both the informal and formal learning of the English language. Students predominantly used their mobile devices informally outside the classroom to facilitate their English language learning. Social media, such as *Twitter*, *WhatsApp*, *YouTube* and *Instagram*, were particularly popular and provided students opportunities to practise their English language communication skills outside the classroom. In contrast, faculty members emphasised the formal use of mobile devices in the classroom context and expressed views on how to control student use of mobile devices.

This study has two important implications for the study site in particular and similar institutions in general. First, when comparing student and faculty member use of mobile devices for improving English language learning, it is evident that students' informal use of mobile devices to support their learning is better aligned than faculty members' formal uses of these devices in terms of what one might consider mobile device best practice. This can be challenging in a learning institution context where students have a better understanding of contemporary learning technologies and how they might be best used than their teachers. Professional development of faculty and a shift towards more student-centered learning by allowing students to exercise greater leadership of their own learning could be the most effective means to address this imbalance. Second, given that both the formal and informal use of mobile devices in EFL instruction appear to be already reasonably well established at the study site, and given the well-documented benefits that mobile devices can offer in enhancing English language learning, the opportunity exists for mobile devices to be successfully embraced in this discipline area. Having established such a foothold in English language learning, mobile devices could be then introduced across the various faculties of the university. Institutions in a similar position are encouraged to explore this possibility as well.

This study has a number of limitations. First, although the study site was considered similar in characteristics to other universities in Saudi Arabia, nevertheless, the data represent the use of mobile devices by students and their instructors at one university. It is recommended that research be conducted at other universities to better determine the generalizability of the results. Second, the study only collected student and faculty member descriptions of how they currently use their mobile devices - no observations of actual mobile device use were made. To understand further how mobile devices are actually being used in English language learning, in-class observations would be beneficial. Such observations would allow for both the documentation of actual mobile device use and commentary on the effectiveness of these devices as tools of instruction in an EFL context.

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