Mobile Learning and Enhancing ELT Learners' Vocabulary

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Abstract: Advancements in cell phone technology have impacted every aspect of society. Thus, teachers need to reconsider using these mobile devices to enrich the classroom learning. In the present paper, the researcher discusses how she successfully incorporated cell phone learning activities into her classroom. Teaching-learning Vocabulary strategies using cell phone technology and recommendations for overcoming challenges associated with cell phone use in the classroom are discussed in the present paper.

INTRODUCTION

While university systems have focused on the use of mobile phones to communicate information for administration (e.g. attendance, homework, security alerts, communication with parents, exams results) as well as support for student learning (e.g. surveys, testing, audio recording, video recording, web browsing), there has been less attention paid to the professional development of teachers with such technologies as mobile phones are seen as ubiquitous in teachers' lives. But, the ever-presence of mobile phones does not necessarily mean that teachers are willing or capable of integrating such technologies into their classrooms practice. Education systems cannot assume that teachers can or want to become as proficient as their students in using new technologies.

Basoglu & Akdemir (2010) assert that there is a need to integrate appropriate technologies into existing education systems. Their view supports the work of Shuler, C. Winters & West (2013) who argue that professional development programs need to focus not only on the technology, skills and knowledge required to implement Mobile learning strategies, but also on the skills and knowledge needed to support a blended learning environment that makes appropriate and targeted use of technologies that support the overall learning goals. The present study contributes to the professional development of teachers in the appropriate use of mobile phones to enhance their students' Vocabulary.

We -the educators- are pursuing the future of learning because we know our students will live and work in a world that doesn't yet exist; a world whose challenges and possibilities are only now beginning to unite. If we- the educators- can offer our students the advantages of seeing the new world these changes will create, then we've done something truly valuable.

Theoretical Background

Over the past decades, the introduction of mobile devises in ESL classrooms highlighted the benefits of mobile learning for language development. A recent review of the literature on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) showed a wide variety of uses of mobile devises in the ESL classroom with positive outcomes for language learning (Burston, 2013).

Thornton & Houser (2005) argue that the benefits of mobile learning can be gained, through collaborative, contextual, constructionist and constructivist learning environments. This is supported by Switzer and Csapo's (2005) observation that mobile technologies afford learners opportunities for collaboration in the creation of products and for sharing them among their peers. Authentic learning environments in education typically involve these characteristics (Herrington &Herrington, 2006).

Mobile-learning initiative is built upon the theory that humans learn best when they are in community – collaborating with others in a learning environment

without boundaries. A technological solution that aims at increased learning must enhance communication and convergence. Thus, the teaching strategies should seek to connect learners through engaged, collaborative, distributive, integrated and evaluative models, all of which combine to produce a profoundly connected learning experience.

According to Thoronton and Houser (2005) smart phones can capture the learners' interest and provide them with study opportunities that lead to acquiring new vocabulary.

Zhang, Song and Burston (2011) clarify that "vocabulary learning with mobile phones allows learners to be exposed to spaced repetition of vocabulary items, which is believed to be more effective than mass repetition" (p. 204).

In addition, Basoglu and Akdemir (2010) proved in their comparative study that "vocabulary learning programs running on mobile phones improved students' acquisition of English vocabulary more than traditional vocabulary learning tool, flash cards" (p.6).

The present study moves beyond established approaches to create new pedagogies for mobile technologies that promote their use—not for simple one to one communication or delivery of information—but to focus on their use as cognitive tools in authentic learning environments.

In addition to the hardware used for delivery, Mobile Learning differs from eLearning or CBT in that mobile learning generally entails accessing focused instruction or information more often instantaneously over a shorter duration. It can be personalized and can include data collection or user-generated content. Mobile learning is not about devices, but capabilities. It's about the experience—not the technology.

Mobile delivery is an available option to deploy the spacing effect by delivering learning in short segments over a period of time for improved retention of learning. Research assert that there is a need to integrate appropriate technologies into existing education systems (Kim & Reeves, 2007; Basoglu & Akdemir, 2010). Their view supports the previous work of Jonassen and Reeves (1996) who argued that professional development programs need to focus not only on the technology, skills and knowledge required to implement the different strategies, but also on the skills and knowledge needed to support a blended learning environment that makes appropriate and targeted use of technologies which support the overall learning goals. Shuler & West (2013)

reported that effective methodology needs to be supported by a facilitator whose role is to engage the students in a collaborative learning environment using a combination of face-to-face, online and mobile synchronous and asynchronous communication strategies.

The present study not only achieves the previous goals but also contributes to the professional development of teachers in the appropriate use of mobile phones to enhance their pedagogy and their students' acquisition of vocabulary.

The Use of Bingo

Bingo is commonly used in ELT classrooms (Herron, 2014; Norman 2014) as a game which enhances students' vocabulary. "Bingo is well suited to the English as a second language classroom because it can be adapted to practice various grammar points and vocabulary words" (Norman, 2014). It is an encouraging game which provides a sort of motivation to language learning.

Herron (2014) emphasizes the benefits of such a game to the different learning styles; the kinaesthetic learners as they get to use the Bingo cards. Also it has benefits to the audio learners as they listen to the letters and respond accordingly and the visual learners as they search for the written lexical sets. Moreover, Crossland (2014) illustrated that "many adult classrooms benefit from the use of Bingo as a teaching aid". Hence the utility of this game is to serve as a self-motivating tool for the students since they like to compete with each other.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the use of mobile phones in learning vocabulary, and to provide examples of good pedagogy to achieve this goal.

Duration of the experiment

The duration of the experiment was a semester; four months; an hour per week.

Research Question

What is the effectiveness of using smartphones – adopting the Bingo Game- on enhancing Saudi students' vocabulary?

Instruments of the study:
1- A vocabulary Bingo game.
2- A questionnaire that measures:
a- The experimental group relation with their mobile phones,
b- The benefits of using mobile phones for enhancing their vocabulary.
3- A vocabulary test.

Sample of the study

The study adopted the experimental design; 79 students in the experimental group and 80 students in the control group. They were all enrolled in the first year of the intensive course, English Department, King Abdullah City, Riyadh, K.S.A

Methodology

Firstly, a few ideas about using the mobile phone itself – rather than using it as a communication device- was introduced to the teacher of the experimental group by the researcher before the implementation of the experiment. Then, the researcher trained her on the use of Bingo game while teaching in the vocabulary lecture.
While implementing the experiment, the teacher of the experimental group asked students to take a picture with their phone around a particular theme or send everyone in the class a picture that she wants them to study / talk about to use as wall paper. This can be a photograph or a key message or a reminder of some learning point. Students then create ring tones using phone zoo. They created the 'tone' in Audacity, Garage band etc.

Before the commencement of the experiment, we, the researcher and the teacher of the experimental group, checked the students' smartphone settings and registered those who use English settings and those who use Arabic ones. In each vocabulary class the students were asked to form groups of four and each group had eight cards that were set on the teacher's table. In each card there was a blank diagram of a circle in the middle and four bubbled circles around it. The students had the opportunity to choose any letter from the alphabet and write four words that they can recall from their smartphones beginning with the corresponding letter. When they finished their card, one of the group members volunteered to go back to their assigned table to fold over the already completed card and took the next. They continued doing so until they finished their eight cards filled with thirty two smartphone vocabulary. The first bingo is the winner, while others continued to finish their cards. At the end, the winner is rewarded.

The Bingo game was used twice; in the first stage, thirty minutes were devoted once a week from the vocabulary lectures to the Bingo game. First, it was implemented without informing the students in advance. The teacher of the experimental group asked her students to choose an alphabetical letter at a time and they had to write as many words as they could remember using their mobile phones. After that, they were informed that next week the game would be repeated to draw their attention to the useful use of their phones in learning vocabulary.
Second, after a week, the experimental group students were asked to write words based on their part of

speech; nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs prepositions and conjunctions. That was an indication of the students' mastery of the use of the words rather than memorizing them.

Four important strategies are identified to support such an implementation:
1. A shared understanding of the theoretical framework of the experiment was essential for the teacher engaged in it.
2. Developing an understanding of some of the affordances of the technologies at hand, and having a significant amount of time to develop these skills before using with students, is an important component of using new technologies.
3. Participating in authentic tasks which modeled the practices being discussed provided opportunity for insights into new pedagogies that assisted the move from theory to practice.
4. Developing a shared language, knowledge and understanding of new pedagogies and the implications for practice.

A questionnaire was distributed to the students to measure the participants' relationship with their mobile phones and its benefit in enhancing their vocabulary.

Result Analysis

According to the analysis of the questionnaire's data, the awareness of 94% of the experimental group students, of the benefits gained from the use of smart phones while learning vocabulary was enhanced. The findings also indicate that the experimental group students admitted that they became very attached to their mobile phones.
Regarding the questionnaire, the data were analyzed according to two main points:

a- Students' relationship with their mobile phones:
The findings indicate that the participants of the experimental group became fond of owning the latest version of smartphones. About 85% of them explained that they cannot keep their phones off for more than two hours.

b- Mobile phones and the learning of vocabulary:
96% of the experimental group students uploaded three dictionaries on their smart phones as they considered using them as enrichment for their English vocabulary.
Thus, the experimental group students became aware of the benefits of using the mobile phones while learning vocabulary. Some students tended to show their English ability in front of their classmates. Thus, their learning of vocabulary is reinforced.

Additionally, findings proved that the vocabulary of the experimental group students improved significantly and outperformed the results of the control group regarding vocabulary acquisition. The results confirm Lu (2008) in the respect of enhancing students' vocabulary.

Conclusion

In the last few years there has been an explosion in worldwide developments of new mobile technologies as the integration of visual and communication technologies associated with text, sound, audio, picture, and internet access collapse into single devices.

When information and communication technologies (ICTs) are used, too often they are used merely as disseminators of knowledge that is where students learn from the technologies rather than with them as cognitive tools (Kim & Reeves, 2007; Jonassen & Reeves, 1996). Jonassen and Reeves (1996) described cognitive tools as: 'tools that amplify, extend, and even reorganize human mental powers to help learners construct their own realities and solve challenging tasks' (p. 699).

Educators have been keen to incorporate the use of such devices in teaching and learning activities. Notwithstanding, we identify a need to move beyond training to use the technology, to examining new pedagogies for enabling their use to support learning more effectively.

According to the present study, engagement and interaction through technology is an essential aspect of many of our students' lives. The experiment findings conclude that just as students need to 'own the technology' if they are to make effective use of it, then so do the teachers. Comprehensive staff development and support are key aspects of ensuring effective use of educational technologies with a strong focus on pedagogy within the curriculum.

Of significance was the ability to use the mobile devices in everyday work and to become familiar with them to such an extent that teachers were then able to incorporate their use in the vocabulary classes and the students then supported each other with learning how to use them to acquire new vocabulary.

Humans learn best when they are collaborating with others in a learning. A technological solution that aims at increased learning must enhance communication. As mobile phones are spreading, new educational techniques should be introduced to utilize them. Instructors need to boost the use of this devise while teaching vocabulary as memorizing long lists of vocabulary introduced by the teacher does not motivate the new generation of students to learn.

In order to help teachers to be able to meet the needs of their students, we need to develop and understand different ways of teaching and learning. By training teachers, there are many opportunities to engage them in new pedagogies to influence changed practice from early childhood through to higher stages.

Embracing mobile phones in schools is a logical step. Although the risks are real, the rewards are great.

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