Mobile-Assisted Language Learning in Higher Learning Institutions: Practices and Attitudes Toward Using Smart Phone Applications

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Abstract

The use of smart phones in language learning has become very popular today since they have become an integral part of students' lives and offered a new way of language learning referred to as mobile language learning. The current study was aimed at exploring students’ experience of using smart phone for English language learning purposes, and their attitudes towards the use of smart phone for English language learning purposes. A questionnaire survey has been devised and administered to a sample of 44 students of D3 English Department students of Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis. The results of the questionnaire analysis clearly show that smart phones were moderately used for language learning purposes by the students. Most of them used their smart phones for checking a dictionary or translator and listening practice. Moreover, the respondents’ attitudes towards mobile language learning were high. The majority of the students, in general, believe in the effectiveness of smart phone in the English learning process. Therefore, encouraging students to increase the frequency of using mobile language learning, incorporating smart phone in language learning classroom, providing guided practice and specific instructions of the use of effective mobile language learning strategies are important to be applied by language teachers to facilitate English language learning in higher learning institutions.

Keywords: attitudes; language learning; practices; smart phone

INTRODUCTION

Smartphone ownership and mobile internet users continue to climb in Indonesia today. Smart phone ownership in Indonesia in 2015 was 21%. There was 10% increase from 2013[1]. Most of the ownership was dominated by the age 18-34 (39%), and those who had more education (42%). Besides, the use of mobile internet also shows increasing trend. Active mobile social users in Indonesia in 2015 were 64 million, and mobile social use was 25% [2]. The data shows that smart phone and internet have become integral part of adults and educated persons today.

The increasing number of smart phone ownership and the high number of smart phone ownership by the adults, of course, give a chance to integrate smart phone in language learning. Several researches conducted in Indonesian context shows the benefit of using smart phone in language learning. A research at Junior High School SMP PGRI 01 Karangploso, Malang, East java found that The MALL system gave a great impact in increasing student’s learning opportunity, motivation and interests in learning English in a rural school in Indonesia [3]. Furthermore, a research about students’ perception toward the use of smart phone in English language learning at the fourth semester students at the Faculty of Letters, Universitas Sam Ratulangi found that that smart phone could increase their ability in learning English [4]. the perceptions of English teachers and students of SMA 1 Kudus towards the use of smart phone in
English class was positive and the majority of the teachers and students supported the use of smart phone as learning tool and it can be used in English class to assist language learning [5].

In Asian context, a research in Vietnam found that students showed a positive attitude towards the use of mobile phones to study English in the future (85%) [6]. Similarly, a research conducted in Palestine found that the majority of the students have positive attitudes towards using English language applications to help them learn English [7]. In addition, perceptions of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak undergraduate students on social media apps in English language learning found that students generally benefited from the use of Wiki in enhancing their writing while YouTube videos were extensively used to improve their speaking skills. Facebook group was useful to learn grammar and vocabulary, while Twitter served mainly as a tool to retrieve updates on the definition of words [8].

Mobile devices have numerous advantages for language learning. They are availability, portability, easily accessed in the classroom or outside of classroom, and convenience [9]. Similarly, m-learning has advantage on flexible use; and it can be adopted to enhance students' interaction and learning experiences [10]. On the other hand, conclude that the ESL apps seem effective because they provide a personal and learner-centered learning opportunity with ubiquitously accessible and flexible practices [11]. Moreover, smart phone apps for language learning bring several advantages such as responsive touch screens, enhanced text entry, high-quality image, audio and video recording, editing, and sharing, voice recognition, storage, connectivity, and GPS all bring together the multi-sensory experience necessary for effective language learning. Moreover, various ways of presenting information through a mixture of different media makes them more appealing than traditional textbooks or activities. Besides, they are also good for learners with fear of failure, since they may keep trying answering the tasks repeatedly until they find the correct answer [12].

Based on the facts above, utilizing smart phone in language learning is a big opportunity. It offers a new way of language learning referred to as mobile assisted language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobile Assisted Language Learning as “means learning with the aid of handheld technology like mobile phones, portable laptops and any other similar portable devices which are handy” [13]. Similarly, mobile learning creates an interactive learning environment with multiple contexts using different kinds of available applications [14].

Mobile devices have properties. They are: portability, social interactivity, context sensitivity, connectivity, and individuality. 1) portability means such devices can be to taken different places due to small size and weight; 2) social interactivity is exchanging data and collaboration with other learners is possible through mobile devices; 3) context sensitivity refers to the data on the mobile devices can be gathered and responded uniquely to the current location and time; 4) connectivity means mobile devices can be connected to other devices, data collection devices, or a common network by creating a shared network; 5) individuality refers to activities platform can be customized for individual learner [15].

Regarding on mobile phones contribution to the learning field, mobile phones give positive contribution to the learning field in many different ways. First, mobile learning helps learners to improve their literacy as well as their numeracy skills and to recognize their existing abilities. Second, it can be utilized to encourage both independent and collaborative learning experiences. Third, it helps learners to identify their weaknesses in learning areas where they need assistance and support. Fourth, it helps to combat resistance to the use of Information Communication Technology and it can fulfill the gap between mobile phone literacy and ICT literacy. Fifth, it helps to remove some of the formality from the learning experience and engages reluctant learners. Besides, it helps learners to remain more focused for longer periods. Ultimately; it helps to raise self-esteem and self-confidence [16].

Despite having many advantages, mobile learning also has some disadvantages or limitations. Many of the mobile phones are not designed for educational purposes. Therefore, learners got difficulties to use them to do the task given by the teachers. Besides, appropriate
devices for specific learning tasks are too expensive for most of the learners to buy [14]. Disadvantages of m-Learning for university students. They are too small screen which makes difficulties in viewing data, limitations in network connectivity, and the high cost for the service [17].

The purpose of this study are twofold: (1) To explore students’ experience of using smart phone for English language learning purposes, (2) To explore students’ attitudes towards the use of smart phone for English language learning purposes. The study attempts to address the following questions:

a. Have learners ever used their mobile phones for language learning?

b. What are students’ attitudes towards the use of smart phone for English language learning purposes

**METHODOLOGY**

**Population and sample**
The participants of the study were students of D3 English department of Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis academic year 2015/2016. A total of 44 students who have smartphone were selected.

**Instrument**
The questionnaire of this research was adapted from [18] and [19]. There were 8 questions in with five choices of Likert scale in order to investigate the use of smart phone for learning English and and 9 questions dealing with attitudes towards mobile learning of the English department students of Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis. The five choices for the use of smart phone for learning English were; 1= never or almost never true of me, 2= rarely or usually not true of me, 3= somewhat true of me, 4= usually true of me, and 5= always or almost always true of me. In reporting the frequency of strategy used, the average scores which fell in the range of 3.46-5.00 was defined as high frequency of use of learning strategies, the average in 2.46-3.45 was intermediate frequency of use, and the average in 1.00-2.45 as low frequency of use of strategies. While, the choices for attitude towards mobile learning were: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree [20].

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Regarding the activities done when using smart phone for learning English, the data shows that the most frequently activities done in using smart phone for language learning was “To use a dictionary/translator”, “To listen to audio materials in English” was the second, and “To read English materials in English” was the third most frequently activities done in using smart phone for language learning. “To keep English vocabulary list” and “To play games for English vocabulary learning” were the least frequently activities done in using smart phone for language learning. Moreover, the majority of respondents (31.82%) were seldom play games for English vocabulary learning. While in using smart phone to keep English vocabulary list, there were similar percentage of students who seldom keep and sometimes keep vocabulary list (31.82%).

In terms of frequency of use, “To use a dictionary/translator”, and “To listen to audio materials in English” were two activities done in high frequency of use in smart phone language learning. It means they were usually use dictionary/translator, and listens to audio materials in language learning. The rests were done in intermediate frequency of use. It means that they only sometimes read English materials, use English language learning applications, watch video materials in English, use a keyboard for spelling practice, keep English vocabulary list, and play games for English vocabulary learning.

In sum, smart phones use was in intermediate frequency of use. it was moderately used for language learning purposes by the students. The most frequently activities done in using smart phone for language learning was “To use a dictionary/translator”. It was done in high frequency of use. It is consistent with the findings of [6], and [21]. Furthermore, the score of learners in learning and retaining vocabulary through MALL method was found much higher than that of the learners of traditional method [22].
Table 1: Activities Done When Using Smartphone for Learning English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>always</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>To use a dictionary/translator</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>68.18%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>15.91%</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To use English language learning applications</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>47.73%</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To listen to audio materials in English</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>47.73%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To watch video materials in English</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>47.73%</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>To read English materials in English</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>43.18%</td>
<td>38.64%</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>To play games for English vocabulary learning</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>29.55%</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To keep English vocabulary list</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
<td>20.45%</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>To use a keyboard for spelling practice</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.88%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
<td>20.45%</td>
<td>11.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.40</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Attitudes towards Mobile Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mobile phone has assisted my overall English learning process this year</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>61.36%</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I plan better for my English learning with mobile phone than without it.</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>61.36%</td>
<td>13.64%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The use of mobile phone in English learning makes me more productive.</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td>72.73%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I find the use of mobile phone enhancing the English learning process.</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.45%</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My English vocabulary acquisition has increased because of text messages written in English.</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>56.82%</td>
<td>18.18%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>My English vocabulary acquisition has increased because of my mobile phone dictionary.</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38.64%</td>
<td>59.09%</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I find it easy writing and receiving text-messages in English.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>47.73%</td>
<td>40.91%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>My motivation in learning English has been enhanced by the use of mobile phone in and outside the classroom.</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.55%</td>
<td>65.91%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Overall I believe using mobile phone in learning English is very effective.</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47.73%</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.19</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of attitude towards mobile language learning, 61.36% strongly agreed that Mobile phone had assisted their overall English learning process this year, while 31.82% agreed, and only 6.82% were neutral. When dealing with the statement “I plan better for my English learning with mobile phone than without it”, the majority of students (61.36%) agreed that they planned better in language learning with mobile phone, 25.00% strongly agreed, and 13.64 gave neutral response. 72.73% of the respondents agreed that The use of mobile phone in English learning makes them more productive, while the remaining 27.27% strongly agreed.
In terms of the use of mobile phone enhancing the English learning process, the majority of respondents agreed with that statement, 20.45 strongly agreed, and 4.55% gave neutral response. 56.82% agreed that their English vocabulary acquisition had increased because of text messages written in English. In contrast, only 18.18% gave neutral response. 59.09% agreed that English vocabulary acquisition had increased because of my mobile phone dictionary. 38.64% strongly agreed, and small percentage (2.27) was neutral.

In terms of the statement “I find it easy writing and receiving text messages in English” there were slightly different between the number of respondents agreed (47.73%) and neutral one (40.91%). 4.55% disagreed. 65.91 respondents agreed that their motivation in learning English has been enhanced by the use of mobile phone in and outside the classroom, 29.55% strongly agreed. Overall, 47.73% of respondents strongly believed that using mobile phone in learning English was very effective, while 45.45% agreed, and the rest 6.82 were neutral.

The results show that the majority of respondents state that English vocabulary acquisition had increased because of text messages written in English and mobile phone dictionary. It is consistent with [23] who found that students in general hold positive attitudes towards learning vocabulary via mobile phone.

It can be concluded that the respondents’ attitude towards mobile language learning were high. They believed in the effectiveness of smart phone in the English learning process. It is consistent with [24] finding that students’ attitudes were high. Similarly, high percentage of students (85%) showed a positive attitude towards the use of mobile phones to study English in the future [6]. The majority of the students have positive attitudes towards using English language applications to help them learn English [7]. Moreover, the students’ attitudes towards using mobile phones to learn English correlate strongly to their original attitude to English language. Furthermore, students who had a handset of their own tended to be more optimistic for the potential of this new way of language learning than their counterparts [25].

CONCLUSION
The use of smart phone applications for English language learning purposes among English department students of Politeknik Negeri Bengkalis Smart phones was in intermediate frequency of use. It means it was moderately used for language learning purposes by the students. Moreover, the most frequently activities done in using smart phone for language learning was “To use a dictionary/translator”. It was done in high frequency of use. Furthermore, the respondents’ attitudes towards mobile language learning were high. They believed in the effectiveness of smart phone in the English learning process. Therefore, encouraging students to increase the frequency of using mobile language learning is important. Moreover, incorporating smart phone in language learning classroom, providing guided practice and specific instructions of the use of effective mobile language learning strategies are also beneficial to be applied by language teachers to facilitate English language learning in higher learning institutions.

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