

SMART PHONES IN ESP CLASSES: REDEFINING THE POWERS OF 'HUMANWARE'

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ABSTRACT: *Most teachers and professors are fed up disallowing the use of smart phones in the English language classroom. Therefore, serious efforts should be made to disengage from this useless battle by engaging students in classroom tasks that integrate these powerful tools for a better digitalization of class content and an optimization of learning outcomes. Observed patterns of participant students' answers and investigation of different classroom practices show that a big majority of students reportedly believe that the use of smart phones broadens learning opportunities, and allows learners to benefit more in the classroom when smart phones' use is monitored to meet class content and objectives. The Chi-square test outcomes show that there are no factors that determine smart phone good learning practices. A well-trained teacher (with or without mobile technology) can always make a difference in the language classroom.*

KEYWORDS: Smart Phones, English For Specific Purposes, Digitalization of Class Content.

INTRODUCTION

The use of mobile technology tools such as computer tablets and smart phones in English language teaching has recently triggered considerable controversy and raised questions about the utility of implementing these mobile technology tools in the language classroom. Research highlights the perceived benefits as well as the potential limitations and challenges that may deter many EFL/ESP teachers from integrating mobile technology devices in the language classroom. Different research attempts to relate the potentials of these new technologies to the requirements and aspirations of the English class have usually failed to convince many language professionals of the utility of allowing the use of mobile devices in the EFL/ESP classroom. Simply claiming that the use of mobile technology will bring about positive changes in the language classroom does not really help. (Zilber 2013; Kane 2013; Kuznekoff 2013).

However, engaged adopters of mobile technology for learning purposes have continued to create learning opportunities to support language learning in the EFL/ESP classroom. They create learning situations where smart phones and tablet computers are turned into effective teaching and learning tools, and enthusiastically argue that mobile technology can always be implemented in different English language teaching contexts and settings to boost learning objectives and outcomes. (West 2012; Kurtz 2012; Leis 2014).

This ever-growing interest in the use and the integration of mobile technology in EFL/ESP classrooms does not always meet the objectives and expectations of language professionals and educators across the world. It is true that considerable investments have been made to turn schools into digital teaching environments to boost conventional learning processes. However, most previous research studies, devoted to the assessment of curricular integration of mobile technology in the language classroom, have focused more on benefits and have included great

expectations for an EFL/ESP classroom that does not always reflect the same motivation and commitment.

Different barriers and issues should be addressed to use the power of mobile technology to the advantage of students. Most teachers and professors have failed to outlaw the use of smart phones in the English language classroom. Therefore, more efforts should be made to engage students in classroom tasks that allow the use of these powerful tools for a better digitalization of class content and maximization of learning outcomes. Physical proximity, provided by mobile devices, may allow teachers to establish immediate and constant contact with learners and engage them more in their learning tasks and obligations. But the rapid transformations in the nature and structure of these technologies as well as the controversial reactions and claims about their impact on students' English language learning will always trigger substantial debates and generate unexpected attitudes and reactions.

Most teachers and professors are fed up disallowing the use of smart phones in the English language classroom to establish a distraction free teaching and learning environment. The results are usually frustrating. Therefore, more efforts should be made to design mobile technology-aided EFL/ESP learning tasks that motivate and involve students. But the ever-increasing development and evolution of mobile technologies as well as the failure of class methodologies to catch up with these innovations have recently triggered substantial debates and discussions over the utility of using mobile devices to boost learning in the EFL/ESP classroom. More research is then needed to show how mobile technologies can be used to support conventional teaching processes and broaden learning opportunities. The following research questions were used to ensure a better articulation and organization of the research study.

Question 1: What are the factors that determine smart phone good learning practices in the ESP classroom?

Question 2: To what extent does the use of smart phones boost conventional teaching processes and broaden learning opportunities in the ESP classroom?

LITERATURE / THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Research devoted to the exploration and assessment of the use of smart phones in the English language classroom has covered different issues including perceived benefits, potential challenges and appropriate learning practices and requirements. Research has shown that smart phones won't substitute dedicated teachers, but their frequent use may allow learners to have sufficient English language practice regardless of their locations (Leis 2014). Moreover, the ability of smart phones and computer tablets to provide students with access to digital content whenever they need is another reason for learners to love and use such technologies (West 2012). Perhaps the most significant role that smart phones and other mobile learning technologies play in the EFL classroom is providing opportunities for learners to learn interactively through different platforms (Kurtz 2012).

However, research has also shown that smart phones use in the EFL classroom has limitations as well. Students lacking self-confidence in their English ability view their mobile phones as items for enjoyment, and not as educational tools (Zilber 2013). They are less likely to use them for learning purposes. Moreover, Learners who are not able to maintain control over the

use of mobile learning technologies, including smart phones may become nervous, upset, concerned or even angry in learning environments where smart phones use is strictly forbidden (Kane 2013). The potential distraction caused by students using their mobile phones to play games, text messages or check Facebook has become a concern to many classroom instructors (Kuznekoff 2013).

When smart phones are allowed in the EFL classroom, there are requirements and conditions that should be met. Schools need to not only supply the hardware, but they also need to provide training and support for teachers and students alike in terms of how to get the most out of these technological tools (Ellis 2011). Moreover, the use of smart phones and their apps generate positive effects on learning English as a foreign language, especially in the development of learners' vocabulary and their increased motivation to study (Klimova 2017). However, using smart phones in the classroom without appropriate methodologies and well-defined learning objectives and potential outcomes will not bring much to the language classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Over the last two decades, ELT professionals across the world have engaged in a debate about the utility and appropriateness of using mobile technology and applications to enhance English language teaching and learning in the EFL classroom. The present research study has addressed a set of relevant issues related to the integration of smart phones in the EFL classroom with a particular focus on recurrent class practices and potential learning outcomes. A post-course questionnaire was used with a sample of ESP learners at the National School of Business and Management, Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakesh to investigate students' smart phone aided-class practices, assess the benefits as well as the encountered challenges. To ensure more research validity and credibility, different statistical methods were used for the presentation and discussion of findings.

The English prep course (*AC1 and AC2*) is intended to give 2nd year students at the ENCG-Marrakesh a solid foundation and a working knowledge of business English. The class is taught at an upper-intermediate level and students should have a level of intermediate English language proficiency and writing experience. The thematic structure of the course is 'Marketing'. Different aspects and themes of business English are covered, including, but not limited to marketing and brand management. Classroom tasks and activities include reading/listening comprehension, translation of paragraphs from French into English, business writing as well as oral presentations about different issues related to the thematic structure of the course. The present research study has been geared to focus on the exploration and assessment of smart phones use in the task of translation (French→ English) in the ESP classroom.

Appropriate statistical approaches and tools are used for the presentation and discussion of findings. Both Cross-tabulations and Chi-square tests are used in assessing for possible relationships between different independent and dependant variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency distribution of independent and dependent variables

In order to begin a preliminary data analysis, the frequency distributions of both independent and dependent variables are provided. Attention will turn later to the second step of data analysis which is to look for possible relationships between variables.

Frequency distribution of independent variables

Independent variables include gender composition, English learning experience, English proficiency level, digital literacy level and perception of smart phone use in the ESP classroom.

Gender composition

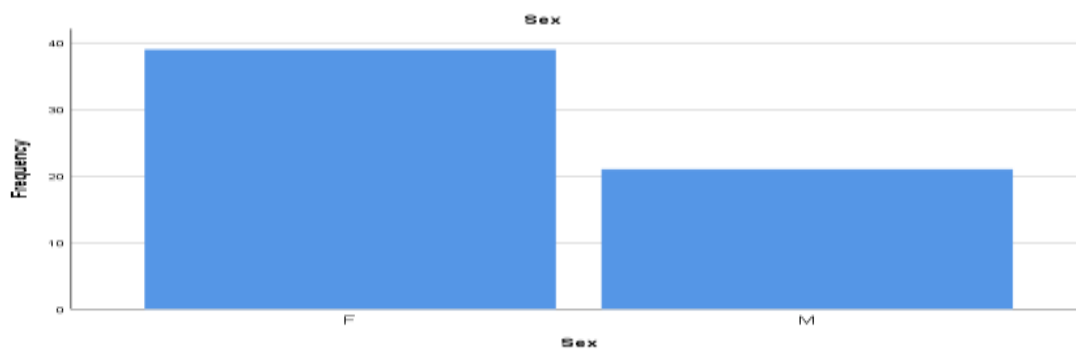


Figure 1: independent variable 1

The research sample includes 60 participant 2nd year students from the National School of Business and Management (ENCG) Cadi Ayyad University Marrakech. More than two-thirds of the respondents are females (40%) largely outnumbering males (20%).

English learning experience



Figure 2: independent variable 2

The sample consists of students with a rich English learning experience. A majority (75 %) of the respondents' have at least 5 years of English learning experience with a maximum of 8

years of learning experience. Other respondents' learning experience (25%) ranges between 1 and 4 years. The objective is to see later whether English learning experience determines smart phone uses and practices in the English language classroom.

English language proficiency level

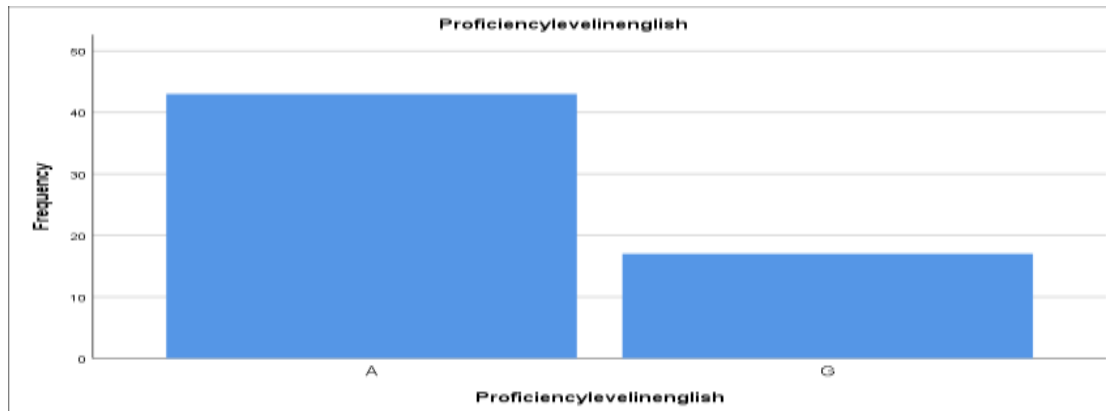


Figure 3: independent variable 3

The sample consists of students with an average level in English. Only 15% of participant students reportedly believe that their level in English is good. The objective is to see whether students' English language proficiency level determines specific uses and practices of smart phones in the English language classroom.

Digital literacy

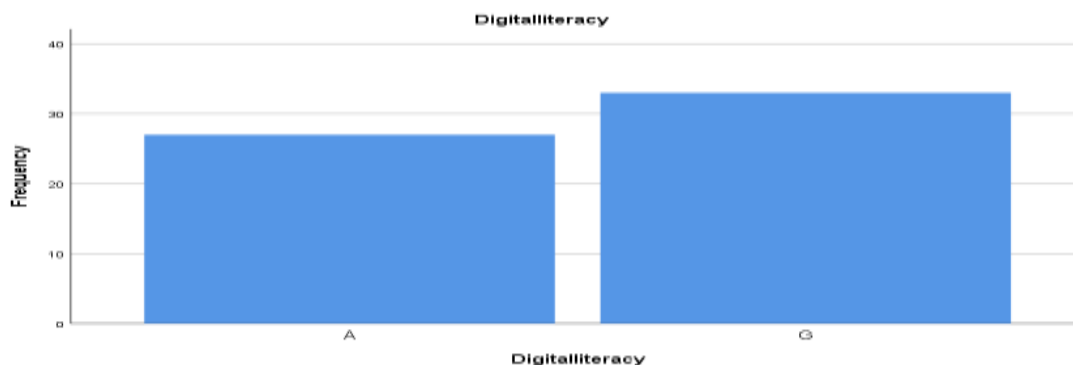


Figure 4: independent variable 4

More than 60% of participant students are good users of information and communication technologies. About 40% of participant students reportedly believe that their digital literacy level is average. The objective is to know whether students' digital literacy level determines their smart phone-aided learning practices in the English language classroom.

Perception of smart phone use in the EFL classroom

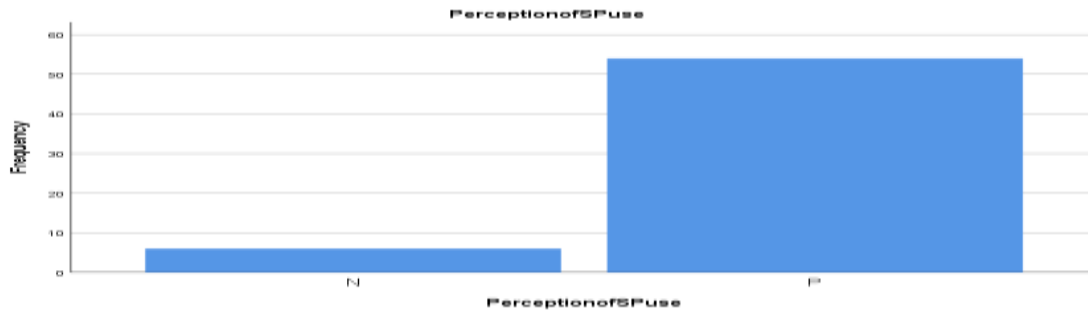


Figure 5: independent variable 5

Most participant students have a positive perception of smart phone use in the English language classroom. They think that allowing smart phones' use in the EFL classroom motivates students, involves them more in their learning tasks, and provides them with relevant class content. Very few participants think that smart phones' use makes learning tasks less challenging and does not allow students to develop and acquire autonomous learning skills.

Frequency distribution of dependent variables

Dependent variables include different smart phone-aided class practices, ranging from using dictionary apps or translation apps to translation strategies and the frequency of using distraction sources.

Classroom practices 1: Use of dictionary apps / Translation apps

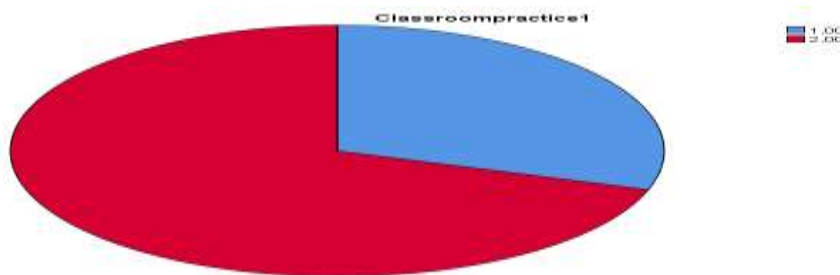
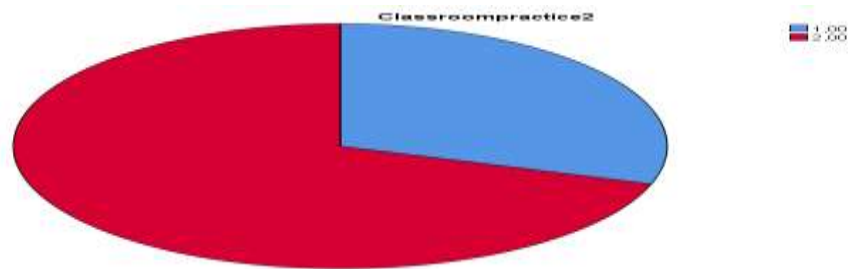
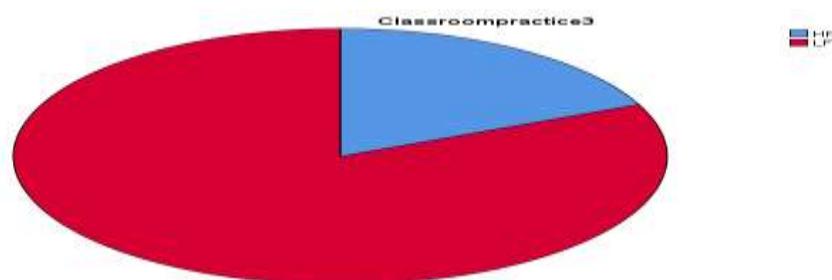


Figure 6: dependent variable 1

Most students use translation apps instead of dictionary apps. This is more likely to engage them less in class activities and make learning tasks less challenging. Research has always shown that students are more likely to benefit from more challenging learning tasks (Stephen Krashen's input: $i+1$ hypothesis)

Classroom practices 2: Translation strategy**Figure 7: dependent variable 2**

Most students have adopted a learning strategy that may seem useful and effective for many EFL teachers. They use translation apps to turn paragraphs from French into English than use their own learning strategies to improve and edit their first draft. However, there is always fear that the use of translation apps may make translation learning tasks less challenging and less engaging.

Classroom practice 3: Frequency of using distraction sources**Figure 8: independent variable 3**

Most students use distraction sources (using smart phones to text their friends and update their favourite social media networks) less frequently. This means that students use smart phones for different purposes other than learning but not to the extent of distracting and disrupting the course of teaching and learning activities.

Cross tabulation of independent variables with dependent variables

The study includes 5 cross tabulations. 1- Cross tabulation of gender composition with classroom practices, 2- Cross tabulation of English learning experience with classroom practices, 3- Cross tabulation of English proficiency level with classroom practices, 4- Cross tabulation of digital literacy level with classroom practices, and 5- Cross tabulation of perception of smart phone use with classroom practices. The objective of the research study is to answer the following research question: What are the factors that determine smart phones' good learning practices in the ESP classroom?

The observed patterns from cross tabulation 1 show that female students use translation apps more than male students do in the ESP class translation tasks. Patterns also show that even if

female students use translation apps, they make more individual efforts to improve their drafts more than male students do. However, and ironically enough, female students use distraction sources more than male students do.

The research results from cross tabulation 2 show that students with a bigger English learning experience use translation apps more than students with less English learning experience do in the ESP class translation tasks. Preliminary research findings also show that even if students with a bigger English learning experience use translation apps, they also make efforts to improve their drafts more than students with less English learning experience do. However, and ironically enough again, students with bigger English learning experience use distraction sources more than students with less English learning experience do.

The observed patterns from cross tabulation 3 reveal that students with high English language proficiency use translation apps more than students with low English language proficiency do in the ESP class translation tasks. Patterns also show that even if students with high English language proficiency use translation apps, they make more individual efforts to improve their drafts more than students with low English language proficiency do. However, and strangely enough, students with high English language proficiency use distraction sources more than students with low English language proficiency do.

Preliminary results from cross tabulation 4 show that students with better digital literacy use translation apps more than students with average digital literacy do in the ESP class translation tasks. Patterns also show that even if students with better digital literacy use translation apps, they make more individual efforts to improve their drafts more than students with average digital literacy do. However, and strangely enough again, students with better digital literacy use distraction sources more than students with average digital literacy low do.

The observed patterns from cross tabulation 5 show that students with a positive perception of smart phone use tend to use translation apps more than students with a negative perception of smart phone use do in the ESP class translation tasks. Patterns also show that even if students with a positive perception of smart phone use tend to use translation apps, they make more individual efforts to improve their drafts more than students with a negative perception of smart phone use do. However, and strangely enough again, students with a positive perception of smart phone use are more likely to use distraction sources more than students with a negative perception of smart phone use do.

Although preliminary research based on descriptive statistics show that there is a relationship between the five independent variables (gender composition, English learning experience, proficiency level in English, digital literacy level, perception of smart phone use) and classroom learning practices, the relationship is not statistically significant as shown by the different results of the chi-square test. The *p* value has always scored higher than 0.05. This backs up the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between the five independent variables and learning practices in the ESP classroom. (For a detailed description of Chi-square test results, see table 1)

Table 1: Chi-square test results

Chi-square correlation test results			
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
1	Cross tabulation of gender composition with classroom practices,		
2	Cross tabulation of English learning experience with classroom practices		
3	Cross tabulation of proficiency level in English with classroom practices		
4	Cross tabulation of digital literacy level with classroom practices		
5	Cross tabulation of perception of smart phone use with classroom practices.		
Cross tabulation	Classroom practice 1	Classroom practice 2	Classroom practice 3
1	$p = ,111 > 0.05$	$p = ,443 > 0.05$	$p = ,046 > 0.05$
2	$p = ,445 > 0.05$	$p = ,899 > 0.05$	$p = ,481 > 0.05$
3	$p = ,070 > 0.05$	$p = ,070 > 0.05$	$p = ,931 > 0.05$
4	$p = ,955 > 0.05$	$p = ,955 > 0.05$	$p = ,524 > 0.05$
5	$p = ,453 > 0.05$	$p = ,851 > 0.05$	$p = ,911 > 0.05$

Implication to Research and Practice

The investigation and assessment of using mobile technology (smart phones and tablet computers) in the ESP classroom shows that there are no factors that determine appropriate learning practices. This implies that serious efforts should be made to adapt the use of mobile technology to meet the requirements, expectations and needs of students in the ESP classroom. It is true that mobile technology can be used to broaden learning opportunities and consolidate autonomous learning, but when it comes to reducing the risk of distraction, teachers are more likely to face several challenges. Perhaps the best way to overcome the distraction barrier and boost learning outcomes is a more engagement of students in classroom tasks that require the use of mobile technology. Students should build up the required self drive and appropriate autonomous learning strategies and skills to benefit more from what mobile technology can offer.

CONCLUSION

Findings have then shown the absence of any statistically significant relationship between different independent variables (Gender composition, English learning experience, proficiency level in English, digital literacy level, perception of smart phone use) and classroom learning practices. The Chi-square test outcomes show then that there are no factors that determine smart phone good learning practices in the ESP classroom. However, and though they are not statistically significant, both English proficiency level and gender composition show some effect. Female students with an advanced proficiency level in English are more likely to benefit from what mobile technology can offer.

A well-trained teacher (with or without mobile technology) can always make a difference in the language classroom and determine the appropriate learning practices that learners are more likely to benefit from. Very often the use of mobile technology without appropriate planning and monitoring does not help teachers and learners to fulfil the required teaching and learning

functions. The curricular integration of mobile technology-aided activities may help reduce the 'Distraction effect' and engage students more in their learning.

Future Research

Despite the challenges that still hinder the process of class content digitalization, most language education professionals and scholars have come to the conclusion that ICT provides more opportunities for learning foreign languages and turns classrooms into open and interactive environments, allowing more participation and cooperation. However, there is this increasing need for the dissemination and exchanges of practical methodologies and teaching best practices that allow the use of these new technologies for the benefit of learners. The digitalization of class content is a new teaching and learning paradigm that requires the use of new teaching methodologies to fulfill the function of ICT-enabled foreign language teaching environments.

Future research should be then oriented towards the transformation of these new teaching paradigms and approaches into classroom learning practices to meet the needs and expectations of both teachers and learners. Research should address issues related to ICT-aided classroom methodologies and learning strategies that allow a more practical and efficient use of information technology in the language classroom.

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