

STUDENTS' VIEWS ON UTILIZING MT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING: INTEREST, IMPORTANCE AND EFFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT: *With Mobile Technology (MT) getting smaller, cheaper and easier to carry, the new generation has been bombarded with various mobile technology devices that seem to be invading every single aspect of their lives. Educators and learners in higher education institutes need to realize the extent to which undergraduate learners are ready to deploy MT as learning facilitators. Hence, our present study aims to find out the students beliefs and views on the importance of MT in their educational life. In order to fulfill the study's objectives, 328 undergraduate students were randomly selected across four different departments at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait, during the spring semester of the academic year 2012/2013. The data were collected based on the informants' responses on 18- itemed questionnaire that was mainly designed to reflect on the students' views over the main study objectives. As a result, the students' responses were categorized into three dimensions that should eventually fulfill our study goals; interest in MT devices, efficiency of various MT devices, and the importance of MT application in the students' education. The study results revealed the students high interested in MT deployment within their education as they motivate them to learn and provide them with wider learning opportunities, especially in the discipline of distance learning. Students have also perceived MT as more efficient. Older students tend to agree less. Efficiency of MT has further been pressed in the discipline of language learning.*

KEYWORDS: Mobile technology, efficiency, motivation, digital generation, MALL

INTRODUCTION

No one can deny that we are living in an era of technology which is constantly redefining our lives. Despite the obvious benefits of such a digital revolution in every single aspect of our lives, little is known about the teachers' and the learners' perspectives on utilizing the new media within the school grounds. With the world getting technically digital, we moved from bulky computers that used to be beyond the individual budgets and space, into smaller, cheaper and portable devices that have invaded every home, and are in the reach of the vast majority of mankind. Let us not forget that tiny devices such as smartphones are now being carried by teenagers who can communicate with people on the other side of the world through a click of a button. So whether we like it or not, technology is occupying fundamental time and space in our lives. Are we using it to our own benefits?

This paper examines the learners' beliefs on mobile technology within the educational discipline. Our research looks into the students' beliefs on mobile technology across three major facets; efficiency, potential usage, and interest in the application of the various technological venues. By looking into the extent at which the undergraduate students are motivated to use mobile technology, we aim to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are the undergraduate students interested in mobile technology applications within their college premises?
2. What is the students' overview on the efficiency of mobile technology in the enhancement of education?
3. What are the potential usages of mobile technology within their level of education?

Answers to the aforementioned questions, we believe, would assist us as educators to better plan our curricula, allocate appropriate mobile technology services that enhances learning, and withhold services that lead to our learners' frustration, hence to negatively affect the future education.

The paper starts by giving a comprehensive overview on the topic as reported in previous literature. We will then introduce our readers to the research tool, participants and procedure. The findings will be viewed and discussed in the light of the literature within the same discipline and focus, hence, enabling the establishment of a number of logical recommendations within the area under the scope of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Mobile Technology?

Mobile technology is exactly, as the term indicates, technology that can be used on the move. The term includes various tools and devices that enable the users to communicate with others, create documents, read files, and access the networks. Accordingly, recent innovative devices such as smartphones, tablets, iPads, pod-casts and the like would fall into this category. The term has also been linked to M-learning, a learning that would utilize mobile technology as a major resource for learning in a mobile setting. Such smart devices may facilitate learning as they enable the users to receive emails, instant messages in text and multimedia formats, lecture notes and video links.

Malladi and Agrawal (2002) distinguish between mobile technology and mobile wireless technology. In this vein, the two researchers explain that while mobile technology is only portable, the latter adds computing to mobility. In other words, the users can continuously access network resources while carrying the device.

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Importance of Mobile Technology in Education

Employment of Mobile technology within the field of education has been widely explored by a number of researchers. Kirkwood & Price (2013) state that technology has yet to reach its potential in the transformation of teaching and learning practices. This is because educators have always focused on reinforcing existing practices, researching interventions that were technology-led; for example, how podcasts can be used, rather than being derived from the needs and aspirations of the educational actual setting.

The effectiveness of mobile technology has further been researched along a number of mobile facilities. Grimes & Warschauer (2008), for example, state that a one-to-one laptop program can have a facilitating role in writing-intensive, information-rich multimodal and student-centered instruction processes in three diverse schools in California, which have long been called for by educational reformers. On the other hand, effects of in-class laptop use on college students' learning has been explored by Fried (2008). The study demonstrates an unwanted interference of laptop usage on the students' levels of concentration on the presented material, which would negatively influence the amount of achieved learning.

Oblinger (2003) states that despite the fact that the current media view today's students as having high levels of technological aptitude, those levels might have always been exaggerated. As a result, a number of researchers, such as Chase & Herrod (2009) have investigated the extent to which college students have really integrated mobile technology into their daily lives. Their study reports that technology usage by the young generation has never reached its plateau after the early 2000's, as the curve tends to continuously escalate. They add, students are becoming even more reliant on technology for educational purposes. They, therefore, conclude that the trend should stay on the rise in the future years. Such a quick rising trend is transforming every single aspect of the young generation lives, and education would never be an exception. In fact, education will most probably be within the core of that transformation. As a result, introducing mobile technology within the current educational system has become inevitable.

Rogers et al. (2012) describe mobile technology as a learning enhancer, as it augments on going activities that enable the learner to move back and forth between the physical environment and a number of digital resources and representations, in order to potentially enhance the learners' sense-making activities through using a combination of information, communication and computation.

According to Stockwell in Deng et al. (2014), mobile technology has also been heavily integrated into the discipline of language learning. In this vein, mobile assisted language learning (MALL) has been established as a new sub-area of mobile learning. Thornton & Houser (2005) believe that mobile devices can be effective tools for delivering language learning materials, despite a number of inherited disadvantages of such devices, including small screen sizes, limited presentation of graphics and reliance on networks that might not be ideal in many settings (Albers & Kim, 2001). On the same matter, Viberg & Gronlund (2012) have accomplished a full systematic review of the previous literature on the issue, based on which they perceive the field as lacking empirical studies to provide solid evidences on how mobile technology enhances the individuals' language learning outcomes. Therefore, they suggest conducting more experimental cases to evaluate the effects of such technology on the learners' writing skills, reading comprehension, pronunciation performance, and second language grammar acquisition. Moreover, they recommend accounting for the differences in the individuals' learning strategies when employing mobile devices in language learning in order to get the best effects on the language learners' proficiency levels. Findings of that nature, they add, would make an important contribution not only to educators and learners but also to systems developers. The two researchers have also recommended future studies to be conducted on how the use of mobile technology affects individuals' time management. Furthermore, the systematic review has also called for the necessity of establishing new theoretical models in MALL to distinguish it from other technology-related disciplines such as CALL.

Are We Ready for the Change?

A drastic transformation from a traditional chalk and blackboard teaching and learning into digital/mobile learning requires educators and learners who are well prepared, both aptitudinally and attitudinally. Kukulska-Hulme (2009) describes mobile learning to be a fertile ground for innovation, with its success depending on human factors.

A number of researchers have looked into college students' readiness for M-learning, with the underlying belief that a positive attitude would lead to a higher success rate in learning (Keegan, 2010). Al-Quda et al. (2013) have researched the extent to which university students are prepared to accept the adoption of mobile technology in their educational system. Their study reports more positive attitudes towards M-learning amongst the postgrads when compared to undergrads, a finding that was related by the researchers to the more advanced abilities and exposure to M-learning amongst the postgrads. Hussin et al. (2012) have also explored university students' four dimensions of readiness in Malaysia; basic readiness, skills' readiness, psychological readiness and budget readiness towards the integration of mobile technology into the higher educational system in the country. The study reveals high familiarity with the computational skills required for mobile technology, a rather welcoming atmosphere for the employment of e-learning within the university premises, yet, an extent of uncertainty on how much money to spend on obtaining the appropriate devices for such use.

The researchers of the current study would therefore set the significance of exploring the students' attitudes and perception on utilizing mobile technology in the process of learning and teaching. Establishing a positive perception for deploying mobile technology is a predisposition for any anticipated future success in the learning process.

STUDY RESULTS

The data analysis was based on three main categories: the students' interest in the use of technology, application and importance of the use of technology and efficiency in the use of technology. The first group, interest in the use of technology for learning, consisted of 9 statements. An overall view of the results reflects the fact that the students find the use of technology interesting. For example, 94.2% of the participating students found that the use of technology in the classroom motivating. Moreover, 81.1% students stated that in-class use of computers makes learning more entertaining, 86.5% believe that the use of PowerPoint in the classroom is very entertaining. The majority of students disagreed with the idea that technology in the classroom is boring and not important. However, 38.4% stated that the overuse of technology in class might be boring, as opposed to 49.2% who do not believe in the idea of overusing technology in class.

As most students find learning via mobile technology more interesting than the traditional ways of learning (88.3%), many of them also prefer reading the information off the screens of their laptops and smart phones. Furthermore, not only do 71.4% of the students prefer to take courses with instructors who constantly use technology in the classroom, but 70.7% believe that on-line (distant) learning could be a challenging step in their educational life. Further analysis shows that when specialty interacts with choosing an instructor who uses technology frequently in class, a significance of $p=0.009$ was shown (where significance was calculated at $p\leq 0.05$). The reason behind this significance was the fact the students who major in Arabic and Islamic studies disagree significantly more.

When it comes to the application and importance of technology in the classroom, it appears that most students believe that the technology should be constantly used in the classroom (64.5%) because of its importance in the educational environment. A one-way ANOVA by specialty indicates that English major students disagree more than other students that the use of technology is a requirement in every class ($p=0.025$). The most important value of the use of technology, in the students' point of view, is its aid in language learning. Statistics show that 76.7% of the participants believe that they need technological devices to help them learn a language. Moreover, 84.5% of the students indicated that the use of technological equipment in the classroom motivates language learning. Therefore, 94.2% of the students stated that the use of CDs and videos helped them improve their language fluency, and 87.2% frequently use technological devices to research projects and prepare for presentations. Finally, the statistics show that 56% of the participants believe that using emailing as an educational method of communication will establish the need for new social communication programs such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp.

As the majority of students (88.3%) find the use of technology more entertaining and efficient, it appears that students believe that technology is essential in order to gain knowledge in less time. A good example of this is the fact that 75.8% of the students believe that the material downloaded from the net helped them become efficient as students. A one-way ANOVA by age shows high significance of $p=0.031$, as participants over 25 years old disagree significantly more. Additionally, 88.4% of the students believe that language learning is easier when using technological devices.

From the analysis of the questionnaire, it is clear that students believe that the use of technology in class is a must. They have reflected their belief that instructors and students should use technology in the educational realm. It aids learning and saves time, presenting a more efficient and entertaining educational environment. Chart (1) below reflects the interest in technology and the belief in its importance and efficiency.

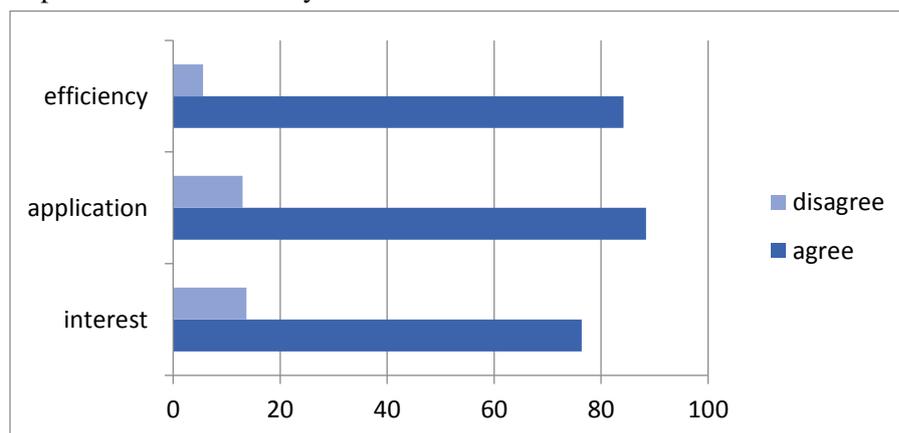


Chart 1. The Average agreement/disagreement on the categories of interest, importance/application, and efficiency of the use of technology in the educational environment

DISCUSSION

Our study investigates attitudes of CBE students towards the utilization of mobile technology in the teaching and learning of various courses across the college. We attempted to closely monitor our

students' views and beliefs on a number of issues related to their teachers' application of mobile technology in and outside their classrooms. Hence, we looked into our participants' views on the issue from three dimensions; the necessity of utilizing mobile technology, the students' levels of interest in mobile technology and the students' beliefs on the efficiency of using mobile technology inside and outside their college premises.

Necessity and Interest in Mobile Technology

Looking back into the study's results, one may safely conclude that our students seem to be highly interested in the concept of utilizing various types of mobile technology in their education system. A closer look into the issue suggests that the students believe that using mobile technology would motivate them to learn, provide a wider opportunity of efficient learning to take place, may be utilized in their research projects, and maintain satisfying levels of the required challenge for distance learning across other colleges and teaching institutions. The students have particularly pressed the importance of enforcing using smart phones in the two-way instant communication applications amongst the students and their teachers. They have also accentuated the significance of presenting some of the required information through Youtube, movies and videos. The vast majority of the students have additionally claimed that laptop usage attracts their attention to the presented material, especially when the instructor presents the material via PowerPoint presentations. In the same topic, our sample has disagreed on whether they prefer their courses with instructors who use mobile technology. The findings suggest that, although the students would usually prefer instructors who use technology, those whose major is Arabic and Islamic studies seem to disagree the most. The finding might be logically related to the nature of those two specialities, which are still standing further away from the technological advancement both in terms of their presented material and teaching methods. Furthermore, around half of the sample doesn't seem to be concerned about the overuse of mobile technology. Our finding in this case tends to contradict Fried's findings, who claims that the use of in-class laptops may negatively affect the students' achievement levels (2008). It is crucial at this point to emphasize that the actual achievement of our sample after using any of the suggested mobile technology techniques and devices was never tested for in the current study. We therefore call for further rigorous studies that specifically look into the students' claims as opposed to factual levels of achievements. The vast majority of our sample (around 90%) claim they'd rather read a learning material off their laptop/smart phone screens over reading from conventional resources. The finding contradicts some previous research findings on a similar topic, whereby the students tend to prefer reading from a book-resource over reading from an e-resource when they were involved in pleasure silent reading (Akbar et al, 2015). Despite the fact that our findings signal an overall agreement on the use of mobile technology in the field of education, the students whose major is English tend to significantly disagree with the idea, as they find using mobile technology is exceptionally important in language learning classes, but not in other teaching disciplines. A large number of students (over than half) seem to have realized the urgent need to using and applying a number of up-to-date social media programs such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, as they are rapidly replacing the conventional e-communication through e-mails. The student's resonant call, however, should be closely monitored so as to avoid some claims of negative effects established by previous researchers on the topic of social media, such as addiction and misunderstanding (Kakabadse et. Al, 2009). The idea tends to be even more complicated as the context is extremely gender-segregated, whereby utilization of social media between opposite genders tend to be highly stigmatized within such a conservative society.

Efficiency of Mobile Technology

Not only has mobile technology been perceived as boomerily interesting by the students, but also as extremely efficient. Examination of the study's results across the questionnaire statements aiming to reflect on the students' perception on Mobile Technology efficiency has generally suggested a number of well-established positive beliefs in this regard. Mobile technology has been viewed as time-efficient. In other words, the students believe that Mobile Technology tools can provide them with the information in no time when compared to old days search for information. With the help of mobile technology, our sample seems to have agreed on its efficiency in teaching and learning. In other words, the students tend to agree on finding learning through the application of Mobile technology more

efficient. Older students (above 25 years old) however, tend to agree less on the view. The finding could be due to the fact that younger students seem to have become more prepared and acquainted with the new technology when compared to their older counterparts. The efficiency of Mobile Technology has further been intensified by the students in language learning contexts, as a huge majority finds Mobile technology tools as being very efficient in making language learning easier and more feasible. Future studies should be conducted on the issue to tackle the uniqueness of Mobile Technology in second/foreign languages learning disciplines.

As for Mobile technology efficiency, undergraduate students in CBE seem to maintain the belief that mobile technology tools are efficient, hence should be utilized in their colleges. Yet, we highly recommend future studies that will establish an order of the various mobile technology tools and devices in terms of their ability in enhancing the teaching and learning processes. The findings may well imply the tools that are viewed as efficient and necessary vs. those which are viewed to be neither important nor efficient.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study have paved the way to a number of conclusions. First of all, our undergraduate students seem to be highly eager to apply Mobile Technology in and outside their college. Such a high interest and fascination in mobile technology tools within the field of education should be wisely employed by the educators in Kuwait. Adequate preparation for using the tools has to be our first step, in which policy-makers should provide a generous budget that covers the expenses of the infrastructure of such a leap change. With the urging need to design curriculums that can accommodate existing technologies, curriculum designers should also consider curriculum innovations that follow a number of leading countries in the field (Ally & Tsinakos, 2014; Stockwell, 2014). Educators should also undergo highly preparatory programs that will enable them to utilize mobile technology with less frustration and adequate using skills.

As for Mobile technology efficiency, undergraduate students in CBE seem to maintain the belief that mobile technology tools are efficient, hence should be utilized in their colleges. Yet, as the opportunities and challenges are emerging, we highly recommend future studies that will establish the actual positive effects of the use of technology in the classroom, and an order of the various mobile technology tools and devices in terms of their ability in enhancing the teaching and learning processes. The findings may well imply the tools that are viewed as efficient and necessary vs. those which are viewed to be neither important nor efficient. In doing so, Mobile Technology tools can be informatively prioritized accordingly.

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