

EVALUATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ANDROID APPLICATIONS ON THE STUDENTS OF PHONETICS COURSE IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AT TTU

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ABSTRACT: *This study aims at evaluating the students' attitudes and perceptions on the implementation of the Android application "K&J English Pronunciation" as a learning tool in the teaching of Phonetics course in the English department at Tafila Technical University. It also focuses on investigating the students' interaction and understanding of this application, the extent to which they use it in their learning, the obstacles they encounter in using it, and their suggestions and recommendations for a better use of this application in learning. Hence, the data was collected via a questionnaire distributed to the students of Phonetics course in the English department at TTU to evaluate their attitudes and interaction with this android application, the extent of their usage of this application, and the obstacles that halt their usage of it. The goal of this study is to shed light on the importance of integrating smart phone applications in the teaching of English courses at the English department at TTU, which will pave the way towards implementing more technological tools and applications in other courses in the English department in the future. The data analysis shows that the students' attitudes, interaction, and the extent of their usage of this application are very high. Whereas the results show that the obstacles that the students encounter in implementing this application are very low. Finally, all the students of the course were strongly agreed that TTU University should work hard on arming the students with enough knowledge via holding seminars and workshops on how to use these android applications effectively, and on designing some useful applications to use in other courses in the future.*

KEYWORDS: Android Application, Phonetics, Students' Attitudes, Smartphones, Usage

INTRODUCTION

Education can benefit from the integration of smart phones in teaching English courses. This is due to the fact that most students in the world own these phones by which they can access World Wide Web at any time. They are easily portable and can be used anywhere-anytime. These smart phones can facilitate learning and teaching via interaction and connection between teachers and students inside and outside classrooms. The best way to use smart phones is to benefit from their applications which can be afforded by the students because they are not highly expensive, and most of them are free for users.

Additionally, these applications can enhance students' learning and interaction with teachers via making students follow the material of the course inside and outside the classroom. The use of smart phone applications in education has become more effective than the traditional ways because college students use them a lot for fun and for connection with teachers and with their classmates. Smart phone applications have changed the learners from formal learners to more engaged and interactive ones. Thus, these applications have really become a great

revolution in education against the traditional methods of learning which are based on the spoon-feeding method of learning.

The integration of this technology in the language curriculum is now needed. Educators should be more careful for the best ways to use these applications effectively, and they should work harder on designing more applications that coexist with students' needs in their learning of English courses. Also, there is a need to make students more familiar with the usefulness of these applications in educations via holding seminars and workshops on how to use them effectively. • Based on the previous discussion, this study tackles students' evaluation and attitudes of the implementing "K&J English

Pronunciation" in phonetics course in the English department at TTU. My choice of this android application for my students is due to its usefulness to make students able to pronounce vowels and consonants easily, differentiate between them clearly, transcribe sounds phonetically, know to how to articulate sounds easily through watching audio-visual videos of the articulation of sounds, and evaluate their articulation of sounds via tests and exercises offered in the application. Furthermore, the application is free on Google Play and does not need Internet connection after being downloaded. All these benefits offered by this application are the course goals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Smart phone applications have been implemented in empirical research by many researchers in the world to evaluate their effectiveness and usefulness in learning. Jaradat (2014) investigates the students' attitudes and perceptions in French language classrooms at Princess Nora University towards the use of mobile phones in their learning of French grammar and vocabulary. After answering the questionnaire by the students, the researcher finds out that the students' attitudes are high and their perceptions are moderate. She also finds out that mobile learning is very effective in students' learning because it improves their performance inside and outside the classroom.

Vafa and Chico (2013) explore students' perception of the integration of technology in their medical education. A survey designed by the researchers was distributed to 1000 first year medical students reflected that the students accepted the idea of integrating this technology in their education, and they also "highlighted the need for a supportive academic and technological infrastructure" (230).

Mtega et al. (2012) have conducted a collaborative study on the usage of mobile phones at universities in Tanzania, in which a survey was distributed to 30 teaching staff and 40 students. The study shows that most of the respondents use traditional mobile applications. The researchers conclude that "costs associated with downloading multimedia content was another constraint which limited some respondents especially students from using phones for learning purposes" (118).

Subramaniam and Harun (2013) study students' perception of implementing smart phones for teaching English oral communication through surveying 150 students using smart phones in their study. The researchers found that smart phones play a very effective and valuable role in the students' learning of English, and they recommend to integrate these tools in teaching English courses in the future.

Ting (2007) studies the effectiveness of mobile phone in education, in which the researcher asserts that “Mobile learning can guide a learner to an authentic learning context and incorporate the field objects with closely related information in the handheld device to initiate the process of knowledge acquisition” (718-720).

In a very valuable collaborative study conducted by Woodcock et al. (2012), the researchers investigate the extent to which students use smart phones in their learning. After interviewing a number of students, the researchers found that most of the students who own smart phones are unaware of the usefulness of these smart phones in their learning because they do not install the useful applications for learning. The students become aware of the effectiveness and usefulness of these applications when they become familiar with how to integrate them in learning. The researchers conclude that “it is important, therefore, for educators to understand the potential of these devices to teaching and learning, especially if their use by students is likely to erode constraints that currently deter effective learner engagement with the curriculum and academic innovation” (2).

METHODOLOGY

In order to evaluate the students’ attitudes and perceptions and views on the use of “K&J English Pronunciation” in Phonetics class, a thirty seven-item questionnaire was designed to measure students’ attitudes and opinions on the usefulness of the application as a learning tool, the extent of students’ usage of the application, obstacles of implementing this application in the course, and the students’ suggestions and recommendations for an effective implementation of the application. Additionally, Likert Scales with five points ranging from strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree was used in the study. The study was conducted in the Phonetics course taught in the English department in spring 2014 at Tafila Technical University, Jordan. All 50 students enrolled in Phonetics course were surveyed. They were asked to complete the questionnaire designed to measure the students’ evaluation of K&J Pronunciation. A set of questionnaire was given to the students as shown in Table 1. The data collected and analyzed statistically through SPSS.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are related to the fact that half of the class are without smart phones. These students had to share the smart phones with other students in the class. Additionally, some students’ smart phones have a bad audio system which does not enable them to hear sounds clearly. Also, there were some students who were not familiar or aware with culture of android applications, and that is why they were slow to accept the idea of implementing this application in their learning of phonetics at the beginning of the course.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Smartphone applications are considered the best technological devices to use in learning English language courses, including phonetics courses, in the classrooms. The objective of this study is investigate students’ responses and evaluation of integrating the android application “K&J English

Pronunciation” in their learning of phonetics course, and whether they benefit from this application or not. Table 1 shows the number of enrolled students in the class who own and do not own smart phones, in which approximately half of the class has smart phones (24) students, while 26 of the students do not have ones. This is considered as one of the limitations of this study, because in order to benefit from this application effectively, students should have a smart phone device. Thus, there should be some efforts to be exerted by the university to make these smart phones available for the students in order to make them benefit from them. Additionally, the table shows that half of the students are over two years in their educational level and the other half of them are below two years. This does not highly influence the results of the study. The students who are over two years have previous knowledge in phonetics because they took introduction to linguistics course which introduces phonetics to them briefly. However, this application does not need any previous knowledge in order to be used by the students because it is very easy to use and does not need high skills.

Responding to the first section of the questionnaire (questions 1-11) which evaluate students’ responses on their usability and interaction with K&J Pronunciation application in phonetics course, the results show that 78% of the students have strongly agreed and 22% agreed that they have a clear idea about how to use this application after knowing how to use it from the instructor. This indicates that this application is very easy to use, and the students do not need a long time to learn how to use it. The results also show that 98% of the respondents strongly agreed that “K&J English Pronunciation” application is more effective than the traditional methods in teaching phonetics, and 96% of them agreed that this application is an effective educational vocal tool that helps them in learning phonetics. This result shows clearly the usefulness and effectiveness of implementing this application in teaching phonetics in an innovative way. This is clear from the results that show 74% of the students agreed and 20% strongly agreed for the statement that they spend most of their times studying phonetics via this application because it makes them feel excited and joyful in learning phonetics (94%).

Also, the results show clearly that students strongly agree (92%) that “K&J English Pronunciation” helps them improve their pronunciation and phonetic transcription of English sounds; it increases students’ interaction and motivation (90%); it does not make students feel bored in learning phonetics (94%); it can be easily used and does not need high skills and previous knowledge (96%). The study has also found that 80% of the respondents agreed that they felt free and unlimited when they use such application. Although the respondents strongly affirmed (94%) that they have never used this application before, the results reflect that the students have the ability to use this application effectively because they find it very useful, attractive, easy and effective. Thus, this section of the questionnaire reveals the usefulness of this application and students’ effective interaction with it.

The responses in section two of the questionnaire on the extent to which the students use this application (questions 12-19) show 98% of the respondents strongly agreed that “K&J English Pronunciation” is very useful for knowing the articulation and transcription of sounds, while 80% of them indicated undecided on the relevance of the application to other courses taught in the English department. The study has also found that (100%) of the respondents strongly agreed that this application easily and clearly enables them to articulate sounds and repeat them through watching and listening to the audio and visual videos that the application offers. Additionally, the results show that the 96% of the respondents strongly agreed that this application enables the students to pronounce vowels, consonants, and diphthongs without any confusion, and that “K&J English Pronunciation” helps them keep in constant contact with

phonetics course regardless of internet connection, time, and place. This result indicates the effectiveness of this application to the students in improving their pronunciation of the sounds.

Furthermore, 94% of the students strongly agreed that they can adapt to or get familiar easily with the use of this application. 66% of the respondents agreed and 28% strongly agreed that their academic achievement in phonetics course with the use of this application is better than their achievement in other courses that do not use these applications. This is a clear indicator to the fruitful effect of the use of this application in the students' academic achievement in the course. The respondents also strongly agreed (60%) and (34%) agreed that this application facilitates their comprehension of the basics and rules of phonetics without any need to look at websites. Thus, it is noted in the responses of this section that the majority of the students affirm the usefulness of the application on their achievement and progression in phonetics course via their constant usage of this application in their learning of phonetics.

Concerning the third section of the questionnaire on the obstacles of implementing "K&J English Pronunciation for the students (questions 20-30), (70%) of the respondents strongly disagreed and (30%) disagreed that the lack of desire to use this application is an obstacle. 66% of them strongly disagreed and 26% disagreed that the lack of experience of the use of this application is an obstacle. The respondents, however, indicated undecided (66%) and (14%) disagreed for the statement that there is a lack of knowledge for the students in the usage of smart phones in general and K&J application in particular. Additionally, the results show that the respondents strongly disagreed (82%) on the statement that students have low confidence to get high grades in phonetics course via using K&J English Pronunciation. They also disagreed (94%) that the nature of phonetics course does not permit to use "K&J English Pronunciation" application.

The statements on that phonetics becomes more difficult and that the instructor of the course does not encourage students to use this application show the respondents' strong disagreement (98%). Furthermore, the study has also found that (72%) of the respondents were disagreed on the statement that there is a negative tendency toward using Smart phones and (82%) of them disagreed that K&J Pronunciation is frequently disconnected. However, (98%) of the respondents strongly agreed that their experience of implementing K&J English Pronunciation is new and this idea has not been implemented before. Thus, the response in this section clearly shows that the majority of the students do not have any obstacles in implementing "K&J English Pronunciation". These responses do not contradict with the students' responses in the first section which emphasize the usefulness of this application.

Responding to the students' suggestions and recommendations for an effective implementation of the application, the study has found that 100% of the respondents strongly agreed that university should work on designing free android applications for the students to benefit from in their learning of the English courses; and that there should be an interest in increasing the students' positive awareness toward the usage of smart phone applications in general and "K&J English

Pronunciation" in particular. Also, 98% of them strongly agreed that the university should afford students with cheaper smart phones in order to benefit from the usage of "K&J English Pronunciation", and they suggest that the university should design electronic educational programs to help students use "K&J English Pronunciation". 96% of the respondents also strongly agreed that university should provide students with brochures and orientation workshops on the usefulness of android applications in general and "K&J English

Pronunciation” in particular. Furthermore, 94% of respondents strongly agreed that the university should host specialists in android applications to offer training workshops and seminars on how to use these applications; and 92% of the respondents strongly agreed that the instructor of the course should train students how to use K&J English Pronunciation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study presents valuable and important findings on the usefulness and effectiveness of integrating smart phone applications in phonetics course, and how the students can make a great progression in this course when they implement it. The researcher has analyzed the students’ responses to the questions of the questionnaire in order to gain a feedback on how the students’ implementation of the android application can help them understand phonetics. All the students of phonetics class agreed on the efficiency and usefulness of smart phone application in learning phonetics. This is shown in the respondents’ answers which reveal that such application can better engage students in the learning of phonetics through the easiness of application usage, the excitement the students feel when using it, the eagerness to know more about the sound articulation via watching the videos included in the application.

Additionally, the students in the survey show their own true engagement all the time in the course through being connected with the material of the course through using “K&J English Pronunciation” application without any need of the internet connection and the high skills to use it. What is surprising in the students’ responses that they agree that such modern and innovative way of teaching phonetics via smart phone applications is better than the traditional ways that are based on the didactic method because these applications increase students’ motivation to learn more, and they enable them anytimeanywhere to be interactive with this course through improving their pronunciation, articulation of the sounds without feeling limited and bored in the classroom atmosphere. Furthermore, the majority of the students assert that their achievement in the course with the usage of the application has improved more than in the courses that do not use android applications. This is shown in their responses which reveal that they can, by the usage of this application, pronounce the consonant, vowel, and diphthong sounds correctly and clearly after watching and listening to the videos in the application.

However, the students’ responses do not reveal any obstacles in the usage of android application although it is a new experience for them because they feel that such application does not need a previous experience or any connection with the internet. They feel that this course becomes easier with the usage of this application and with the instructor’s motivation for them to use it. The only obstacle that some of them encounter lies in their inability to own a smart phone.

Thus, the students in their responses want the university to create free android applications for them to benefit from. They suggest that the university should help them own smart phones with cheaper prices, hold workshops and seminars and distribute brochures that help them use these applications effectively. They think that the university should increase students’ positive tendency to use smart phones in general and this application in particular, and design electronic educational systems to help them use Android application.

In light of the students' responses on the usefulness of smart phone application in the phonetics course, I strongly believe that there are a lot of potentials to be realized. We should expand our implementation of these applications in all the language courses we teach in the department. We should keep conducting more research on the best ways to use these applications in our teaching to know students' feedback on the implementation of these applications in classrooms. Additionally, all the instructors of English language courses should include and integrate some of these applications in their syllabi and teaching of the course. The university should work harder on integrating such technology in teaching through making these smart phones available for the students with a cheaper cost. There should be some training programs organized by the university to increase students' awareness of the usefulness of smart phones in learning.

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