

Applied Linguistics Approaches to English Language Teaching and Learning: The Impact of Technology and Social Media

Angela Folahan EGELE, Ph.D.

Department of Languages, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria

Email: angelafo17@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper reports on a study that explores students' attitude to mobile learning and their perceptions about the practice and challenges of using mobile phone applications in language learning. The participants for this study were students from two (Science Laboratory Technology, and Building Technology) departments in Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi. To collect data, a questionnaire was used to determine whether students use their mobile phones as educational tools in learning English inside and outside the language classrooms. The results revealed that mobile learning is gradually becoming popular amongst language learners, because they use a variety of apps as educational tools outside the classroom. However, the results indicate a lack of adequate support on the part of so many language teachers who either do not allow the use of mobile phones in class or provide limited guidance for using mobile apps in independent language learning.

Keywords - Mobile learning, Language learning, mobile apps

1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of the mobile phone was greeted with immense joy in Nigeria. All over the world, mobile phones are basically seen as instruments of easy communication and entertainment [1]. However, over time the mobile phone has become a tool for everything [2]. To play music and download a ringtone was once the most exciting thing to do with your mobile phone [3]. These days' mobile phone users have millions of free downloadable mobile software applications (apps) to choose from and the choice is not easy [3]. [4] Revealed that "these simple but useful apps have found their way into almost every form of human endeavor", and education is not an exception. The general concept of e-learning which includes Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has evolved by the arrival of mobile devices to form a new concept known as mobile learning. [5]

Considers mobile learning as an extension of e-learning. Mobile learning can simply be defined as "a dynamic learning environment through the use of mobile technologies, especially in the field of education" [6]. Recently, the interest level of m-learning has increased among many language educators because these devices are controlled by almost every student and supported with amazing apps that make learning of every single element in any field attractive and accessible anytime and anywhere. Consequently, these devices with their huge potentials would definitely revolutionize the learning process. For example, most students become uncertain of what to download if he/she looks for a dictionary online, because there are countless varieties of free dictionaries online, with very

cheap hard copies available in the market. In addition, the hard copies of dictionaries that students used to buy in the past are now available online and many of them can be used even offline by installing them in their mobile phones. There are also numerous apps for learning English language and some well-known international institutes like the British Council and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) who have designed their own free versions of such apps which are available for free globally.

Many academics have accepted the fact that today's mobile devices are tomorrow's textbooks, as hardcopies of books are being replaced by electronic versions (eBooks), and it is becoming the trend. The library and the academic board of Auchi Polytechnic have encouraged academic staff to put their books online for students to download and read. This trend is to meet the needs of the new generation and to meet effective learning strategies by providing tools that support the process of learning and teaching in the 21st century. To many educators, the challenge is to find links between the use of these devices outside the classroom and the required educational elements [1]. In fact, using these devices normally requires many competences that are also needed in education, such as communicating, organizing, ordering, planning, assessing, evaluating, producing, etc. [1]. [1] Argues that since these competences have become part of the "routines" exhibited by learners, there is need to reconsider them to be integrated into school learning practice and curricula. It is obvious that these digital tools have come to stay, and may possibly be deemed as new ways to shift education to the new era and thereby be

compatible to the “digital natives” as reported by [7;8] describe learners/students of today.

1.1.MOBILE PHONES AND EMERGENT NEEDS IN THE CLASSROOM

Although widening access to and ownership of smart devices by all students should be recognized by English Language teachers, there are teachers who are still reluctant to allow their students to touch these devices during class time. To many teachers, these devices are for communication and entertainment, and not for education. They think that these devices should not be used in class as they may cause disturbance to both teachers and students [9]. Nevertheless, mobile phones can be used for educational purposes as students can download useful educational software which they can install and use inside and outside the classroom, since their mobile devices are available to them all the time [7], explaining a clear change in today’s generation of students, states that “today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. He calls this generation “the native speakers of technology” [8] or “digital natives” [7], because they have grown up with technology and are already fully engaged with digital lives inside and outside the classroom. Similarly, Saudi students do “not only have the most up to date mobile phones but they are also professional in using them. Almost half of their secondary school students were expert users of mobile phones. As a consequence, the study recommended that teachers should be encouraged to take advantage of new tools and applications and support students by creating new learning experiences for them. Indeed, for many students, mobile phones have already become a part of their learning process even though these devices have not been fully integrated into formal classes yet. This process can go under what is called autonomous learning and many educators are expressing its importance in education currently. [10] Reported that students learn at their own pace and become more autonomous because such applications give learners a less controlled environment and thus, an opportunity to improve their skills. Therefore, educators cannot ignore what is happening around them and they need to align with the new changes that are taking place in the English language classroom and beyond.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of researchers have pointed out the role of mobile phones in contextualizing and authenticating language learning [7; 8; 11; 12; 13]. [7] Believes that not computers, but mobile phones that are currently banned in many schools, are the most important tools that would engage the 21st century students. Mobile phones, now operate as “high- tech mobile computers” [14], the features mobile phones exhibit include; short messaging service (SMS), graphics, user-controlled operating systems, browsers, camera functions (still and video), geo positioning, and many other sophisticated operations. Some mobile phones have sensors, fingerprint readers, and voice

recognition. Consequently, mobile phones are being constantly improved upon daily. [15] Argues that the multiple functions of mobile phones help to “communicate language practice, access to authentic content, and task completion”. Likewise, [11] argue that technology can engage English language learners with authentic and meaningful materials and can enhance their sense of community with circumstantial essentials of an out-of-class learning environment. Indeed, mobile technology has become a social and cultural phenomenon that has effective learning and pedagogical potential to create educational environments that encourage social interactions and better knowledge transfer.

Current mobile phones are supported with applications, such as, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Podcasts, Simple Radio, Tiktok, AI, to mention a few. These apps help users to connect to the world and have a sense of community by belonging to sites that are known as social networks, a place where users create virtual communities, exchange ideas, information, news, and even emotions. These social media networks encourage mobile learning, more engagement, collaboration and interaction between students and the outside world. Therefore, an autonomous learning environment is maintained and sustained. [16] Argues that learner autonomy is fostered by the use of technology in language teaching and learning when a rich environment of resources and tools that are easy to access for outside class activities are provided. [17] Reported that mobile blogs are effective tools that enable student-to-student interaction in diverse language situations, and there arises authentic opportunities for learners to interact with native speakers of English Language. Moreover, [18] argues that using the “informal social network media such as Facebook increased students engagement in the learning task, and motivated them to implement contextual elements from their own environment”. [12] Reiterates that mobile learning has “become a viable platform for contextual learning that bridges formal and informal learning environments in and beyond the classroom”. Since students in Nigeria generally use mobile phones extensively and for almost everything, there is the need for a study to explore how students at Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, deal with mobile phones when learning English and how they use these mobile devices as educational tools inside and outside classrooms.

The objective of this study is to examine the attitudes and perceptions of students about mobile phone educational apps that can be used to enhance English language learning inside and outside the classroom. This paper reports on a study that explores students’ attitude to mobile learning and their perceptions about their practice and challenges of using mobile phone applications in language learning. It also examined their views about mobile phone educational apps that can be used to enhance English language learning inside and outside the classroom.

3.METHODOLOGY

The participants were students from two departments in Auchi Polytechnic, namely, Science Laboratory Technology (SLT) in the school of Applied Science Technology, and Building Technology in the school of Environmental Science Technology. The total numbers of participants from both departments were 100. They were students of National Diploma One (ND1) respectively, but from different schools. The researcher administered a structured questionnaire on the students at the end of the course. However, the researcher got responses from 70 students, 38 were male and 32 were female. In addition, the questionnaire was designed on a 5-point Likert

scale of frequency, where 5=Always, 4=Often, 3=Sometimes, 2= Seldom, and 1= Never. The questionnaire consisted of five questions with the Likert scale response options. The questions focused on the participants’ practices and perceptions on how they use mobile phones in their learning, both inside and outside the classroom.

3.1. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results show that all students who participated in the study owned mobile phones. The answers from the survey conducted in this study were grouped for easy interpretation.

Table 1. Responses from students

Participants practices and perceptions on the use of mobile phone apps during learning	Seldom/Never		Sometimes		Always/Often	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
I always have internet access	2	2.8	23	32.8	45	64.2
I use my mobile phone in class while lectures are on	2	2.8	18	25.7	50	71.4
I check up meaning of words from my phone during lectures	5	7.1	25	35.7	40	57.1
I chat with friends on my phone during lectures	3	4.2	5	7.1	62	88.5
I search for information relevant to English Language topics with my phone outside the class	2	2.8	12	17.1	56	80.0

Respondents = 70

About 45 of the students (64.2%) indicated that they always have internet access through data subscription, while 32.8% of the students said that they sometimes had internet access. Only two students (2.8%) said that they seldom had internet access. Similarly, 50 students (71.4%) indicated that they used their mobile phones in class during lectures, while 18 students (25.7%) sometimes used them. Only two students (2.8%) seldom used their phones. According to the students, they used mobile phones during the class time “if the lecture was very boring” or if they “needed to check the meaning of a word.” As for their reasons why they do not use mobile phones in class, they said they did not use them because they had “to pay attention to the teacher”, be “more focused”, and “more concentrated”. Some of them also said that they saw it as disrespectful to use a mobile phone in class while lectures were on. According to other students, they said “education is more important than mobile phones” and lecture time is “time to learn and pay attention to the teacher.” It is obvious from the students’

comments that mobile phones are not welcome by many teachers in the classroom. Most students are nervous to use them in class as they feel that they may lose attention and focus on what is being taught. The results of this study agrees with what [19] found in her study. According to [19], students liked to use mobile phones but their teachers do not allow them to do so for the reasons that we have identified in our study. By looking closely at the students’ responses, it is clear that some students try to use their mobile phones during class to look up words while others feel reluctant to do so because of the teacher’s reluctance. However, the students who use mobile phones in class do so secretly without the teacher’s permission. The participants had different views regarding the use of mobile phones in class. Some students thought it had two sides, positive and negative. Those who said that using mobile phones in the classroom was positive said that they used it to check the meaning of words from online dictionaries or searched for information from the internet. A particular student said during a

short chat, that they should be allowed to use their mobile phones in class “because they use them everywhere and every time” and it is a “good idea to teach them the way they like”. On the other hand, students who viewed using mobile phones in class in a negative way believed that some students chatted during class using social networks. As a result, they lost attention, got confused, wasted time, and could not understand what was taught in class. Some students thought it was not necessary to use mobile phones in class as they do not help students to improve their language skills, while others thought that it was disrespectful and impolite to use mobile phones in class. One student indicated that teachers got angry when mobile phones were used; therefore, they were sent out of the classroom if they used mobile phones in class. Some students admitted that they chatted in class if they noticed pop up messages and they needed to reply to them. However, they admitted that this had a negative effect because they got busy with their phones instead of concentrating in class. Forty students (57.1 %) indicated that they always used mobile phones to check meaning of words during lectures, 25 of the students (35.7%) said they sometimes did, while, 5 of the students (7.1%) said they never did. Interestingly, 56 students (80.0%) indicated that they used their phones to search for relevant topics from the web at home, 12 students (17.1%) agreed that they sometimes did, while, 2 students (2.8%) seldom did. Furthermore, 62 (88.5%) students said that they always chatted during class especially if they received an important message or if the class was boring. Five (7.1%) students indicated that they sometimes chatted with mobile phones during lectures; only, three (4.2%) students said they never chatted during classes. The students listed some mobile phone apps that they used in learning English language inside and outside the classroom. Among these are different dictionaries, for example, Merriam Webster, Oxford dictionary, Dictionary.com, the free dictionary, AB Dictionary, Dictionary online, Longman dictionary, Smart Dictionary, and Golden Dictionary. Social Networks included; Facebook, Instagram, X, Gmail, Yahoo. Mail, and WhatsApp. According to the students, dictionaries were most popular among them, followed by social networking apps, for example, WhatsApp, X, and Facebook.

In light of the above, it will not be entirely wrong if teachers are told to encourage students and guide them to use these apps, or at least encourage them to look for apps that help them in their study by bringing them to the class, or by sharing them with other students after teachers have checked and approved their effectiveness and their appropriateness. This enable students to have access to information and also use available resources to locate information in the 21st century.

4.CONCLUSION

This paper reports on a study that explores students’ attitudes to mobile learning and their perceptions about their practice and challenges of using mobile phone applications in language learning. The participants are students from two (Science Laboratory Technology, and Building Technology) departments. The findings revealed that all students, who

participated in the study, owned mobile phones and over 70% always, had access to the internet. The results also showed that students used a variety of mobile applications to support their effective English language acquisition, although they used them informally without their teachers’ direction or guidance. The results also revealed that many students had a generally positive attitude towards using mobile phones in language learning. As a result, they were able to practice some informal activities and engage themselves in some popular social networking websites to improve their vocabulary. Obviously, the students in this study revealed that students are already engaged informally using different well-known social apps like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube for language learning purposes. The study also revealed that they engage these apps to discuss issues in English, follow other users from different countries and create educational environments away from school rules and formality. However, in order for our students to take full advantage of the available mobile phone applications, teachers should be more involved in guiding students in effective use of these applications in language learning. Instead of the outright condemnation of mobile phone use in the language classrooms by language teachers, teachers should begin to engage policy makers, curriculum designers and the government on the need to allow minimum use of these gadgets by students in the English Language classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author appreciates the support and sponsorship of this Institution Based Research (IBR) via the grant source from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) intervention, year 2025 to make the research a reality.

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