

Attitudes Of Tertiary Students Towards Using Smart Phone Applications In Learning English: The Case Of The Freshmen Enrolling In The General English Requirement In The University College Of Applied Science

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Abstract

The Use of mobile phones and smart phones in education has become very popular with the emergence of this technology and its availability among both learners and teachers. The current study attempted to examine the attitudes of the freshmen students registering in the General English Requirement in the University College of Applied Science towards the use of smart phone applications in learning English. The results of the questionnaire analysis indicate that the majority of the students have positive attitudes towards using English language applications to help them learn English. Yet, student's use of smart phone applications is limited to downloading English language games and dictionaries. Therefore, both teachers and students need to be more aware of the beneficial options that these applications offer to the English language classroom.

Keywords: *smart phones, smart phone applications.*

Introduction

Technology has become vital in the modern era in the field of education. Smart phones and tablets are one shape of the current technology that entered some schools around the world. In some developed countries, some schools have replaced the heavy text books with tablets so that their students can learn more efficiently. Smart phones, tablets, iPad, etc., have become mostly available even in the hands of children. How our children sometimes ace the use of smart phones better than us, their parents, is a wonder! Thus, looking into how to learn from this technology and how to use it learning and teaching has become a must.

Literature Review

Since the beginning of the 21st Century, the advances of mobile technology attracted not only those who wish to use this technology for communication, but also those who wish to use it as means for teaching and learning languages, in general, and English, in particular. Various studies around the world tried to examine the different facets of using mobile technology in education in terms of how meaningful it is for the learning process (Kesk, Metcalf, & Florida, 2011; Kukulska-hulme, 2010; Meurant, 2009; Nah, White, Sussex, & Nah, 2008; Ogata et al., 2010; P. Thornton & Houser, 2004) and the learners in terms of their attitudes, preparedness (Rahamat, Shah, Din, Bt, & Aziz, 2005; Stockwell, 2013), and motivation (Meurant, 2010a, 2010b). Some studies even tried to set the pedagogical theories and rules for how to use it properly in the EFL or ESL classroom (Hincks, 2003; Kesk et al., 2011; Kukulska-hulme, 2010; Park & Tech, 2011; Thornton & Houser, 2004; Vinci, Cucchi, & Vinci, n.d.).

Advocates versus opponents of mobile phone in education

When mobile applications and technologies appeared in Education, many researchers were skeptical about its use as they showed their concerned and doubts about its usefulness. In fact, they considered it as a mean for distraction to students rather than as a meaningful tool for language learning; therefore, it should be banned from schools (Katz, 2003). However, others believed that mobile devices are an extension for the e-learning as these devices became very popular in the hands of both teachers and students. Thus, it will be wise to exploit it well to reach the youth who are not interested in the regular classroom procedures but can respond and communicate effectively with their teachers if this technology was handled properly (Prensky, 2004)

Learners with mobile phones around the world: readiness, attitudes and motivation

The debate about the use of mobile phones in education surpassed the question of whether it is useful or harmful as it became imminent in education. Therefore, many studies started to explore the possibilities of the different devices that are available in the hands of students such as the old version of mobile phone with instant messages, smart phones with touch screens, ipad, ipods, digital cameras, etc. These studies tried to provide statistical information about the use of these devices by students in terms of how and why they use it in different parts of the world with various cultural differences (Attewell & Savill-smith, 2004; Katz, 2003; Nah et al., 2008; P. Thornton & Houser, 2004; Patricia Thornton & Houser, 2005).

Such studies paved the way for following research to be conducted about the attitudes of learners towards mobile learning with its various technologies and how to motivate students to use them for reasons other than enjoyment and communication but rather than for learning English for several purposes. Some researchers tried to discover how mobile phones affect learners overall literacy in English (Meurant, 2010b), while others tried to investigate the effect of using mobile phones on learning certain aspect of English. According to Stockwell (2013), the overall subjects of his study showed interest in using their mobiles for vocabulary learning with a positive attitudes towards it, which gives hope for educators to convince their students to use their mobiles effectively for learning. With the right training and right directions, students can learn English in ways we cannot imagine.

Sailing the boat to the shore of safety:

After examining this new trend of using mobile phones, educators tried to direct teachers and learners by setting clear theories and pedagogical instructions that can control the learning process to reach the maximum positive results. Park & Tech (2011) tried in their study to provide a framework for educators to exploit mobile phone technology to enable students merge between the personal and social aspects of mobile usage. As this field is advancing, research is still scarce in this arena as every researcher builds up a base for other research in order to enable others benefit from the knowledge gained with experiment. Can we say that we sailed the mobile boat to safety? We do not know! The mobile boat is still wandering.

Research Objectives

The aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To discover the most common activities that UCAS students do using their smart phones.
2. To discover the attitudes of the UCAS students towards the use of smart phone applications in learning English.

Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the common activities that the UCAS students do with their smart phones?
2. What are the attitudes of the UCAS students towards downloading and using English language learning applications?

Methodology

Subjects

The target population of this study is 53 male and 47 female freshmen in a community colleges' students in Gaza taking the General English Requirement Course. Most of the community college students obtain low scores in their General High School Certificate Exams. Thus, they choose to study in a two-year diploma degree. In addition, English is not generally their favorite topic. Some of them even pass it with difficulty. Their main problem, as observed from teaching for almost 10 years in such colleges, is learning English vocabulary in terms of its meaning, spelling and pronunciation.

Instrument

This study follows the quantitative methods of collecting and analyzing data, thus the researcher gathered data through distributing questionnaires on the target population. The researcher distributed the questionnaire only among those students who said that they have smart phones that have internet access. These questionnaires then were analyzed using (SPSS 20). The researcher would utilize the following statistical tools:

1. Cronbach's Alpha and Split Half Method for Reliability Statistics.
2. Frequency and Descriptive analysis.
3. Parametric Tests (One-sample T test).

T-test is used to determine if the mean of a paragraph is significantly different from a hypothesized value 2 (Middle value of Likert scale). If the P-value (Sig.) is smaller than or equal to the level of significance, $\alpha = 0.05$, then the mean of a paragraph is significantly different from a hypothesized value 2. The sign of the Test value indicates whether the mean is significantly greater or smaller than hypothesized value 2. On the other hand, if the P-value (Sig.) is greater than the level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$, then the mean a paragraph is insignificantly different from a hypothesized value 2.

Reliability of the Research

The reliability of an instrument is the degree of consistency which measures the attribute; it is supposed to be measuring. The less variation an instrument produces in repeated measurements of an attribute, the higher its reliability. Reliability can be equated with the stability, consistency, or dependability of a measuring tool. The test is repeated to the same sample of people on two occasions and then compares the scores obtained by computing a reliability coefficient.

(A) Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha

The normal range of Cronbach's coefficient alpha value between 0.0 and + 1.0, and the higher values reflects a higher degree of internal consistency. The value of Cronbach's Alpha equals 0.757. This value is considered high which indicates an good reliability of the entire questionnaire.

(B) Split Half Method

The correlation coefficient between the odd and even questions equal 0.636. The Spearman-Brown Coefficient equals 0.778. This correlation coefficient is statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, so it can be said that the questionnaire is consistent and valid to be measure what it was set for.

Findings of Statistical data and discussion

Part one: Demographic Information

Figure 1
Distribution of Male and female students

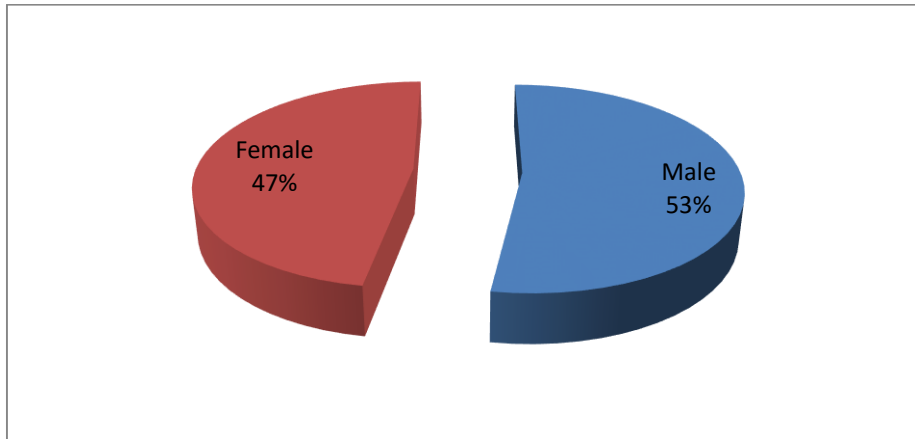


Figure (1) illustrates that the female respondents constitutes 47%, while the males were 53%. The number of male and female respondents is not even due to the fact that, the researcher asked who owns a smart phone, and then gave the respondents the questionnaire. Also, this paper did not focus on the gender factor.

Figure 2
The Age of the respondents

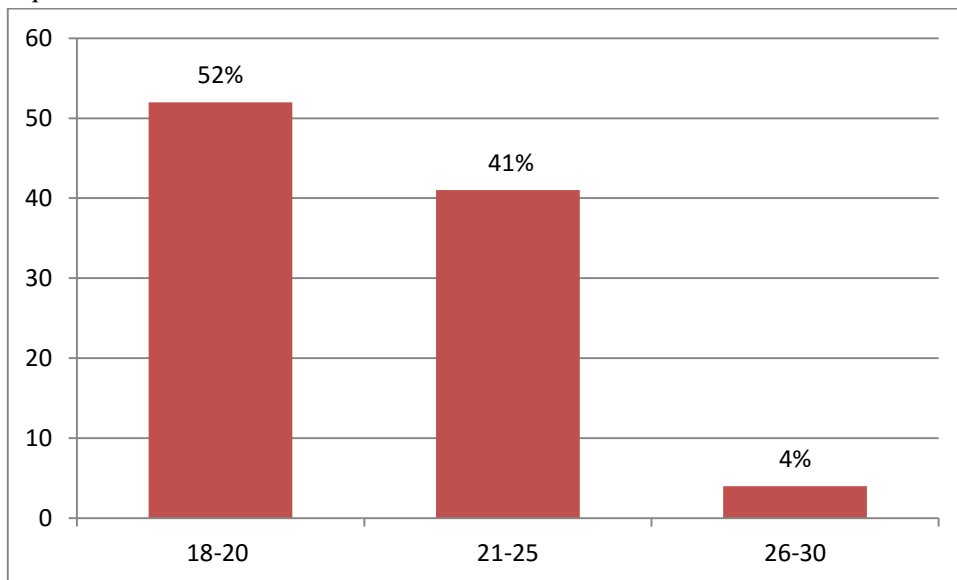


Figure (2) illustrates that the majority of the respondents are in their early to Mid-20s, which constitutes 52% of the study population, while those are heading towards their 30 constitute only 4%, and the rest of the population who are in their Mid-20s constitute 41% of the population.

Figure 3
What is your CGPA?

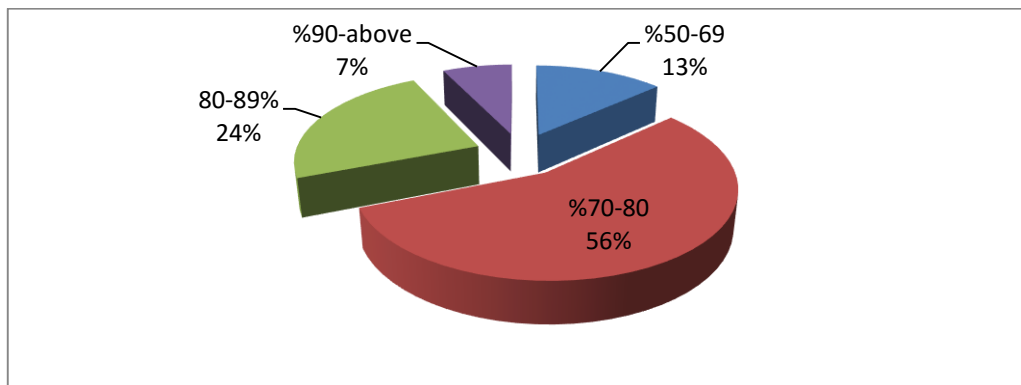


Figure (3) indicates that the Cumulative Grade Point of Average (CGPA) of the respondents, which shows that the majority of the respondents- about 56% have "Good" standing with their CGPA is between (70-80%), while students 24% have a "Very Good" and only 7% have an "Excellent" standing.

Part Two: What are the common activities you do when using you smart phone?

Table 1

Item	Mean	Proportional mean (%)	Test value T	P-value (Sig.)	Rank
Making phone calls	2.82	94.16	19.88	0.000*	1
Sending SMS	2.64	87.85	12.33	0.000*	2
Taking photos	2.50	83.33	8.19	0.000*	3
Audio recording	1.86	62.11	-2.18	0.016*	7
Checking social communication websites	2.42	80.70	6.06	0.000*	4
Checking news and cultural website	1.71	56.94	-4.31	0.000*	8
Checking English learning websites	1.64	54.74	-5.36	0.000*	9
Writing e-mails	2.07	69.07	0.98	0.165	6
All Item	2.23	74.41	6.39	0.000*	

Analysis for each Item

Table 1 shows the following results

The mean of item No.1 “Making phone calls” equals 2.82 (94.16%), Test-value = 19.88, and P-value = 0.000 which is smaller than the level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$. The sign of the test is positive, so the mean of this item is significantly greater than the hypothesized value 2. It is concluded that the respondents strongly agreed to this item, as it constitutes the largest percentage, about 90% of their activity.

While the mean of item No. 7 “Checking English learning websites” equals 1.64 (54.74%), Test-value = -5.36, and P-value = 0.001 which is smaller than the level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$. The sign of the test is negative, so the mean of this item is significantly smaller than the hypothesized value 2. It is conclude that the respondents disagreed to this item.

The overall result of the analysis of the common activities done by the respondents shows that the major activities are related to social communication; such as making phone calls, taking photo, sending SMS, and checking email; whereas checking educational websites in English has the least activity which only constitutes about 50% of their daily activity.

Part Three: students' attitudes towards using smart phones for learning English

Table 2

Means and Test values for "Students' attitudes towards using smart phone applications in English"

	Item	Mean	Proportional mean (%)	Test value T	P-value (Sig.)	Rank
.1	I prefer to write SMS in English	1.78	59.45	-3.13	0.001*	10
.2	I prefer to write e-mails in English	1.76	58.76	-3.07	0.001*	11
.3	I feel that writing SMS in English is hard.	2.28	76.04	3.54	0.000*	4
.4	I download apps. in English on my smart phone	2.24	74.65	2.97	0.002*	6
.5	I write SMS in English characters but with Arabic spelling	2.08	69.42	0.98	0.164	9
.6	I download games for teaching English on my phone	2.47	82.47	6.33	0.000*	1
.7	I download apps for teaching English on my phone	2.22	73.96	2.56	0.006*	7
.8	I download English-Arabic dictionary on my phone	2.36	78.69	4.27	0.000*	3
.9	I feel that I learned a lot of vocabulary from the dictionary on my phone	2.38	79.38	4.57	0.000*	2
.10	I feel that I learned a lot of vocabulary because I write SMS in English	2.27	75.79	3.26	0.001*	5
.11	I feel that using the smart phone is not useful for learning English	1.34	44.79	-10.80	0.000*	12
.12	I feel that I write in English using my smart phone better than speaking English through it.	2.20	73.26	2.54	0.006*	8
	All Item	2.12	70.56	3.39	0.001*	

Table 2 shows the following results

The mean of item No.6 “I download games for teaching English on my phone” equals 2.47 (82.47%), Test-value = 6.33, and P-value = 0.000 which is smaller than the level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$. The sign of the test is positive, so the mean of this item is significantly greater than the hypothesized value 2. It is conclude that the respondents strongly agreed to this item.

The mean of item No.11 “I feel that using the smart phone is not useful for learning English” equals 1.34 (44.79%), Test-value = -10.80, and P-value = 0.000 which is smaller than the level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$. The sign of the test is negative, so the mean of this item is significantly smaller than the hypothesized value 2. It is conclude that the respondents disagreed to this item. This result indicates that the majority of the respondents understand that using smart phones is useful for learning English, which is a positive result.

These results indicated that the highest attitude that the respondents have is for downloading games in English on their smart phones with about 80% of the respondents agreeing to this item. Whereas, downloading English-Arabic dictionaries comes in the second place with 78% of the respondents agreeing to this item. This results indicates that the respondents understands the importance of having dictionaries on their mobiles, yet the questionnaire didn't ask about the amount of daily use of these dictionaries.

In addition, the respondents attitude towards writing e-mails and SMS in English is not high enough, as the results of these items in the questionnaire are close with around 58% of the respondents agreeing to this item, which constitutes only about half of the respondents.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The focus of this study was only on the attitudes of the UCAS freshmen students registering in the General English Language course, thus it didn't focus on other factors; such as the relationship between gender and attitude, or specialty of the students and their attitude. In light of the research findings, it is suggested to conduct the same study on a bigger number of students, with more factors to examine, and with focus on verbal responses from the respondents.

Implications

The use of mobile phones in the language classroom is encouraged in a number of countries as previous studies indicated that their use motivated students to participate more than before (Rahamat et al., 2005). Yet, in the Arab countries, the use of mobile phones and smart phones in education is not as welcomed as it is in other places. Both teachers and learners need to be aware of the various options and possibilities offered by this technology to benefit the language learners. In addition, the use of mobile phones can alleviate the pressure on the teachers in the condensed classrooms (Aamri & Suleiman, 2011). It is worth mentioning that the population of this study targeted mainly students with smart phones, which is not available to other students who are economically unable to purchase such devices. Thus, future studies should take into consideration these students and how can we, as teachers help them jump on board with their peers and enjoy the benefits of this technology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper attempted to investigate the attitudes of the use of Smart phone applications among freshmen students registering in the English Language Requirement. The results indicated that students have positive attitudes towards using their smart phones for learning English but in a very limited way. Students use do not exploit the various options of using their smart phones beside the regular communication purposes it offers. They need to be me aware of the benefits of using smart phones in learning English along with their teachers. Thus, the study proposed some suggestion for the students and teachers. Also, recommendations for further research were presented to overcome the limitations of the current study in terms of considering other factors such as gender and specialty of the population of the study as well as the their opinion

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