MOBILE TECHNOLOGY FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: STUDENTS' AND TRAINEE TEACHERS' REFLECTIVE VIEWS OF CELL PHONES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

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Article Info

Abstract

Even if scholars realize the emergence of cell phones opening up a range of opportunities for 'learning on the move', there are not many studies on how they can be used and how students and trainee teachers view them as tools for English Language Teaching and Learning in EFL context. This case study, therefore, aims to explore students' post-intervention views to mobile assisted lessons, examine trainee teachers' reaction to the experience of teaching with cell phones and identify issues with learning and teaching reading and listening with Cell phones. To achieve these objectives, twelve trainee teachers' short-time attachment reports to five secondary schools, one teacher training college and one university on applying cell phones for teaching listening and reading skills as part of the tasks for their Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) course during 2015 to 2017 academic years were analyzed. The reports indicated that students viewed cell phones as useful tools for learning reading and listening, but it was also reported that they were concerned with their skills of using cell phones for learning. Similarly, the self-report showed that the trainee teachers themselves viewed the cell phones as helpful tools for teaching reading and listening despite some technical difficulties they faced. Finally, it was recommended that such working cases need to be expanded to other Ethiopian educational contexts and be embraced by as many schools as possible.

Key words: Cell phone; CALL, Reading, Listening, MALL

INTRODUCTION

Many schools in Ethiopia forbid students from bringing cell phones with them because of the fear of the nuisance they may cause in the classrooms. Humble-Thaden (2011, p.14) states, "Policy regarding cell phone use by students in school will not change unless studies indicate that administrators and faculty also view them as valuable learning tools." On the contrary, schools try a number of ways to motivate students for learning, to improve the quality of students' learning experience, and to increase access to the classroom lessons during non-classroom time. These attempts include providing home take assignments, arranging tutorial classes, and providing textbooks for reading in their libraries. All these attempts limit students to do the access and learning at certain station and time. However, a number of studies see the emergence of pocket-sized ICT devices such as cell phones opening up a range of opportunities for 'learning on the move' with little influence of time and space for learning. Zhang, (2012) states that experience with teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Australia suggests L2 students are no longer learning the way we used to do as they now learn through looking up dictionaries online, on their iPod or iPhones. Kukulska-Hulme (2009) also confirms that the widespread ownership of mobile phones and the increasing availability of other portable and wireless devices have been changing the landscape of technology-supported learning.

Despite the fact that their abundance is limited, it is also not uncommon to see students in Ethiopia holding handy digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, iPods, etc. that can help them learn anywhere (Tesfaye, 2016). If their teachers integrate their lessons with online learning, they will definitely improve students' opportunity to 'learn on the move' referred to as 'm-learning' or 'learning with handheld devices' (Hockly, 2013, p.80). Evans (2008) asserts that the use of portable technologies makes it easier for learners to study when and where they

want and they facilitate ''just-in-time'' learning where learners can often take advantage of unexpected free time since they frequently have their devices with them. McBride, (2009, p. 156) states, "Mobile learning solutions also alleviate institutions of some of the needed hours of available language lab space, thus presenting a possible financial benefit." Mobile devices are particularly useful in learning listening skills as most such devices can playback audio and video texts (Shinagawa, 2012). Hockly (2013, p.83) states, "The future is increasingly mobile, and it behoves us to reflect this in our teaching practice." Hockly (2015, p.312) further asserts, "app-based, mobile approaches are now major, long-term players in the online language learning space." Carrier (1997) predicted that ten years from then we would be able to access everything by wireless connection, so we would never be out of reach of resources or personal communication. However, Kukulska-Hulme (2009) is concerned about mobile technology taking learning beyond the reach of the teacher and suggests the need to develop designs that clearly identify what is best learnt in the classroom, what should be learnt outside, and the ways in which connections between these settings will be made. On the other hand, according to Sung, Chang, and Yang (2015) the evident substantial contributions of mobile devices to language learning have not yet been investigated. Particularly in Ethiopia, reports of practical working cases are scanty.

In such a context, teachers need to demonstrate to their students how cell phones can be used for English Language Learning. This requires training the teachers themselves in an in-service or pre-service context on cell phones for English Language Teaching and Learning. This study, therefore, was a report of an attempt made in a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) Course for post graduate trainees with the objectives of exploring students' views to mobile assisted lessons they were involved in, examining trainee teachers' reaction to the experience of teaching with cell phones, and identifying issues with learning and teaching reading and listening with Cell phones.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This case study was made based on a post-intervention report document analysis of twelve Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Master of Arts trainee teachers. The report was about their short-time attachment to five secondary schools, one teacher training college, and one university at Arba Minch, Sodo and Gerese towns in Ethiopia on applying cell phones for teaching listening and reading as part of their home take assignment of CALL course during 2015 to 2017 academic years. The education centers and students for teaching reading and listening with cell phones were conveniently selected by the trainees themselves.

The trainee teachers were required to demonstrate (teach) listening and reading lessons using cell phones and report back students' views and their own reflection on the lessons. The details of the instructions for the attachment tasks were presented on their e-learning portal of the course, http://elearning.amu.edu.et/course/view.php. Figure 1 is a screen shot of where the instructions are set in the e-learning portal. The instructions read as follows:

Table 1

Instructions for cell phone assisted listening and reading lessons

- Prepare a listening and reading lesson appropriate to grade eleven or any appropriate context to you.
- Transfer to your cell phones
- Share them with your students through Bluetooth or any file transfer means in their cell phones
- Ask your students to do the listening and reading tasks from their cell phones
- Ask them to say whatever they have felt about the lessons and their usability in their situation
- Prepare written and oral reports of the task.
- Include a description of what you did and how you did it, your students' reactions and comments, your reflection about the tasks and usability in your context in the educational centers you selected.

The portal which included this assignment was developed for the CALL course by the teacher researcher for assisting the trainees take the course in an e-blended learning environment. The trainees submitted their reports online at this portal and they were all downloaded from the portal for assessment and for analysis.
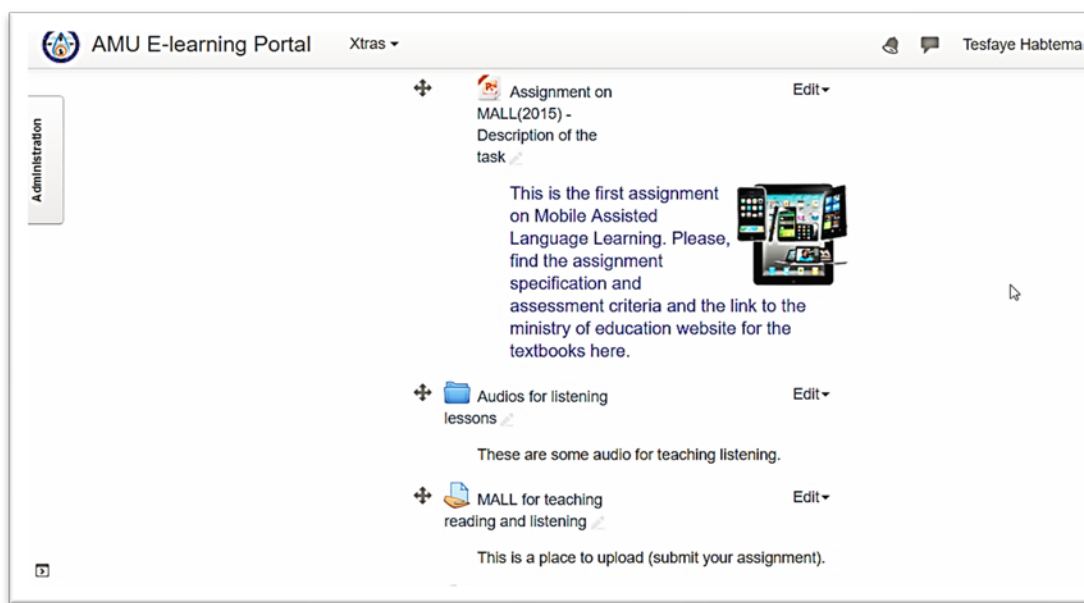

Figure 1: Screenshot of the task on Cell phone tasks

As reported by the trainees, they selected 36 students (four each) on the bases of their possession of cell phones and they conducted the lessons in none-scheduled classes. Contents for reading lessons were taken from teaching materials prepared for the levels (secondary schools, teacher training college and university). However, the listening lessons were collected from different sources including the ones uploaded in the e-learning portal itself.

The tasks and texts for reading were in PDF and Word format and the listening texts were audio records collected from different sources. These were

transferred into the students' cell phones through Bluetooth, C-share and Xender as appropriate. Students were then asked to do the tasks as provided. The reading tasks required the students to read from their cell phone screens and write answers to the tasks on their note books for latter discussion. Similarly, the students were required to use their earphones to listen to the audio texts and do the tasks.
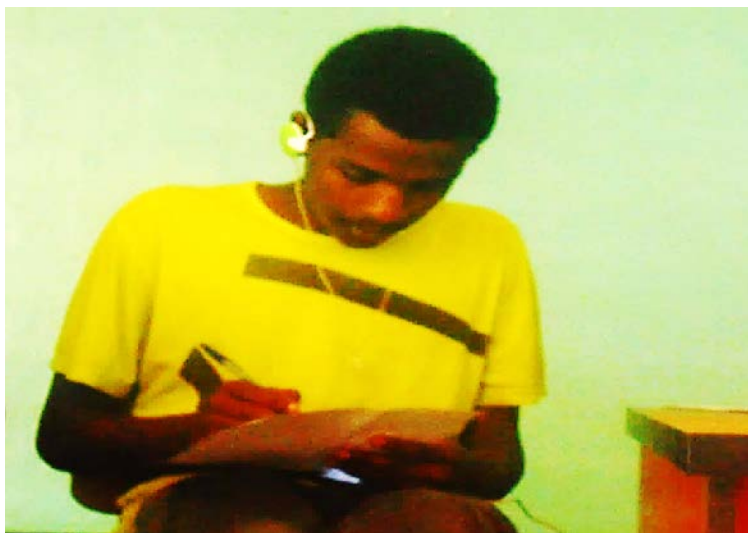

Figure 2: A picture taken by Getachew while a student is listening to the lesson from his cells phone

The analysis of the results was done qualitatively grouping the reports into three major themes and six sub-themes. In the analysis, trainee teachers' real names were used as they granted the teacher-researcher permission for using them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion of the study thematized into the three major and six sub-themes. These are the students' views of using cell phones for learning, trainee teachers' reflective views on using cell phones for

teaching, and issues about using cell phones for learning and teaching listening and reading.

Students' Views of Using Cell Phones for Learning Reading and Listening

According to the report documents, all the twelve participants interviewed all the students involved in their lessons at the end of using cell phones for the reading and listening lessons. According to the self-reports, all the students they interviewed mentioned that their involvement in the mobile assisted reading and listening lessons has helped them to innovatively see cell phones as educational tools with a number of benefits which are presented below.

Cell phones as new tools for language learning

The reports showed that the students' involvement in the cell phone assisted lessons has helped them to see cell phones as new and potential tools for language learning. Hirut, in Garda's report, stated that her involvement in the cell phone assisted lessons has shown her a new direction.

> ... In my personal cause [sic], I use mobile for limited purposes like for communication including face book referring dictionary and bible uploaded and listening music are some of my benefits I get from my mobile. But now today I view the new direction which is using mobile for language learning. We can learn skill, vocabulary and grammar issues as well.

In support of this a student named Beyene from Arba Minch College of Teacher Education in Kako's report said, "I didn't believe that mobile has such a power to teach English rather than taking a photograph and using for saying hallo".

Mesfin in his summary of responses from students he interviewed at Gerese Secondary and preparatory school stated that

It is like an innovation. Before now we learn listening only in the classroom every time. Using our cell phones enable us to practice it outside the classroom. It helps us to listen the lesson repeatedly because when we learn listening in the classroom, the reader reads it once and it passes without having clear insight. In addition, we can identify the correct the meaning of each sentences and the whole idea of the listening lesson through repeating.

Shewit, who reported that she switched to Arba Minch Teacher Education college because she was unable to get permission from Arba Minch Secondary and preparatory school, wrote that her students learned that cell phones can be used for learning other than listening to music or browsing for Facebook.

Cell phones as tools promoting English language learning and performance
Even if all the reports indicated that the students viewed their involvement in the cell phone assisted learning provided them a number of benefits, a student named Hirut Yasin from Arba Minch Secondary and Preparatory school in Garda's report specifically stated:

If we use this system or technology, it is very necessary to promote our learning. It develops our performance in learning language when we hear videos and audio of different speakers we develop our English proficiency and fluency.

Mariam's report after using cell phone for teaching reading and listening in the course Communicative English at Arba Minch University indicated what one of her students sees as a benefit.

The second student says it is good to learn from cell phone because it saves their time, to know the meaning of new words easily which means to check up in their dictionary from their phone immediately, to save their money

instead of paying for handout, and to carry their phone with them as they want at anytime and anywhere.

Zelalem also reported that his students said the listening lesson helped them to become familiar with the pronunciation of foreigners.

Cell phones as tools solving shortage of language learning material

Mihiret, who had been attached to Arba Minch university community school, reported that one particular female student sees cell phones solving shortage of books.

> …. reading from mobile phone is better than reading from the text book because in the school there was a shortage of books to give for all students in classroom we were reading one book in group of four or five. Using this kind of technology will reduce this problem in addition to this she said it will create the ability to practice reading at any time and place and it also reduce the burden of carrying a big text books in their bag.

Similarly, Hirut Yasin in Garda's report stated "When people upload and use text books in the mobile, it solves text book problems in one side."
Zelalem also reported that students,

> …use of mobile for language learning is very interesting. They like it very much because they don't carry different modules or books to the class. They can use it (their mobile) everywhere and at any time. They said that the listening lesson help them to become familiar with the pronunciation of foreigners.

The reports showed similar views in the usefulness of cell phones for learning listening and reading. Some of the reports in particular indicated that the use of cell phone for learning listening and reading has shown that cell phones can be used for learning as opposed to their usual use for communication. This agrees

with Azar and Nasiri (2014), who attempted to investigate the effectiveness of cell-phone in Iranian L2 listening comprehension, and students' attitudes toward the mobile technology in educational centers. The results of this research showed that cell phones are an interesting and innovative way for learning a new language. It is also consonant with Tessier's (2013) survey which documented the positive perceptions that students have of using their cell phones in the classroom for academic purposes. Students felt that using cell phones in this way improved their learning, heightened their enjoyment of the class, increased their success, and moderately improved their attendance, while not serving as a significant distraction. A study by Soleimani, Ismail and Mustaffa (2013) which explored the extent of acceptance of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) among graduate students in Malaysia showed a positive response to MALL as a convenient, practical and easy way of assisting ESL learners in enhancing their ESL learning. Cell phones, therefore, seem to be viewed positively regardless of the differences in the contexts of use. This might be because technologies are inherently motivating as educational tools and cell phones specifically have the potential to extend learning out of class in every context.

Trainee teachers' Reflective views on using Cell phones for Teaching Reading and Listening

Trainee teachers were expected to reflect on using cell phones for teaching reading and listening based on their observation and involvement in the practices. This section analyses their reflections as presented in their reports for the task.

Kako reported that the experience has helped him to learn new things. To quote:

Even, I myself learned many things from this assignment. Even though recording audio in my PC seems easy, I couldn't do it well. Therefore, I

recorded my sound in my cell-phone and send it to my students. Then, I wrote exercise using my PC and shared it to my phone using USB device. Then I send it to my students. I also changed this assignment into power point presentation so that I could easily use for classroom presentation. Moreover, I learned that I must work hard so that I would use my cell-phone as well as my PC.

Mesfin reflected on the usability of the tools for teaching and learning as follows:

In fact, using cell phones for actual classroom teaching and learning purpose make the process more effective. Learners can practice it even outside the classroom without any difficulties. I can genuinely claim that using cell phones provide multiple opportunities for learners. In my school context it is possible to practice it, and it seems more useful.

Metasebia sees the technology providing special advantage to language learning regardless of the constraints she observes. This is presented in her report:

Nowadays due to the growth of wireless technologies, MALL is available through numerous devices. Such devices support the retention and utilization of newly acquired language skills. Although there are constraints of mobile assisted learning, mobile phones for pedagogical purposes can be an exquisite facilitator for both teachers and learners.

Mihiret also reflected that…

… teaching listening through the help of mobile phone also helped me to save my time and energy because students can learn by themselves at any time and place. In addition to this it also helped both the teacher and students to be familiar with new technologies to make the teaching and learning method more motivating.

Similarly, Zelalem sees benefits of using cell phones at a Teacher Education College:

> I can say that the use of mobile for language teaching and learning is very much interesting for the teacher and the students. I saw that students were very much eager in sending and receiving files. Besides, all of them were very much concentrated on the activities. However, both the teacher and the students need to have some technical knowledge of the devices and the applications that they use.

The analysis of the reflections indicates that the trainee teachers were positive about using cell phones for teaching. These teachers' positive views about using cell phones for teaching English Language might have come because they have practically seen the pros and cons of teaching with cell phones by using the tools themselves for the purpose. This agrees with a study by Thomas, O'Bannon and Bolton (2013) on Teachers' perspectives of inclusion, benefits, and barriers. The study surveyed 79 teachers to determine their perceptions of using cell phones for classroom instruction. Findings indicated that the majority (69%) of teachers support the use of cell phones in the classroom. Therefore, teachers seem to generally support the use of cell phones for teaching, yet it may require a more comprehensive study to ascertain the results.

Issues with Using Cell phones for Learning Reading and Listening

Regardless of a number of benefits identified, the reports showed a number of issues with using cell phones for the reading and listening lessons. Some quotes taken from the documents are presented here for analysis.

Cell phones may distract students and are not good for health

Cell phones are believed to distract student when they are used in the classroom learning. Belaynesh in her report identified

The disadvantage of this technology I think in teaching time students may not give attention to read the given PDF and given tasks because some students are open another application to see face book, to chat with friends and to see unnecessary film and others.

Mariam mentions a student who gave comments on issues with using cell phones for learning

She says if they don't understand something who is going to make them understand, she also says when the battery switches off it is difficult to finish the lesson. The last not least student says it is not important to learn from the cell phone because it is not good for their eyes during reading.

Therefore, cell phones are not fully appreciated as educational tools by the participants.

Cell phones are technically challenging and are for the rich

In some of the reports cell phones were criticized for their technical limitations. Damalka reported,

As I observe the class, most of them have smart phone and easily do things, but some of them have ordinary phone and when I tried to transfer data insert memory and SD card but was difficult.

Meles stated that limited battery power in smart phones and shortage of electricity to charge were barriers mentioned by the students. Mesfin observed that teachers can also be challenged because preparing a listening lesson, transferring in to cell phones, and sharing to the whole class may take time. Lukas seems to be challenged by the technology himself. He reported that it was very challenging to

him because the technology was new to him. Zelalem listed a number of challenges he faced in using cell phones for teaching reading and listening. He noted:

> ➢ I couldn`t take the reading section only from the rest part of the unit and send it to the students.
>
> ➢ Some of the mobile devices can't be paired using Bluetooth.
>
> ➢ The application that I use to send data isn't found in students' mobiles and vice versa.
>
> ➢ Some of the students' mobiles can't support (read) the text files (ppt and pdf) but all the mobiles have received the audio file.
>
> ➢ I couldn't send all the files for all the students at the same time but one after the other.
>
> ➢ It is difficult to start the listening activity equally at the same time. One begins after the other and creates disturbance.
>
> ➢ During a listening activity, it was impossible to read the activity while listening to the audio (on mobiles we can't open two programs at the same time).

Shewit sees economic problem as an issue to using cell phones for learning because students cannot afford smart mobile. Moreover, she sees basic skill of computer is mandatory to use cell phones effectively.

School rules against cell phone use in schools

Schools do not seem to welcome cell phones as they do not see them as educational tools because they have not seen them being used for the purpose. Metasebia quoted a student regarding school rules against bringing cell phones to school

> …in our context even bringing cell phones to school is considered as making a great sin and we are strongly forbidden to bring cell phones to school. It is unthinkable to come to school with mobile phones we let it our home until we return back to home.

Shewit was forced to switch to Arba Minch Teacher Education College because she was unable to get permission from Arba Minch Secondary and preparatory school because of the school rules against cell phone use.

Generally, the reports showed major issues in using cell phones. Some of these were contextually specific to Ethiopia. Some students were technically challenged as they did not exactly know how to send and receive files and where to find the received files while others think it was not good for health. Some also complained that schools did not allow them to bring cell phones. The battery life of the cell phones was also mentioned as a limitation. The study supports prior literature on issues with using cell phones for learning. Klímová (2018) reviewed a bulk of literature in the area and identified limitations such as small screen size, limited battery life, lack of pedagogical justifications, high costs of the device, and lack of human contact. Chinnery (2006) also mentioned challenges which included reduced screen sizes, limited audio-visual quality, virtual keyboarding and one-finger data entry, and limited power. Despite some differences in some of the issues mentioned with the current study, the similarities in most of the limitations might be because challenges are common across contexts. This may in turn imply similar solutions if cell phones are to continue to be used for learning English Language.

CONCLUSIONS

This case analysis reported the outcome of twelve trainee teachers short-time attachment to selected secondary schools, a teacher training college and a university on applying cell phones for teaching listening and reading skills as part of the tasks for Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) course during 2015 to 2017 academic years. The study revealed that students viewed cell phones as useful tools for learning reading and listening, but they were also concerned with their skills of using cell phones for learning. Trainee teachers also viewed cell phones as valuable teaching tools. However, they also reported that they were

technically challenged by the technology. With the reported positive views of students and trainee teachers, it is important that such working cases are expanded to other educational contexts. It is also essential that teachers are trained to use cell phones for teaching. However, as this case analysis is limited to post-intervention self-reported document analysis, studies involving more tools are required to confirm the results. Studies may also need to see if cell phone assisted learning can apply to large classes.

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