

Utilizing Students' Personal Technology in Higher Education

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Abstract:- The emergence of new technologies has dramatically changed the way people live, gather information, carry out research, and interact with others. The use of modern devices such as smartphones and tablets have become an essential means of everyday life for today's students as well. The focus of this study is to better understand how effectively students' personal mobile devices can be integrated into teaching and learning English. This research provides teachers with guidelines about how to implement technology in their classroom in order to help higher education students to take control of their own learning for the rest of their lives, to facilitate communication and interaction, and to enable them to learn English at their own pace.

Keywords:- Smartphones; Higher Education; Personal Technology; Interaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

This Nowadays, English as an international language, is used in different fields such as business, industry, technology, economics and education (Schulzke, 2014; Dumitrescu, 2016). In the new globalized era, English language is considered as a global lingua franca which is used by different people from different countries for communication and interaction (Reddy, Mahavidyalaya, & Hyderabad, 2016). English opens opportunities for better education and getting a good job (Ahmad, 2016). Therefore, many decide to put much effort, energy, time and money to improve their English. However, learning English in a non-English-speaking country like Iran is very challenging because Iranian students do not have chance to communicate with the native speakers of English outside the classroom (Hayati, 2010). Many research studies have verified that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students face many challenges in learning English (e.g. McCardle & Hoff, 2006; Seefa, 2017; Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012; Azizifar, Koosha, & Lotfi, 2010). Numerous researchers believe that overpopulated classrooms (Dehghan & Sahragard, 2015; Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2014), teachers' approaches (Yunus, Salehi, & Amini, 2016), limited teaching time (Farahmand & Kowsary, 2016; Mahmoodi Moemen Abadi & Fahandezh Saadi, 2015), inefficient teaching resources in EFL contexts (Azizifar, Koosha & Lotfi, 2010; Ghorbani, 2011) lead to the observable shortage in the majority of Iranian EFL students'

ability to develop their English. As Safari and Sahragard (2015) point out that Iranian educational system suffers a lack of efficacy to meet students' needs despite the theoretical and pedagogical progress. Therefore, to cope with the challenges faced by Iranian EFL students and teachers, this study proposes the implementation of personal mobile devices in innovative ways as a solution to facilitate English learning and teaching and help the students fulfil their needs.

In recent years, innovations in mobile technology has had a great impact on the traditional teaching mode (Hu & Du, 2012), as the traditional classroom, blackboard, and textbooks can no longer satisfy today's students' needs (Keengwe, 2015). Today's students have dramatically changed from prior generations. The use of technology has become an integral part of students' life. Over the past decade, new generations of students have been using personal technologies, such as smart phone, laptops, and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), at different levels of their education to facilitate learning (Jabbour, 2014). With the development of new technologies, today's students have been exposed to the large amount of information and resources. As a consequence, students are no longer passive recipients of information, but rather they are active creators in the process of their learning.

Many research studies also have found that most students prefer learning with technology (Alavi & Abdollahipour, 2014; Saba, 2009). Likewise, the majority of the teachers feel comfortable with technology and believe that technology can save their time and effort (Tafazoli & Golshan, 2014). According to Kolb (2008), if educational technology pedagogy provides students with tools and knowledge that students already possess, they will have better opportunities to connect learning inside and outside classroom. Learning through personal mobile technologies enables students to follow lessons according to their own schedule, without needing to physically attend classroom (Valk, Rashid & Elder, 2010). Accordingly, Mobile Learning (ML) is defined by Masrom and Ismali (2010, p.9) as "the acquisition of any knowledge and skill through the use of mobile technology literally anywhere and anytime". As a result, through using technology, teachers can address the strengths, interest, and needs of the individual students, and provide students with the essential skills and knowledge to be able to independently direct their own learning process (Moeller & Reitzes, 2011).

Many studies in mobile learning concentrated largely on the effectiveness of ML in the pedagogical language program (Abbasi & Hashemi, 2013; Taki & Khazaei, 2011; Azabdaftari & Mozaheb, 2012; Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009; Tabatabaei & Heidari Goojani, 2012; Zare & Amirian, 2014); thus, integrating new technologies into language teaching and learning should be an important goal of language education (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). In this regard, instructors should understand how best to use technologies to support various kinds of learning (Motallebzadeh, Beh-Afarin, & Daliry Rad, 2011). In other words, the success of ML depends on how appropriately and effectively technologies are implemented in education. The mere availability of mobile devices does not guarantee the success of ML implementation and it is advised that educators discover the innovative and creative ways to benefit from the unique features and capabilities of mobile technologies. However, a variety of research studies indicated that many instructors have faced the challenges of knowing how to more effectively implement technology in their classroom to address today's students' needs and interests (Kuo, 2008; Dashtestani, 2014; Teng, 2017). Therefore, the aim of this study is to demonstrate how the shift to student-centered learning approach can maximize the effectiveness of instruction for EFL students using their mobile devices.

II. STUDENT-CENTERED MOBILE LEARNING

Due to growing educational technology, a variety of research in EFL highlight the need to shift from traditional teacher-centered learning towards student-centered learning (Hmaid, 2014; Nakatani, 2005; Gulnaz, Alfaqih, & Mashhour, 2015; Başal, 2012; Zare, 2012). In a traditional one-size-fits-all model of education, students play passive roles, having no control over their own learning, just receivers of teachers' knowledge, and teachers make all the decisions concerning the course, teaching methods, and the different forms of evaluation (Ahmed, 2013). In a traditional learning environment, students are assigned to a grade level and attend class, where they meet their teachers face to face at the same time and get the same learning materials limited to what their teacher has arranged in advance, without regard to individual learner's learning requirements and demands (Kinshuk, Chang, Graf, & Yang, 2009). In contrast, in student-centered learning, students are actively involved in learning process, have greater input into what, how and when to learn it, and take responsibility for their own learning (Ahmed, 2013). Brown (2008) also states that student-centered learning approach refers to an active learning process where students are involved in what to learn, and designing, teaching, and evaluation are based on the learners' needs and abilities. Students engaging actively in the learning process, according to Park (2003), tend to understand more, learn more, remember more, enjoy it more and be more able to appreciate the relevance of what they have learned, than passive students. The teacher acts as a facilitator, guide, co-learner, and co-investigator, and the learner plays the role of an explorer, teacher, and producer (Ahmed, 2013; Jones, Valdez, Nowakowski, & Rasmussen, 1994). Froyd and Simpson (2008) refer to two reasons why

teachers must accept a student-centered learning approach in their course: 1) they find teaching more enjoyable; 2) it leads to the improvements of student performance.

In this fast-changing technological society, the biggest challenge instructors face is to come up with ways how to best use the affordances of mobile technology in their classrooms to engage 21st century students in the process of learning. Mobile technology by itself cannot be effective for teaching and learning if instructors do not use an appropriate learning theory. It is advised that, according to Smeda, Dakich and Sharda (2014), teachers use innovative pedagogical approaches to engage students in the process of learning to provide better educational outcomes. Judson (2006) suggests that there is a connection between a teacher with student-centered beliefs about instruction and the integration of technology into their instruction. This connection between student-centered learning and the use of technology implies that teachers who follow student-centered learning are more likely to integrate technologies in innovative and creative ways for enhancing learning. Many studies also have proved that mobile technologies have the potential to facilitate student-centered learning (Looi et al., 2009; Low & O'Connell, 2006; Keengwe, 2015). Therefore, the implementation of each can support the other. As Diaz-Vera (2012) point out mobile phones as social tools offer innovative ways for the communication and collaboration between peers. For example, students can upload and create some personal information on mobile devices, and share their own and interact with others' personal information (Oakley, Pegrum, Faulkner, & Striepe, 2012), or students can share new information, recourses and can communicate directly with other learners, e.g.: linking mobile devices through Bluetooth or sending files from one to another through SMS or MMS. By engaging the language students in learning process through mobile devices, it is possible to give them a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for their own learning (Reid, Kervin & Hindle, 2007). These unique features of mobile devices create a student-centered learning environment that motivate the students to learn English quickly and effectively (Amer, 2010).

III. CONCLUSION

With the rapid advances of technologies in people's life, educators have to revise their teaching approaches and shift from the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to student-centered learning to meet the needs and expectations of today's students. Instructors need to use EFL students' personal technologies in the classroom not only for the sake of their availability, but also to facilitate their students' learning. Integrating technology into a student-centered class allows students to acquire language skills at their own pace and have more control over their learning. Student-centered mobile learning, with the focus on individual students and their needs and interests, provides each student with multiple choices of authentic learning materials and resources to access and share anywhere anytime. As Spencer (2011) points out that mobile technologies offer students the flexible options that

suit their preferences and abilities rather than struggling with using traditional paper-and-pencil format. Therefore, student-centered approaches and technology seem to be a good match. In other words, instructors need to create a student-centered learning environment and take advantage of students' interest in their personal mobile technologies to promote the skills which are necessary for today's students in order to be prepared for their future job. Moreover, instructors need to know how to integrate students' personal mobile technology in innovative ways to foster student-centered learning to meet 21st century students' needs.

However, instructors need support and training that demonstrate not just how to successfully implement mobile technologies into learning but also to shift to more student-centered learning in order to take full advantage of the unique features of mobile technologies to enhance learning. Leaders, managers, policy makers and university administrators are responsible to their stakeholders to provide knowledge, support and training for teachers. For creating a successful education system, managers, policy makers, teachers and students all should be engaged in learning process (Akef & Moosavi, 2014).

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