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FEMALE SAUDI EFL LEARNERS PERCEPTION ABOUT IMPROVING READING SKILLS
THROUGH MOBILE TECHNOLOGY: A CASE STUDY OF QASSIM UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The following paper presents the results of a study aimed at achieving a better understanding of the students' perception of using mobile learning (m-learning) among female Saudi EFL learners. The purpose of this study is to elicit students' perceptions about improving reading skills through mobile technology. Data was acquired via a questionnaire administered to 100 female Saudi learners at College of Science and Arts, Onizah, Qassim University, in February 2017. The results provide evidence of students' positive perceptions towards using mobile technology in improving their reading skills. Based on the findings, educational implications for this descriptive study and future researches are suggested.

Key words: mobile learning, mobile technology

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INTRODUCTION

Language learning has been taking advantage of information Technology. Continuous development of information and communication technologies has opened the door to a wide range of opportunities for digital learning. One of the most attractive technologies is mobile phones technologies which represent a revolutionary approach in teaching and learning. Most mobile phones are now equipped with photo and video cameras, Quick Response (QR) code readers, voice records, MB3/MB4 players, internet access, email, Short Massaging Service (SMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS). Applications such as YouTube, Face book, Skype, Twitter, flash-embed or java-enabled multimedia recourses are all accessible. In sum: Mobile phones have developed into mini-personal computers (PCs) that can be carried easily in a student's pocket and can embed learning into daily life. In addition, due to mobile phones portability and accessibility the learners can access learning materials and they can communicate with their teachers and peers without time and space constraints (Channery, 2006; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007). Sharples (2000) mentions that many teachers consider mobile devices as the next generation of learning in many ways. Many universities and institutions in Saudi Arabia have begun to implement facilities to support m-learning. For example, King Saud University has launched a new service affording users the opportunity to send text messages to the mobile phones of individuals, or groups of students, directly from their PCs. These messages allow schools, faculty managers and administrative divisions to deliver timely and relevant information to students. However, m-learning in

Saudi Arabia is still in the developing stage (Almutairy, Davies and Dimitriadi, 2015; Hazaea and Alzubi, 2016). Jaradat (2014) states that perceptions of students about mlearning need more accurate investigations.

The study question

- 1) What general perception do students have towards improving their reading skills using mobile applications?
 - a- Do students think that mobile technology is useful in improving their reading skills?
 - b- Do students think that mobile technology motivates them to improve their reading skills?
 - c- Are students ready to use their mobile devices to improve their reading skills?

Literature Review

M-learning is a term derived from e-learning. Mobile learning involves the use of mobile technology, either alone or in combination with other information and communication technology (ICT), to enable learning anytime and anywhere (Pernjek and Habianec, 2015). Learning can unfold in a variety of ways: people can use mobile devices to access educational resources, connect with others, or create content, both inside and outside classrooms. Mobile phones are becoming more widely used in learning and teaching processes. However, mobile technologies are not a substitute for existing learning tools but extension for learning devices in the new environment which shows new capabilities (Gay, Stefanone, Grace-Martin, and Hembrooke, 2001). According to Kim (2013) some researchers found that mobile technologies support language learning in different areas such as vocabulary learning (Lu, 2008; Cavus and Ibrahim, 2009; Kim, 2011; Stockwell, 2010), pronunciation practice (Ducate and Lomicka, 2009), listening skills (Edirisingha, Rizzi, Nie, and Rothwell, 2007), learning linguistics (Moura and Carvalho, 2010) English reading with personalized intelligent (Chen, Hsu, and Kinshuk, 2008). Reading and grammar learning (Wang, S. & Smith, S. 2013). In the Saudi context, Previous research showed a need to investigate the use of mobile applications and features in reading practices (Ahmed, 2015; Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009; Al-Musallam, 2009; Al Nooh, 2013 ;Alshumaimeri & Almasri, 2012; Khrisat & Mahmoud, 2013). Al-Musallam (2009) and Khrisat and Mahmoud (2013) found positive attitudes toward the use of both authentic materials and mobile phones in EFL classes. In 2016, a study conducted in Najran University reflects on what mobile features and applications: camera, dictionaries, WhatsApp, note making, and websites can offer to improve reading practices. The findings revealed that using mobile WhatsApp, online and offline dictionaries, mobile camera, online resources, and memos remarkably improved the students' code breaking practices and text participation practices; text using and text analyzing practices were slightly improved. Almutairy, Davies and Dimitriadi (2015) mention that Saudi students are confident about using mobile devices in their daily lives and they would welcome more opportunities for mobile learning. In addition, Saudi higher education students are very familiar with, and psychologically ready for, m-learning.

Methodology

1. **Participants:** The participants in the study were 100 students majoring in English language. They were drawn from second and third year students, English Department, Collage of Science and Arts, Onizah, Qassim University.
2. **Instrument:** To investigate the Learners' Perception about Improving Reading Skills through Mobile Applications, a structured three parts questionnaire was administered to the students.
3. **Procedure:** To investigate the EFL Learners Perception about Improving Reading Skills through Mobile Applications, the following procedures were followed:
 - I. Reviewing relevant literature.
 - II. Designing and validating a questionnaire.
 - III. Administering the previous tool to sample of second and third year university students.
 - IV. Treating the data statistically by using SPSS software.
 - V. Interpreting the findings of the study.
 - VI. Introducing the suggestions and recommendations of the study.
 - VII. Data analysis.

Results and Discussion

To answer the study question, a group of 100 students responded to a three- part- questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire, which included 5 statements, investigates usefulness (Do students think that mobile technology is useful in improving their reading skills?). The second part, which included 5 statements, investigates motivation (Do students think that mobile technology motivates them to improve their reading skills?). The third part, which included 7 statements, investigates students’ readiness (Are students ready to use their mobile devices to improve their reading skills?)

For statistical purpose, the researcher assigned numerical values to the responses in the following manner:

Strongly agree = 5

Agree = 4

Neutral = 3

Disagree =2

Strongly disagree =1

To illustrate the respondents’ reactions to each statements, the sum and mean scores were compute. Then, statements of the same arithmetic groups were discussed together. The mean score for item number 1 in the questionnaire, for example, becomes

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Mean} &= (50 \times 5) + (44 \times 4) + (3 \times 3) + (2 \times 2) + (1 \times 1) \\ &= 250 + 176 + 9 + 4 + 1 \\ &= 440 \\ &= 440/100 \\ &= 4.4 \end{aligned}$$

The mean score, 4.4 indicates the average number of students’ responses on the given statements. The mean scores of the items are above 3.0, which is the neutral point in the scale. It shows that the students have positive perceptions towards

Using Mobile applications to expand their reading skills in comfortable ways because they can access anytime and anywhere. The same method was applied for the rest of the statements.

SPSS version (17) for windows was used to compute descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation) and perform reliability.

The questionnaire achieved a reliability was .839, the questionnaire items were considered reliable in answering the questions of this study.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.834	.839	17

a- Students’ response to whether mobile technology is useful in improving their reading skills?

The statements, which have been used to answer this question, were as follows:

- 1- Mobile applications help me to get used to read English authentic materials.
- 2- Mobile applications help me to expand my reading skills in comfortable ways because I can access anytime and anywhere.
- 3- The mobile applications help me to improve my achievement in my reading courses.
- 4- Mobile applications are useful to learn a variety of English expression and vocabulary.
- 5- I like to use my own mobile application in my own learning processes.

Table 2: Students responses to the first question (a)

The statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree			Strongly Agree	Total	Mean	Std. D
1	0	13	0	52	35	100	4.22	.660
2	1	2	3	44	50	100	4.4	.739
3	0	8	28	42	22	100	3.78	.883
4	1	1	7	41	50	100	4.38	.749
5	1	3	19	40	37	100	4.09	.877

As can be seen from table (2), the mean scores of the students to the items are above 3.0, which is the neutral point in the scale. This shows that a considerable number of EFL students think that mobile technology is useful in improving their reading skills.

b- Students’ response to whether mobile technology motivates them to improve their reading skills?

The statements, which have been used to answer this question, were as follows:

- 6- The mobile applications motivate me to read different kinds of texts.
- 7- It is fun to use mobile applications for my reading skills.
- 8- Mobile phones motivate me to read frequently in English.
- 9- Mobile applications motivate me to self -study for improving my reading skills.
- 10- Mobile applications motivate me to practice my reading skills.

Table 3: Students responses to the second question (b)

The statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree			Strongly Agree	Total	Mean	Std. D
6	0	4	14	50	32	100	4.10	.785
7	0	2	13	42	43	100	4.26	.760
8	1	3	30	51	15	100	3.76	.780
9	0	5	23	45	27	100	3.94	.839
10	0	3	20	55	22	100	3.96	.737

Table (3) shows that the mean scores of the items are above 3.0, which means that Students thinks that mobile technology motivates them to improve their reading skills.

c- Students’ response to their readiness to use mobile devices to improve reading skills?

The statements, which have been used to answer this question, were as follows:

- 11- I am confident when using my mobile phone for improving my English reading skills.
- 12- I would be interested in owning a new mobile device with advanced features if it would improve my reading skills
- 13- Improving reading skills through mobiles meets my needs.
- 14- Improving reading skills through mobiles is more flexible than traditional learning (using text books)
- 15- I would be happy if I could use my mobile phone in the classroom to support my learning.
- 16- The mobile applications resources can replace reading textbooks.
- 17- The mobile applications provide me with a rich learning environment.

Table 4: Students responses to the third question (c)

The statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean	Std. D
11	1	7	20	50	22	100	3.85	.880
12	0	4	27	39	30	100	3.95	.857
13	0	2	23	49	26	100	3.99	.759
14	3	10	13	28	46	100	4.04	1.127
15	3	2	6	15	74	100	4.55	.925
16	8	11	23	37	21	100	3.52	1.176
17	1	2	25	33	39	100	4.07	.902

The data presented in table (4) illustrate that the mean scores of the items are above 3.0, which is the neutral point in the scale. This clearly shows that students are ready to use mobile devices to improve their reading skills.

As can be seen from the results of the questionnaire, it can be concluded that generally there is evidence of students' positive perceptions towards using mobile applications in improving their reading skills.

Conclusion

Mobile learning technology has a rapid pace of development in learning. The demand for using technology in English learning and the need of learners to use a foreign language through MALL will inevitably increase. In other words, mobile technology makes learning possible in an easier and more convenient way without time and space limitations (Oxford & Oxford, 2009). Students can take the advantage of using mobiles in their spare time to learn English when and where they are. L2 learners listen to English radio programs on their mobile phones while walking on the street, which facilitates to incorporate foreign language exercise into real situations. Mobiles, in this regard, serve a function of extending listening opportunities outside of the classroom (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Hadley, 2001; Kao, 2006).

This research paper investigated students' perceptions of 100 undergraduate students about Improving Reading Skills through Mobile Applications. The author has analyzed the qualitative data in the study to understand how students perceive the use of mobile devices for improving their reading skills. The analysis of students' perception towards m-learning indicated that it is fairly accepted among students. Results and analysis provide evidence of students' high positive perceptions towards using mobile technology in improving their reading skills. Regarding learning performance, further investigation of the relationship between perceived learning improvement (perception) and motivation (attitude) is required. The author recommends that m-learning can be adopted to enhance students' interaction and learning experiences inside and outside the classroom.

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