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THE USE OF MOBILE DEVICES IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES: SURVEY OF A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

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THE USE OF MOBILE DEVICES IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES: A SURVEY OF A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

Abstract

The increase use of mobile devices has made learning more accessible and e-resources easily shared. Therefore, students are moving away from browser based Web environment into the mobile app-centric world. The study investigates the use of mobile devices in learning foreign languages in Afe Babalola University. Four research questions guided the study and the data collection instrument used was structured questionnaire, the study adopted survey research method. The finding shows that respondents use Android phones, iPhone and iPad in learning foreign languages. They have a good knowledge of Chinese, French and English languages through the use of mobile devices. Majority of the respondents acknowledge the high impact of mobile device in learning foreign languages. The respondents revealed that limited access to Wi-Fi in the institution and poor interface and memory capacity of mobile devices are their major challenges. The study recommends that academic institution should endeavour to provide adequate access to Wi-Fi connection, in order to enable easy access to Internet and students are also urge to buy mobile devices with high memory capacity so that it can enable them download heavy apps centered on learning.

Keywords: Mobile Learning, Mobile Device, Foreign Language, Language Learning, ABUAD.

Introduction

The role of information and communication technology in education has created an innovative means of learning through the use of mobile technologies. As rapid advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have produced a wide range of mobile technologies, which “are rapidly attracting new users, providing increasing capacity, and allowing more sophisticated use” (Viberg and Gronlund, 2012). In other words mobile devices has provided an enabling environment for learning in the confine of one’s abode. Therein, its predominant use by the Net generation students as a means to easily access and enhance learning, calls for greater attention. Increasingly, institutions recognize that the learning environment extends beyond the classroom and are thus exploring a variety of technological support options (Vogel, et al 2007). According to Blake (2013)

technology itself is not a methodology, but a tool that is only as effective as the pedagogy employed by the teacher. It provides an innovative pedagogical means to enhance learning of foreign languages. Therefore, technology has helped ameliorate language difficulties and it is considered to be one of the most important drivers of social and linguistic change in this digital age (Shyamlee & Phil, 2012). Moreso, students greatly utilize its potentials for various purposes. Then collegiate institutions begin to recognize the paradigm shift of mobile device use, redefining the way information is consumed, disseminated, and used, it is essential to conduct more studies in this area (Geist, 2011). This is why the study investigates the use of mobile devices in learning of foreign languages in Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

Literature Review

The use of mobile devices has greatly provided as an innovative means to learning of foreign languages. According to Kam et al. (2008) learning English as a Second Language [ESL] by playing games on cell phones present an opportunity to dramatically expand the reach of English learning, by making it possible to acquire ESL in out-of-school settings that can be more convenient than school. Learning a second language requires “using the language to interpret and express real-life messages” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 6).

However, Geist (2011) assert that mobile learning is the use of portable electronic devices to access and share information. It is a trend in higher education, and is redefining the manner in which learning takes place and how instruction is delivered (Miller, 2012). M-learning is the process of using a mobile device to access and study learning materials to communicate with fellow students, instructors or institution (Ali and Irvine, 2009). Dudeney and Hockly (2007), refers to it as a set of technological devices, including smartphones, MP3 players and hand-held computers that might have an impact on language learning. It presents students and professionals with the unique opportunity to access information instantaneously regardless of location (Rossing, Miller, Cecil, and Stamper, 2012).

Therefore, mobile devices include laptops, cell phones, netbooks, notebook computers, audio players, etc. This article will focus on handheld mobile devices that have Internet capabilities and that can perform myriad of functions. The use of handheld technologies provides a major opportunity to enhance access to learning and will enable many institutions to develop learner and

administrative support and learning opportunities in ways which will build on current methods (Goundar, 2011). Hence, Pim (2013) accedes that technology has the potentials to equip learners with the ability to interact with one another especially native language speakers and other learners. In addition, modern mobile devices support a wide variety of other services which include text messaging, multimedia system, email, Internet access, short-range wireless communications (infrared, Bluetooth), business applications, gaming, and photography (Mbabazi, et al 2018).

Despite the enormous benefits of mobile devices in education, students have diverse various negative ways to use this technology. Studies have shown that students use this device to indulge in examination malpractice, to disrupt lectures and leads to loss of concentration during lectures (Just Keller and Cynkar, 2008; Scornavacca, Huff and Marshall, 2009; Burns and Lohenry, 2010; Barnes and Herring, 2011). Study by Tindell, and Bohlander (2012) also found out that with mobile devices, cheating can take place, students can create threats by using devices, make disruptive noises during the class, access to inappropriate content, test performance is significantly lower for the students who are distracted by mobile devices during a lesson and loss of concentration if students are doing non class-related tasks.

Nevertheless, Chen, Hsieh, and Kinshuk (2008) conduct a research on the effects of using mobile phones for the delivery of vocabulary materials on English learners in Taiwan. Their study reveals that students enjoy using their phones because of easy access to materials and the ability to practice anytime and anywhere; in addition, some students like the screen size limitations, which make the amount of content more manageable than that of other teaching materials. Levy and Kennedy (2005) use Short Message Service (SMS) for sending vocabulary words and idioms, definitions, and example sentences for Italian learners in Australia. The BBC World Service's Learning English section creates a similar program and offers English lessons via SMS in Francophone West Africa and China (Godwin-Jones, 2005). To learn Chinese characters, learners must become aware of the characters' visual shapes, learn stroke orders, and develop an understanding of the radicals' functions and positions within a character (Everson, 2009; Perfetti, Ying, & Tan, 2005). Researchers have suggested that e-dictionaries may be useful in helping learners overcome the obstacle of learning to read Chinese characters, because they help speed up the process of looking up unknown words (Shen & Tsai, 2010; Xie & Tao, 2009). To increase reading speed, anxiety from reading in Chinese (Zhao, Guo, & Dynia, 2013) may also be reduced by reading with an e-dictionary. Several studies have indicated that e-dictionaries improve learners' reading

comprehension scores and reading speeds (Wang, 2009, 2012; Wang & Upton, 2012). El Hariry. (2015) notes that some mobiles have special inbuilt learning software such as e-dictionary, flash card software, quiz software, voice recording and listening. Although, there are some studies on mobile devices in relation to education and the significance of technology in language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Chhabra, 2012; Hayta & Yaprak, 2013; Muhammed, 2014; Mojaye, 2015 and Bright, 2016). But in Nigeria, there are relatively few studies on the impact and use of mobile devices in learning. Yet, none has concentrated on language learning in the university context. However, Weisberg (2011) urged that university students cannot do without their mobile devices, including Smartphones, Laptops and more. The use of these mobile devices in learning motivate the students and engage their attention while focusing on solving problems improving their memory, their reading and writing skills (Saleh and Alias, 2012).

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate the use of mobile devices in learning of foreign languages. The specific objectives to the study are to:

1. determine the type of mobile devices use by students in learning of foreign languages;
2. determine the extent of students knowledge of foreign languages;
3. ascertain the impact of mobile devices on learning of foreign languages by students;
4. find out the challenges encountered on the use of mobile devices in learning by students.

Methodology

Survey research method was adopted for the study and structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The study specially focused on students offering foreign languages in the institution. Therefore, a total of two hundred and fifty (250) students were sampled, out of which two hundred and seven (207) was completed for analysis using frequency counts, simple percentage, mean, standard deviation, to answer the research questions. Thus, Random sampling technique was used to administer the questionnaire.

Analysis of Findings

Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Gender

S/N	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	85	41.1
2	Female	122	58.9
	Total	207	100.0

Table 1 shows that 85 (41.1%) of the respondents were males and 122 (58.9%) were females.

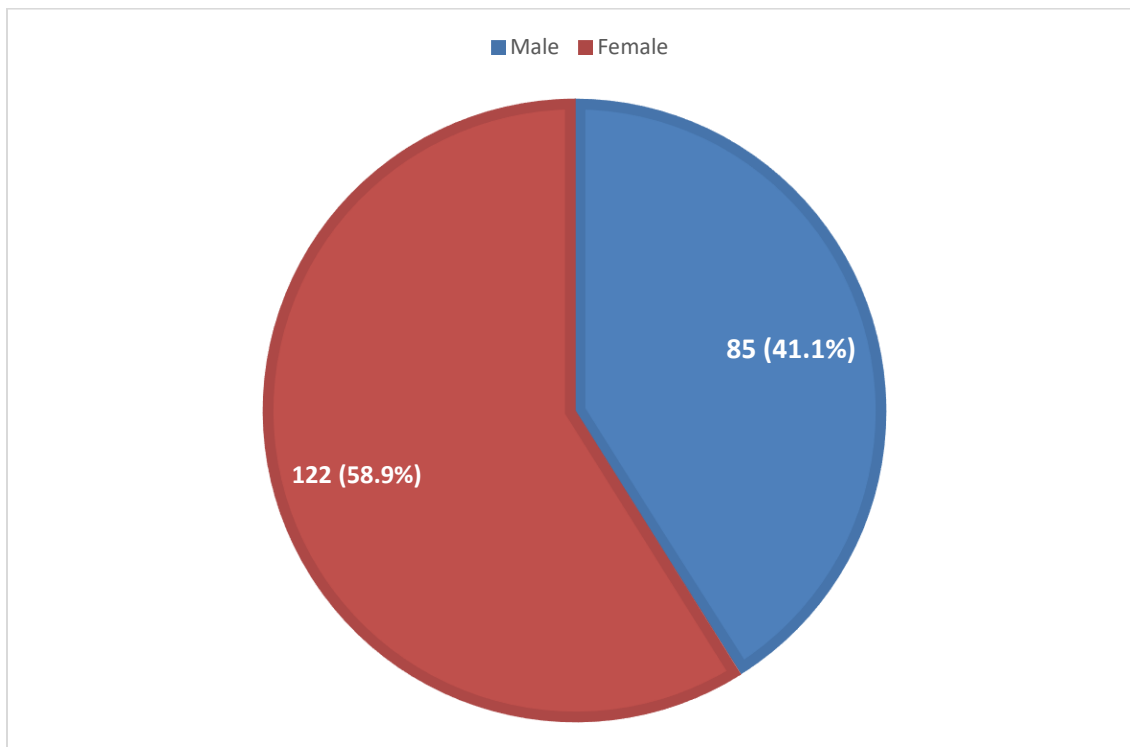


Figure 1: The pie chart above shows the distribution of the respondents by gender

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents by Age

S/N	Age	Frequency	Percentage
1	15-18	38	18.4
2	19-21	118	57.0

3	22-24	51	24.6
4	25 and above	0	0
	Total	207	100.0

Table 2 shows that 38 (18.4%) of the respondents were within the ages of 15-18 years, 118 (57.0%) were aged 19-21 years, 51 (24.6%) were aged 22-24 years, while none was above the age of 25 years.

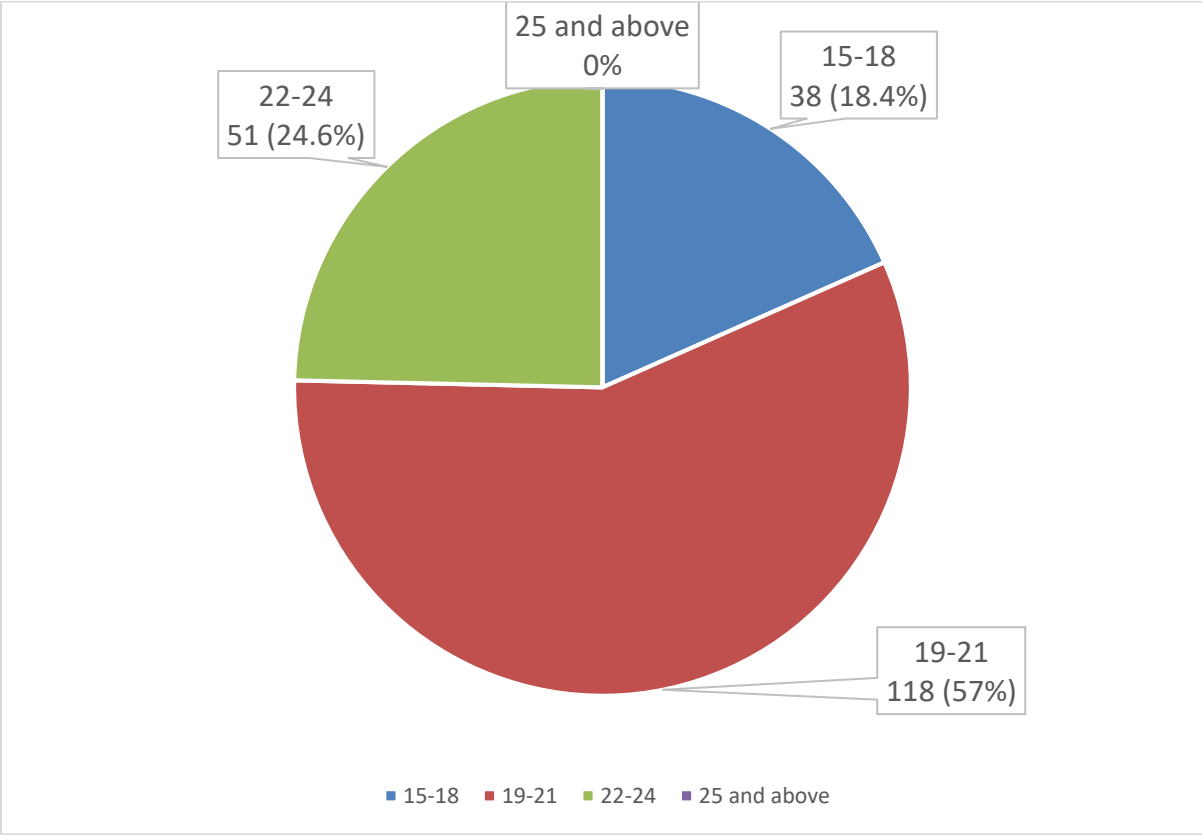


Figure 2: The pie chart above shows the distribution of the respondents by age

Table 3: Types Mobile Devices Used by Students

S/N	Devices	Number of users	Percentage (N=207)
1	iPad	88	42.5
2	iPhone	93	44.9
3	Android	121	58.5

4	Kindle	0	0.0
5	Windows	15	7.2
6	Tablet	57	27.5

Table 3 shows the respective percentage use of each mobile device used by the students (207). 88 (42.5%) uses iPad, 93 (44.9%) uses iPhone, 121 (58.5%) uses android, 15 (7.2%) uses Windows phone and 57 (27.5%) uses Tablets while none uses Kindle.

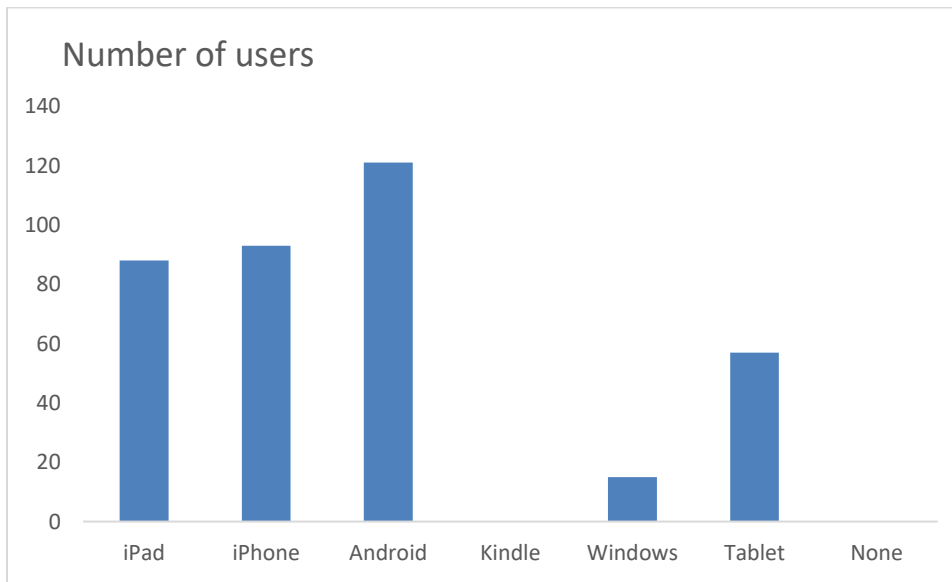


Figure 3: The chart above shows the number of students and their mobile devices. The device used mostly by the students is android (121) followed by iPhone (93), iPad (88), Tablet (57), Windows Phone (15) while no student uses Kindle and no student without a mobile device.

Table 4: Knowledge of Foreign Languages

S/N	Knowledge of foreign language	Excellent (1.0)	V. Good (2.0)	Good (3.0)	Average (4.0)	Poor (5.0)	Mean	Std Deviation	Median
1	Chinese	0	22 (10.6%)	89 (43%)	78 (37.7%)	18 (8.7%)	3.44	0.80	3.0
2	French	0	16 (7.7%)	93 (44.9%)	94 (45.4%)	4 (1.9%)	3.42	0.66	3.0
3	English	70	133	4	0	0	1.68	0.51	2.0

		(33.8%)	(64.3%)	(1.9%)					
4	German	0	0	0	1 (0.5%)	206 (99.5%)	5.00	0.07	5.0
5	Italian	0	0	0	0	207 (100%)	5.00	0	5.0
6	Japanese	0	1 (0.5%)	0	0	206 (99.5%)	4.99	0.21	5.0
7	Russian	0	0	0	0	207 (100%)	5.00	0	5.0
9	Spanish	0	0	0	0	207 (100%)	5.00	0	5.0

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents knowledge of English language is very good (Median=2.0, 2.0 = V. good), their knowledge of Chinese and French is good (Median = 3.0; 3.0 = Good), while their knowledge of German, Italian, Japanese, Russian and Spanish is poor (Median = 5.0; 5.0 = poor).

Table 5: Impact of Mobile Devices on Students Learning of Foreign Languages

S/N	Items	Yes	No	Mean (Std. D)
1	Mobile phones help learners to learn independently	206 (99.5%)	1 (0.5%)	1.00 (0.07)
2	Use of mobile devices has enable me learn at any location and whatever time	207 (100%)	0	1.00 (0)
3	Mobile devices has really provided me with different app for learning languages	207 (100%)	0	1.00 (0)

4	Mobile phones help me to record and memorize lists of words	203 (98.1%)	4 (1.9%)	1.02 (0.14)
5	Mobile devices has enabled me access e-books on language education	205 (99%)	2 (1%)	1.01 (0.10)
6	Mobile devices has improved my spoken and written skills	198 (95.7%)	9 (4.3%)	1.04 (0.20)
7	Mobile devices has improved my knowledge on language learning syntax and morphology	196 94.7%	11 (5.3%)	1.05 0.22

Table 5 shows the rating of the items on impact of mobile devices on students learning of foreign languages as follows; Mobile devices has improved my knowledge on language learning syntax and morphology (1.05) ranked highest in the mean score rating and was followed by Mobile devices has improved my spoken and written skills (1.04), Mobile phones help me to record and memorize lists of words (1.02), Mobile devices has enabled me access e-books on language education (1.01), Mobile phones help learners to learn independently (1.00), Use of mobile devices has enable me learn at any location and whatever time (1.00) and lastly Mobile devices has really provided me with different app for learning languages (1.00)

Table 6: Challenges on the Use of Mobile Devices

S/N	Items	Yes	No	Mean (Std. D)
1	I find it difficult to use mobile devices to learn languages	29 (14%)	178 (86%)	1.86 (0.34)
2	It is difficult for me to download apps that are suitable for learning foreign languages	31 (15%)	176 (85%)	1.85 (0.36)
3	I have limited access to Wi-Fi in my institution	134 (64.7%)	73 (35.3%)	1.35 (0.48)
4	Poor interface and memory capacity of my mobile device	127 (61.4%)	80 (38.6%)	1.39 (0.49)
5	Limited screen sizes	46 (22.2%)	161 (77.8%)	1.78 (0.42)

Table 6 shows the rating of the items on challenges of the use of mobile devices in learning of foreign languages as follows; I find it difficult to use mobile devices to learn languages (1.86) ranked highest in the mean score rating and was followed by It is difficult for me to download apps that are suitable for learning foreign languages (1.85), Limited screen sizes (1.78), Poor interface and memory capacity of my mobile device and lastly I have limited access to Wi-Fi in my institution (1.35).

Discussion of Findings

The finding shows that 122(58.9%) are female students which forms majority of the respondents. This is against the findings of Elega and Ozad (2017) that male students use ICT to cope with language barrier and increase interaction more than the female students. Most of the respondents are between the ages brackets of 19-21(57.0%). Thereof, the study revealed that 58.8%, 44.9% and 42.5% of the respondents use Android phones, iPhone and iPad. The advanced smart phones such as iPhone, Android devices, and Windows Phones have proven to be very instrumental in

respect to mobile assisted language learning (Elega and Ozad, 2017). Based on the knowledge of foreign languages through the use of mobile devices, the study shows that 43% and 37.7% are good and average in Chinese speaking. Then 44.9% and 45.4% are good and average in French speaking. While 64.3% are very good in English speaking. Majority of the respondents acknowledge the high impact of mobile device in learning foreign language. Therefore, technology has helped ameliorate language difficulties and it is considered to be one of the most important drivers of social and linguistic change in this digital age (Shyamlee & Phil, 2012). Based on the challenges encountered on the use of mobile devices, the respondents revealed that limited access to Wi-Fi in the institution and poor interface and memory capacity of mobile devices are their major challenges.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Mobile devices have come to stay in our society and mostly as a viable tool for learning Today most students use it for making and receiving calls, chatting, listening to music and watching movies. But the study points out that, it can be better used as a means of learning foreign languages. Therefore, it is necessary for students to make good use of hand held devices for academic purpose. The study recommends that the institution understudy should provide adequate access to Wi-Fi connection to enable easy access to Internet in the institution and students are urged get high memory capacity mobile devices when buying, so as to be able to download heavy apps necessary in learning foreign languages.

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