EFL UNDERGRADUATE LEARNERS' READINESS TOWARDS MOBILE LEARNING

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Abstract: Prior to the implementation of the technology, assessing learners' readiness for its using is imperative. So, the study applied Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to investigate whether Iranian EFL learners are ready to be involved in using mobile technology in English language learning process. The survey used in the study was administered to a whole cohort of 200 EFL undergraduate students from different fields attending a course in English as a Foreign Language at an Open Learning University. Based on TPB, the learners' mobile learning (mLearning) readiness on nine factors, which are perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitudes, student readiness, subjective norm, perceived self-efficacy, learning autonomy, behavioral control, and intention, was assessed. The results revealed that the learners were ready to use mLearning as soon as possible. The outcomes of the study would be beneficial to educational designers, English language teachers, policy-makers to implement mLearning for the purpose of teaching and learning English language. Hence, ELT material designers and teachers should attempt to provide multiple opportunities for the EFL learners to communicate with their peers and teachers both in and out of the classroom, and to enable them to be self-directed learners.

Keywords: Mobile Learning (mLearning), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), EFL learners

Introduction

In recent years, the innovations of mobile technologies are rapidly attracting the interest of educators in various academic programmes to facilitate teaching and learning beyond classroom walls (İlçi, 2014; Warnich & Gordon, 2015; Shadiev, Hwang, & Huang, 2017; Xu & Peng, 2017; Sun, Lin, You, Shen, & Luo, 2017; Ahmad, Armarego, & Sudweeks, 2017; Li, Lee, Wong, Yau, & Wong, 2017; Miglani & Awadhiya, 2017). Nowadays, mobile technology provides teachers with diverse opportunities to deliver interesting learning materials. Miangah and Nezarat (2012) state that learning through mobile devices also provides the learners with the opportunity to learn in a non-classroom context, such as on the bus, outside, at work or home. For instance, through mobile devices, teachers and learners can receive and send emails, text messages, visual material, audio material and video material. So mobile learning can be utilized for the delivery of learning contents and promoting interaction between students and teachers outside the classroom (Bachore, 2015). In addition, learners can listen to the lectures, cooperate with the peers to ask question and solve their problems (Matasić, Eret, & Dumančić, 2011). mLearning also facilitates personalized learning in the way that learners decide which learning materials and in which format to learn based on their needs and interest. In this study, mLearning refers to the process of using mobile devices such as mobile phones, smart phones, PDAs and tablets for improving formal and informal learning.

The development of mobile technologies is also changing the landscape of language teaching and learning and has created a considerable amount of interest among researchers to study its potential in enhancing English language learning and teaching (Sa'alek & Odeh, 2014; Wagner, Donskaya, Kupriyanova, & Ovezova, 2016). It is believed that mobile technologies can provide educational opportunities because of their unique characteristics such as its mobility, ubiquity, accessibility and privacy (Zaki & Yunus, 2015). In general, mobile devices have the potential to improve language learning by providing opportunities for students to have access to educational materials and self-regulate their learning as well as optimizing opportunities for teachers to share

contents and communicate with students. Despite these benefits, little is known about the factors that will affect learner acceptance of mLearning. As students are surrounded with mobile devices which are widely applied for communication and entertainment, it is essential to investigate the learners' readiness to adopt mobile technology integrating into their education (Shorfuzzaman & Alhussein, 2016). According to Cheon, Lee, Crooks, and Song (2012), the mere availability of mobile technology does not guarantee its success in education, it is essential that learners first adopt mobile learning. To this end, the current study intends to investigate EFL learners' readiness for the implementation of mLearning in the context of Iran. The research aims to address the following research question:

What is the level of readiness of mLearning among EFL undergraduate learners?

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive method (survey) to assess the level of mLearning readiness of the Iranian EFL learners at Open University. The questionnaires adapted from Cheon et al (2012) were conducted online in the 1st Semester, 2017-2018. Cheon et al. (2012) designed a questionnaire based on the theory of planned behavior (TPB), considering the following different themes: perceived ease of use; perceived usefulness; attitudes; student readiness; subjective norm; perceived self-efficacy; learning autonomy; behavioral control; and intention. A total of 200 students from different fields of the study attending a course in English as a Foreign Language volunteered to response the online questionnaire. A five-point Likert Scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5) was used for main items. Data collected was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23 software.

Results and Discussion

The research findings were discussed based on two themes: 1) learners' mobile phone features, and 2) learners' mLearning readiness.

Mobile Phone Features

The results revealed that all the learners have access to at least a smart phone using for Learning (56%), Entertainment (80%), Communication (94.5%), and Work (39.5%). Accordingly, mobile communication devices are applied mostly for entertainment, but it is possible to incorporate mobile devices into their learning. Moreover, more learners prefer using their smart phone (56%) to their laptop (44%) for the purpose of learning. The finding is consistent with the study of Abas, Peng, and Mansor (2009) which indicated a large number of learners had at least a mobile phone.

It is visible that Telegram among social networks is the most common App used between the learners (89.1%), and only a very small proportion (.5%, $n = 1$) had never used Telegram. This indicates that using Social network of Telegram can be used to facilitate learning and communication outside the classroom.

All the learners reported that their mobile phone can provide Video and Audio. Hence, instructional materials can be presented in the format of video and audio to support their learning.

mLearning Readiness

The results revealed the level of learners' readiness towards mLearning based on nine factors: perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitude, student readiness, subjective norm, perceived self-efficacy, learning autonomy, behavioral control, and intention.

1. Overall mean

The overall mean and standard deviation for the nine factors were indicated in Table 1. The highest mean obtained was for students' attitudes ($M=4.08$, $SD=.99$) followed by Student Readiness ($M=4.07$, $SD=0.92$), Perceived Ease of Use ($M=3.99$, $SD=1.13$) and Perceived Usefulness ($M=3.99$, $SD=.97$). The study revealed that the learners highly welcome the integration of mLearning in their learning process. Similar to the present study, the results of Warnich and Gordon's (2015) study showed that a majority of learners (96%) had positive perception levels about using mobile phone technology for their course works. The findings provide teachers with the opportunity to blend mLearning with their conventional teaching.

Table 1 Overall mean for the nine factors

		Number of items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Perceived Ease of Use	3	3.99	1.13
2	Perceived Usefulness	3	3.99	.97
3	Attitude	3	4.08	.99
4	Student Readiness	3	4.07	.92
5	Subjective Norm	3	3.72	1.15
6	Perceived Self-efficacy	3	3.96	.98
7	Learning Autonomy	3	3.97	1.07
8	Behavioral Control	3	3.98	1.07
9	Intention	3	3.96	1.10

2. Perceived Ease of Use

As Table 2 shows, 76% students agreed or strongly agreed that mobile devices would be easy to use. Only a few of the students (16.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item. The results indicated 77 % of the students believe that mobile devices would be easy to operate. According to Cheon, Crooks, Chen, and Song (2011), when students feel that mLearning is easy to use they are more likely to use them in the learning process.

Table 2 Perceived Ease of Use

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
1. I believe that mobile devices would be easy to use.	12	4.5	7.5	34.5	41.5
2. I believe it would be easy to access course material with my mobile device.	6	8	7	40.5	38.5
3. I believe that mobile devices would be easy to operate.	4.5	8.5	10	27	50

3. Perceived Usefulness

Table 3 indicates that a majority of the respondents believe that using mobile devices would help them to improve their English.

Table 3 Perceived Usefulness

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
4. I believe that using mobile devices would improve my ability to learn English.	2.5	11	9.5	37	40
5. I believe that mobile devices would allow me to get my work done more quickly.	3	11	4	44	38
6. I believe that mobile devices would be useful for my learning English.	4	9.5	6.5	49	31

4. Attitude

As the table shows, a majority of the students had positive attitude towards using their mobile devices in learning English courses. The findings are consistent with the results of Cavus's study (2011) that reported that the majority of students displayed a positive attitude towards mLearning and found it enjoyable. However, it contrasts with Stockwell's (2008) study that showed that a number of learners did not wish to embrace the mobile technology for the activities.

Table 4 Attitude

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
7. I would like my coursework more I need m-learning.	2	9	11	33	45
8. Using m-learning in my coursework would be a pleasant experience.	3	10	7	35	44.5
9. Using m-learning in my coursework is a wise idea.	3	8	10	38	41

5. Student Readiness

81.5% think other students would be in favor of utilizing m-learning in their coursework and believe that a mobile device could be a useful educational tool in their coursework. The majority (82%) think other students would possess adequate technical skills to use a mobile device in their coursework.

Table 5 Student Readiness

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
10. I think other students would be in favor of utilizing m-learning in their coursework	4.5	7	7	44	37.5
11. I think other students would believe that a mobile device could be a useful educational tool in their coursework.	3.5	8	7	44.5	37
12. I think other students would possess adequate technical skills to use a mobile device in their coursework.	1.5	6	10.5	39.5	42.5

6. Subjective Norm

Subjective norm refers to "the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188). If the learners perceive that people who are significant to them, such as family, teachers or peers,

are in favor of using mLearning, their intention to use mobile technology is stronger. Table 6 demonstrates that majority of them believe that the significant people surrounding them agree with mLearning.

Table 6 Subjective Norm

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
13. Most people who are important to me think that it would be fine to use a mobile device for university course.	2.0	14.5	9.0	37.0	37.5
14. I think other students would be willing to adapt a mobile device for learning.	.5	11.5	10.0	44.5	33.5
15. Most people who are important to me ...	1.0	14.5	9.5	41.5	33.5

7. Perceived Self-efficacy

The findings showed that the majority of the respondents had a positive self-efficacy in integrating their mobile devices in their learning courses. Only 14.5% reported that they don't feel comfortable to use their mobile devices in their courses. According to Mahat, Ayub, and Luan (2012), to be successful in mLearning, it is essential that learners have a high level of confidence in using their mobile devices in learning process.

Table 7 Perceived Self-efficacy

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
16. I am confident about using a mobile device for my courses.	4	11.5	10.5	42	32
17. Using a mobile device for my courses would not challenge me.	1.5	9.5	9	43.5	36.5
18. I would be comfortable to use a mobile device in my courses.	4	10.5	5	43.5	37

8. Learning Autonomy

78% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would be able to actively access coursework material with a mobile device, and 16.5% indicated 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to this idea. Additionally, 79% agreed or strongly agreed that they would have more opportunities to create knowledge in their coursework with a mobile device, and they would be able to control the pace of learning in their classes with a mobile device.

Table 8 Learning Autonomy

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
19. I would be able to actively access coursework material with a mobile device.	4	11.5	10.5	42	32
20. I would have more opportunities to create knowledge in my coursework with a mobile device.	1.5	9.5	9	43.5	36.5
21. I would be able to control the pace of learning in my classes with a mobile device.	4	10.5	5	43.5	37

9. Behavioral Control

A high percentage of respondents (82%) also had a sufficient extent of control to make a decision to adopt m-learning. Only 14% of the respondents indicated their disagreement to this belief. It is possible that their high behavioral control facilitates their intention to use mobile learning for their courses.

Table 9 Behavioral Control

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
22. I have a sufficient extent of knowledge to use m-learning.	7	6	7	40.5	39.5
23. I have a sufficient extent of control to make a decision to adopt m-learning.	7.5	6.5	4	44.5	37.5
24. I have a sufficient extent of self-confidence to make a decision to adopt m-learning.	4.5	9	6	45	35.5

10. Intention

A significant factor in the Theory of Planned Behavior is learners' intention to try to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). According the findings, a majority of the respondents (75.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would like their coursework more if they used m-learning. Only 17% (n=34) of the respondents stated their disagreement to this item (item 35). 79% agreed or strongly agreed using m-learning in the coursework is a wise idea. Findings implied the learners' high intention to use their mobile devices for learning English.

Table 10 Intention

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	%	%	%	%	%
25. I predict I would use a mobile device for my courses.	4.5	12.5	7	37	38.5
26. I plan to use a mobile device if a course has mobile learning functions.	6	9	7	37.5	40.5
27. I intend to adopt a mobile device for university courses.	4.5	11	5.5	39	40

Conclusion

The study aims to investigate EFL learners' readiness to adopt mLearning for their English courses in Iran. To this end, a survey based on TPB was conducted to assess EFL undergraduate learners' readiness towards mobile learning. According to the findings, all the learners had access to a smartphone. But the results showed learners use their mobile phones mainly for entertainment and communication rather than for learning purposes. Therefore, it implies the lack of learners' awareness on the benefits of mLearning. The empirical results also indicated that EFL undergraduate learners had a high level of mobile readiness for their studies. So, the findings will help the ELT material designers, policy-makers and teachers to bring significant changes and progress to teaching methods in learning context in Iran. It is imperative to invest in designing learning materials accessible to learners anywhere and anytime through using mobile phones.

This study focused on relatively small samples of learners (N=200) selected from one university in Iran that makes generalizations difficult. In addition, it would be valuable if the study assessed the instructors' mLearning

readiness which can play a significant role in students' mLearning readiness. Another study also could design various activities and observe learners' readiness to use mLearning.

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