THE EFFECTS OF USING VIBER ON IRANIAN EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' VOCABULARY LEARNING (AN INTERACTIONIST VIEW)

Reza Nemati Moghadam
M.A. in Language Education,
Islamic Azad University,
Torbat-e Heidariyeh Branch,
Iran

Fahimeh Farahmand
B.A. in English Language and Literature,
Hakim Sabzevari University,
Sabzevar, Iran

Mohammad Ali Kowsary
M.A. in Language Education
Hakim Sabzevari University,
Sabzevar, Iran

Abstract

One of the best ways of learning English is using technology. Actually mobile phone plays the key role in learning English. Today, there are many applications are used for learning and teaching English. Viber is an instant messaging and Voice over IP (VoIP) application for smart phones developed by Viber Media. In addition to instant messaging, users can exchange images, video and audio media messages. Viber is a new software which is used for many purposes. Viber users communicate with each other through textual and oral messages. The aim of this study is to elaborate the exact relationship between using Viber and improvement of vocabualry knowledge. The researchers have chosen 15 male and female EFL University Students which were weak in vocabulary domain at first. Participants were gathered in a Viber group and communicate with each other under the professor's control. After one month, the results declared that there is a meaningful relationship between using Viber and Students' Vocabulary Learning. The results also showed that learners were more interested in learning English through Viber.
Keywords: Vocabulary knowledge, viber, technology, MALL, learning and teaching English.

1. Introduction

Recently, the use of technology and mobile has been of central importance in the area of language learning and teaching. For instance, educational softwares, mobile and internet are among the technologies that are used for learning and teaching English (Kirriemuir, 2002; Prensky, 2002; Seay, 1997; Turgut & Irgin, 2009; Chen & Chung, 2008; Georgieva, Smrikarov & Georgiev, 2011; Sandberg, Maris & Geus, 2011). But technology is not limited to these cases, it is growing and developing and creates new areas with more features. For example, online social networks like Face book, Talk 2 and My space are the new technologies in today's world (Allen, 2005). These technologies with active users worldwide (Kabre & Brown, 2011) provide opportunities for people to have active role in socializing process (Delambo, Homa, Peter, Delambo & Chandras, 2011; Urista, Dong & Day, 2009). These online networks with unique features such as online games and world chat encourage users to communicate with family and friends (Brown, Handrickson & Littau, 2011; Albarran, Dyer, Hutton & Balentine, 2010; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Urista, Dong & Day, 2009). But since most of the features are in English and one has to understand English in order to participate in the activities and functions provided by these networks, they can be used to provide an authentic language interaction and motivation and improve the performance of English language learners (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). Social networks are web-based services that allow individuals to: construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connection and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Harrison & Michal, 2009). Social networking enriches the learning environment through early reconnection of students needs and formative assessment, establishment of classroom community, students engagement, increased sense of students achievement, information management and access to marginalized students (Goldfarb, Pregibon, Shrem & Zyko, 2011). Also Newgarden, 2009 believes that the true social networking tools is in their potential to extend learning beyond the boundaries of the classroom community.

Learning new vocabularies is an important part of learning a new language. According to Nation (2006) learners should know at least 5000 lexical items to understand non-technical English texts.

Because of the limited class hours, students do not have the opportunity to speak and use all of the vocabularies in class. This leads to some problems for language teachers and learners. The problem faced a language teacher is how to teach this large number of vocabulary during the limited time of class. Nation (2005) believed that teachers can teach individual words explicitly, but deliberately teaching vocabulary is one of the least efficient ways of developing learners' vocabulary knowledge. Also learners face a lot of difficulty in the language learning process. They should memorize and learn the large amount of words of the language they are learning. This urges language teachers and researchers to look for alternative ways to traditional classroom teaching of vocabulary and to change vocabulary learning into a lifelong learning which is not limited to the classroom and adapt it to the needs of learners. They should make learning proces interesting for students and make them responsible for their own learning. One of the ways that can help teachers in teaching vocabulary is using different technologies available to students. Cognitive and socio-cognitive approaches have implication of how to integrate technology in teaching in the communicative trend (Laufer, 1998). So, the traditional ways of learning a language are about to replaced by the technology-based methods of language teaching. Teachers are supposed to equip themselves with the new tools of using computers and technological devices in order to survive in this modern world.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as a fascinating field opens the door of new opportunities for integrating technology and language learning. The role of the ubiquitous computer and modern tools has indeed, changed over the years; they are not placed on the margin of people's lives but are an inevitable part of their existence. That is, computer as an offspring of modernity and its technological development is having a crucial impact on every aspect of human beings' relations with the world and of course language learning is not an exception. Computer Assisted Language Learning is growing rapidly and discovering new potential for the use of technology in language class.

There is keen interest in employing ICT both inside and outside the classroom. This tendency stands out particularly in the field of second language acquisition. Although many language teachers and instructors are involved in the exploration of using m-learning in language teaching, one of the more effective ways of employing this technology is to supplement formal classroom teaching. In other words, rather than seeking ways to use technology outside the classroom in order to supplement what cannot be done in the classroom. This comes as a matter of course; if we take into consideration the fact that m-learning allows students to learn in a ubiquitous environment without the limitations of time and place.

Today, a lot of mobile phones of various brands circulate in the community. Islamic Republic of Iran is the world's largest markets for mobile phone vendors. The average Persian people have one mobile phone per person. Why are a lot of mobile phones used by the public? It is not independent of several factors such as: cellular telephone network infrastructure that has been built all over the country. Besides the cost of usage (for the new cost of a conversation) should be fairly cheap. The main factor in the completeness of the features of a mobile phone is an attraction in itself for people to carry a cell phone wherever he goes. The existence of mobile phone has its own phenomenon for education, especially for students. Its presence offers the sophistication to be able to access all information across the world very quickly, easily and inexpensively. In addition to making and receiving phone calls, the phone also has the functions to typically send and receive short messages (Short message service, SMS).

Now, cell phones become multifunctional gadgets. Following the development of digital technology, now the phone also comes with a wide selection of features, like being able to catch the broadcast radio and television, software audio player (MP3) and video, digital camera, game, and internet services (WAP, GPRS, 3G). In addition to these features, the phonies now embedded with computer features. So with the mobile phone, people can change those function into a mini computer.

The use of mobile phone technology has not only focused as a means of communication, or entertainment, but it is used as a medium of learning. The use of mobile phone as a means of mobility in a mobile learning and presentation of the material in the format of the game becomes an medium to present knowledge in an entertainment, i.e. learning with fun, learning anywhere at any time, without the bulkhead, and without limits.

Mobile devices have increasingly grown toward becoming tools for education and language learning, and all its users from teachers or students are getting used to this environment to make education as ubiquitous as possible. Moreover, the emerging of internet made open and distance learning a means of receiving education from all parts of the world. In a short period, the attractiveness of distance learning led to the realization that various mobile devices provide a very effective resource for education. This way, many researchers tried to make mobile devices a rich resource for teaching and learning. It was, in fact, a challenging affair to cover learning tasks by a mobile phone (Oberg and Daniels, 2012).

Pachler, Bachmair & Cook (2010) state that MALL deals with the use of mobile technology in language learning. Students do not always have to study a second/foreign language in a classroom. They may have the opportunity to learn it using mobile devices when they desire and where they are. As learning English is considered a main factor for professional success and a criterion for being educated in many communities, providing more convenient environment for people to learn English is one of the strategic educational goals towards improving the students' achievement and supporting differentiation of learning needs.

Review of Literature
2.1 The role of Mobile phones in supporting teaching and learning
Mobile phones are becoming popular as many people can afford them, currently the use of mobile communication devices has gone beyond the traditional communication role that it is now used in supporting teaching and learning. In education, mobile phones have led to the evolution of new paradigm known as mobile learning (Muyinda et al, 2007). The rapid growth of access to mobile phones around the world and in Africa and Middle East regions in particular have a potential of improving teaching, learning and institutional efficiencies to enable national education system transformation (UNESCO, 2012). According to (Huang et al, 2010), mobile learning applications can facilitate students not only learning contents conveniently but also interacting with others collaboratively anytime and anywhere. Hence, the development of m-learning as a new strategy for education has implications for the way students and tutors in educational institutions interact.

Ferry, (2009) describes that modern mobile phones can be used to help students to access web based contents, remix it, share it, collaborate with others and create media rich deliverable for the classroom teachers as well as global audience. According to Cui and Wang (2008), universities in United Kingdom (UK) have made the use of mobile phones to store and retrieve information such as e-books, instructional materials, reviewing students' marks thus making teaching and learning practices more effective. Moreover, Liaw (2009) reported that in higher education mobile phones can provide course materials to students including due dates for assignments, and information about time table and room changes. Furthermore, Cui and Wang (2008) noted that in China students can view their teachers' web page or access some other online English learning resources via mobile phones and they can also take online tests.

The study done by UNESCO, (2012) has shown that mobile learning projects in South Africa have been used to improve teaching system especially teaching biology subjects. Furthermore the study conducted by Utulu (2012) in Nigeria revealed that mobile phones were used by students for communicating with lecturer in charge of the course collect data (recordings), sending emails to lecturers, access Online Public Access Catalogue and share knowledge. Also a study by Kajumbula (2006) in Makerere University found that mobiles phones were used by students for learning and teaching; for example students can know whether their marks are missing, dates for tutorials, venues and meeting times with research supervisors. However, mobile phone uses for teaching and learning purposes in primary, secondary and tertiary education in Tanzania is highly limited (Nihukia, 2011). Kafyulilo, (2012) adds that, although mobiles phones are the most accessible technological tools in schools and colleges their use in teaching and learning is among the lowest both in Tanzania. It is unknown why the usage mobile phones are low.

2.2 Mobile learning applications

Mobile devices integrate a series of features used in various learning environments. In some mobile learning applications currently available, mobile features are being utilized for various educational practices include the use of Short Message Services (SMS), GPS, camera, browsing, downloading, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, voice calls and gaming (Kizito, 2012; Hoppe, 2009; Cui and Wang, 2008). According to Cui and Wang (2008), SMS System can be used to help students learn foreign languages and teachers can `use SMS to communicate with one student or even one group of students. For instance teachers in higher education in UK have made use of SMS as prompt for course requirements, polling classes, pop quizzes to students and sending information about time table and reminding students about dates for examination (Ferry, 2009).

Browsing with cell phones is one convenient way for students to surf online. Most of the modern mobile phones are incorporated with browsing applications such as Opera Mini, Internet explorer, Mozilla fire fox, Opera and Google chrome. Hoppe (2009), Ferry (2009) and Cui and Wang (2008) state that students can use browsers to check emails, read materials such as ebooks, and watch lecture from anywhere and at any time. Mobile phones have downloading feature which can be used by students and tutors to download various kinds of materials through their mobile phones easily. Teachers can download video through their mobile phones and present them to students through a TV set available in the classrooms (Kafyulilo, 2012).

Most of the mobile phones have features which can be used for recording and playing multimedia contents. Students can greatly benefit from having a camera on the cell phones for documenting visual materials and collecting scientific data (Common Wealth of learning, 2008), Cui and Wang, (2008).

Despite the massive advantages that mobile phones do have in the teaching and learning process, there are some challenges of m-learning among tutors and students. Some of the mobile phones do not have programs that have direct compatibility with the academic programs such as pdf, words, excel and PowerPoint. Screen size is another limiting factor for m-learning.

More recent evidence (Ehsan Shahbazi Tochahi, 2015) reveals that some social networks such as Viber can be a good online instrument for language learning and teraching. It can improve and accelerate the process of learning. The learning was also a motivating experience for the learners in such an environment.

3. Research Question

- Is there any relationship between using Viber and Iranian EFL University Students' Vocabulary Learning?

4. Research Hypothesis

- There is no relationship between using Viber and Iranian EFL University Students' Vocabulary Learning.

5. Participants and Setting of the Study

The participants of this study were 15 BA English students at Hakim Sabzevari University in Sabzevar, Iran. The participants were weak in vocabulary knowledge. The research was conducted in the first semester of 2014 academic year. The students were enrolled in the Fundamental English I course; they met in class two times a week. Each time covered 90 minutes. The length of the semester was eight weeks. Students made a friendly group in Viber, beside their formal class. The mentioned group played key roles in the advancement of

participants' vocabulary knowledge. Students were involved in the group and shared their knowledge of English vocabulary through voice, picture and chatting. The group was monitored by the supervisor, a PhD in English Language Teaching. The supervisor encouraged students to take an active part in discussions. He monitored and facilitated the process of learning. Supervisor believed that **the best way to correct mistakes is to make students correct themselves.** Ideally a student will realize a mistake has been made and fix it automatically.

6. Data Collection and the Methodology

Data for the study were collected by means of an Interview and Observation. The method described here is simple, rapid and sensitive. A series of questions were formulated to find out the students' language proficiency. To get as much out of the interviews as possible the researchers were going to keep them as informal as possible and to create a conversational situation in which the interviewees would feel comfortable and elaborate their answers even more. The interviews were recorded so that it would be easier to go back and review them again and again during the process of writing the essay. The interviews ran smoothly and without any time-pressure or disturbances. The lengths of the interviews were approximately 15 minutes each. Students were selected at random, and were interviewed about their professional development and different aspect of using Viber on their cell phones. The class was also observed before making group and after that. The researchers' aim was to get a general picture of students' vocabulary knowledge. The result of observation was recorded each session. The main focus of observation was on student's vocabulary domain.

7. Conclusion

On the whole, the results of this study showed that most of students like online social networks and they can be used to facilitate English language learning. Results of this study are accordance with the result of Antenos-Conforti (2009) research. The students of this research have indicated that they have positive feeling about using Viber as an online social networking in order to enhance their vocabulary knowledge, because online networks enhance communication and human interaction and provide attractive environment for students and they can learn better than before (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Godwin-Jones, 2008).

As it is mentioned above, there is a clear evidence of the relationship between using online social networks such as Viber and learning English vocabulary. Most of the participants in this study showed positive attitudes towards using Viber to improve their vocabulary domain.

References:

John Kirriemuir, "The games console as a component of the electronic library?" *The Electronic Library*, Volume 18, No. 6, pp. 433-439, December 2000.

Marc Prensky, (2002) "The motivation of game play: The real twenty-first century learning revolution", On the Horizon, Vol. 10 Iss: 1, pp.5 - 11

Georgieva, E., A. Smrikarov and T. Georgiev, 2005. A general classification of mobile learning systems.

Proceeding of the International Conference on Computer Systems and Technologies, June 16-17, Varna, Bulgaria, pp: 11-16.

Sandberg, J., *Maris*, M., de *Geus*, K. (*2011*) Mobile English learning: An evidence-based study with fifth graders. Computers & Education, 57, 1334-1347.

Kabre, F. & Brown, U. J. (2011). The influence of Facebook usage on the academic performance and the quality of life of college students. Journal of Media & Communication Studies, 3(4), 144-150.

Blattner, G. & Fiori, M. (2009). Facebook in the language classroom: Promises and possibilities. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning, 6*(1). np. http://itdl.org/journal/jan_09/article02.htm

Boyd, D. M, Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13(1), article 11.

Alberti, S. (2012).Making the shifts.*Educational Leadership, 70*(4), 24-27.

Altman, A. (2014). Skipping out.*Time 183*(15), 12.

Bruder, P. (2013). Why teachers should be blogging ... and how to do lt. *Education Digest*, *79*(3), 30-37.

Brunsell, E. &Horejsi, M. (2010). Create a classroom blog!*Science Teacher, 77*(2), 12.

Colombo, M. & Colombo, P. (2007).Blogging to improve instruction in differentiated science classrooms.*Phi Delta Kappan. 89*(1), 60-63.

Flierl, R., & Fowler, H. (2007).Educational Uses of Blogs and Wikis. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *89*(3), Inside Bac.

Oravec, J. (2003). Blending by blogging: Weblogs in blended learning initiatives.Journal of Educational Media, 28(2/3), p.225-233. Doi.10.1080/1358165032000165671

Shim, J. & Guo, C. (2009). Weblog technology instruction learning and information deliver. *Decision Sciences Journal Of Innovative Education, 7*(1), 171-193. doi.10.1111/j.1540-4609.2008.00212.x