

Iranian Male and Female EFL Learners' Perceptions toward the Use of Mobile Assisted Language Learning

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to investigate the perception of Iranian EFL learners toward the use of mobile-assisted language learning. 90 male and female EFL learners participated in this study. They were at different levels of proficiency: Elementary ($n=8$), intermediate ($n=31$), upper-intermediate ($n=24$), and advanced ($n=27$). The instrument utilized in this study was Mobile Learning Perception Scale developed by Uzunboyu and Özdamli (2011). Two independent sample t tests were performed to determine whether there were significant differences between Iranian male and female learners perception toward mobile learning. The results revealed that, although, the perception of male learners was slightly more than female learners, it failed to be statistically significant. Therefore, there is no significant difference between Iranian male and female learners' mobile learning perception and the first null hypothesis was accepted. Also Adequacy of mobile learning perception also has the same lack of significant difference between male and female learners. Therefore, the second null hypothesis was accepted. Besides, both male and female learners had a positive view towards e-learning and technology-based language learning. The outcome of this study can be used by curriculum developers and English language teachers to consider the importance of mobile learning in a language syllabus.

Keywords: Mobile assisted language learning, Perception, MALL, Supplementary material

INTRODUCTION

People living today have seen many changes taking place in almost all areas of their lives because of what has been termed "information explosion". Living in this period of time has certain advantages such as higher standards of living because of more advanced technology. One of these forms of advanced technology is the internet, which has affected all aspects of life, especially communication. Social networks have become an important part of daily life and a large number of people are in touch with each other through social networking. Undoubtedly, social networking has influenced language teaching and learning as well. Therefore, it is imperative for second language

acquisition researchers to investigate the different aspects of this phenomenon, including the practical aspects (Bal & Arici, 2011).

In fact, social networking can be considered as a tool for language teachers and learners to facilitate the process of language teaching and learning. Technological advancement and widespread access to computers and electronic devices have rather changed different aspects of our lives a lot, one of which is the field of language learning and teaching. Nowadays, many technological devices are produced in portable form and people have become accustomed to them. These devices are reshaping user behavior in daily lives in different ways (Vyas & Nirban, 2014). In explaining why we need to go toward advanced and modernized methods as the Center for Digital Education (2007) described the disconnection between the millennial learner and the industrial age in the following statement:

The students whom our teachers are endeavoring to teach and prepare for future are learning and interacting with each other in technology rich environments. For the Millennials, a term used to describe the generation born in the 1980s and 1990s, cell phones, text messages and instant messages are their chosen communication methods. Computer gaming has evolved from casual entertainment to a social event, complete with national and international competitions (p. 2).

A paradigm shift is needed to alter the education, training, and preparation of the current generation of learners (Oblinger, 2005). Printed books and structured classrooms can no longer be the primary means for preparing our students for the 21st century (Center for Digital Education, 2007). Until quite recently, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) was a topic of relevance mostly to those with a special interest in that area. Recently, though, computers have become so widespread in schools and homes and their uses have expanded so dramatically that the majority of language teachers must now begin to think about the implications of computers for language learning. Using computers provides a number of advantages for language learning (Warschauer, 1996):

1. Repeated exposure to the same material is beneficial or even essential to learning.
2. A computer is ideal for carrying out repeated drills, since the machine does not get bored with presenting the same material and since it can provide immediate nonjudgmental feedback.
3. A computer can present such material on an individualized basis, allowing students to proceed at their own pace and freeing up class time for other activities.
4. The process of finding the right answer involves a fair amount of student choice, control, and interaction.
5. The computer can create a realistic learning environment, since listening can be combined with seeing, just as in the real world.
6. Multimedia and hypermedia technologies allow a variety of media (text, graphics, sound, animation, and video) to be accessed on a single machine. Hence, skills are easily

integrated, since the variety of media makes it natural to combine reading, writing, speaking and listening in a single activity.

7. Internet technology facilitates communications among the teacher and the language learners. It allows a teacher or student to share a message with a small group, the whole class, a partner class, or an international discussion list of hundreds or thousands of people.

More recently, the advent of the Internet also has enabled tremendous innovation in the delivery of post-secondary education (Gunasekaran, McNeil & Shaul, 2002; Teo & Gay, 2006). As time goes by, more and more people gain access to the Internet, the cost of computer ownership decreases, and overall computer literacy increases. These trends provide educational institutions an ideal channel for the delivery of educational content.

Computers, mobiles and electronic software are not substitute for existing learning devices, but they serve as extension for learning in new environment, having new capabilities, though, not all learning content and activities are appropriate for computer devices. Khamkhien (2012) stated that demonstration teaching and learning through computer based instruction is very helpful with self-directed learning. With self-directed learning approaches, students will be encouraged to learn by themselves. Particularly, they will gain more experience in meaningful contexts. However, it is recommended that the teacher provide students with opportunities and a rich learning environment for students to develop their abilities to think independently, and to self-manage their own activities in order to construct knowledge.

In a very broad sense, for as long as formal instruction has existed there has been an interest in freeing learning from the constraints of time and place (Burston, 2013). Clay tablets, scrolls, then much later printed books were the first technologies employed to meet this challenge. In the latter part of the 20th century desktop computers, laptops, netbooks, and web-based applications greatly facilitated flexible access to language learning materials. The advent of hand-held computer-based devices gave rise to Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) as we know it today. Since the mid-1990s, MALL has focused on the exploitation of five mobile technologies: pocket electronic dictionaries, personal digital assistants (PDAs), mobile phones, MP3 players, and most recently ultra-portable tablet PCs.

The collected data in this study used to help come up with answers to the research questions posed in the study:

1. Are there any significant differences between the mobile learning perceptions of Iranian male and female EFL learners?
2. Are there any significant differences between the mobile learning adequacies of Iranian male and female EFL learners?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The popularity of technology, Internet, and mobile phones has inspired not only the stakeholders in the mobile market, but also many innovative scholars and educators in

the last decades. There have been a number of studies looking into the use of mobile phones and basic functions of mobile phones in language learning.

Two of the recent researchers on the topic under question are Tehrani and Tabatabaei (2012) who investigated the impact of blended online and face-to-face classroom on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge. The participants of the study were 60 female adult EFL learners with intermediate level of English language proficiency located in the city of Isfahan. Their age range was between 19 and 27. The results of this study showed that blended learning provided more authentic and real-life language contexts for learners when it is compared with traditional and paper-based learning situations. These situations provided enthusiasm and excitement for learners. They also suggested that the use of blended online learning itself cannot guarantee vocabulary learning. There should be a teacher to organize the materials, motivate, guide and give feedback to students. Finally, due to time limitations, this study did not measure the impact of online blended learning on the extent to which learners were able to retain lexical items. They also didn't investigate the role of gender on blended online learning.

Regarding gender impact on online learning, Monteith (2002) in a study named gendered learning and learning about gender online gave a report on the findings of a study conducted on a higher education online course run by the University of Stirling. This project aimed to consider whether learning styles were gendered online and whether the Internet as a medium of higher education was suited to men, women or both? Content analysis techniques were used to examine the resulting transcript of texts for evidence of gendered learning styles within a community of learners. Findings indicate that gender is not masked in the text driven discussions on the Internet. It was the contention of this study that the distinction between male and female learning styles has become blurred.

Majeed (2011) under a study entitled "A Gender Based Study for E-Learning in Pakistan" also attempted to investigate "gender differences" affecting the development of e-learning and how these factors can be overcome. This paper identified a number of gender problems associated with e-Learning in Pakistan. It measured the degree to which these factors affect male and female students. The findings showed a positive attitude among students regardless of their gender in consideration of using e-learning either currently or in the future. However, male students have tended to be exposed and encouraged more in the use and development of e-learning as compared to female students.

In a quantitative survey which has been conducted by Fahad (2009), the attitude and perception of the students about the use of mobile technology in education studied at King Saud University, Saudi Arabia. He attempted to determine how this technology can be optimally used to improve student retention. The variables taken into consideration included gender, course of study and attitudes towards new technology. The analysis of student perception on m-learning points to the fact that mobile learning is widely embraced by them. The majority of student supported the notion that the wireless networks increase the flexibility of access to resources in learning and that they could work independently of variable resources like lab or library PCs.

In another study, Fuxin (2012) explores the evolution of the smart phone into a potentially powerful learning tool by providing a literature review on smart phone's use in higher education, and lays a foundation for future research that examines the digital gap between teacher and student related to knowledge and use of smart phone in an existing university.

Cakir (2011) conducted a research which carried out with university students, most of the participants who had the opportunity of using mobile education tools stated that they were interested in mobile learning environments and wanted to make use of mobile learning technologies if they had an opportunity. Moreover, this study supports the fact that the learning process continues on the move. In the study on mobile learning.

Liaw, Hatala, & Huang (2010), found out that students' interest in the subject matter, motivation and academic success increase when online learning and published learning sources are used together.

The study carried out by Uzunboylu & Ozdamli (2011) investigated the attitudes of the students towards the technology based cooperative learning after receiving training in the technology-based cooperative learning environment. It was found out that the students significantly developed positive attitudes towards technology at the end of the experiment.

Azabdaftari and Mozaheb (2012) describe the results of a seven-week study that compared the L2 English vocabulary acquisition of 80 university students. Half of these formed an experimental group that used a phone-based vocabulary program (Spaced Repetition System) complemented by SMS exchanges with the instructor and Internet resources. The control group used printed flashcards containing English words with pronunciation on one side and corresponding L1/L2 equivalents on the other. The experimental group significantly outscored the control on a 20 item multiple-choice post-test.

Ozdamli and Uzunboylu (2015) have conducted a study to investigate mobile learning adequacy and perceptions of students and teachers in secondary schools .In this research, data for the analysis were obtained from a sample of 467 teachers and 1556 students from 32 schools that were surveyed in Northern Cyprus. Based on the results, they conclude that teachers and students want to use m-learning in education. Their perceptions are positive but their m-learning adequacy levels are not sufficient.

METHOD

The present study used a quantitative method to answer the research questions. To do this, the researcher distributed a set of questionnaires among a sample of the target population of the study, the Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, survey data (based on responses in questionnaires) were used to collect the data.

Participants

Convenience sampling procedure was used for the present study. The sample population consisted of Iranian EFL learners who were learning English in high schools and private institutes in Isfahan, during the last month of summer and first two months of fall. The institutes were selected based on convenience sampling. The institutes selected for the study were almost widely scattered throughout Isfahan. The researcher herself or her colleagues were teaching in the institutes. Moreover, some of the participants received the questionnaires through email. There were no requirements other than the participants be currently learning English.

The target number of learners for the study was 100, out of which 90 learners agreed to participate. The response rate, the proportion of participants who agreed to complete the questionnaires among those who received them was 90%, which is acceptable rate to minimize non-response bias (Dornyei, 2003).

There were about 47 females and 43 males; their age varied from about 14 to 26 years old, and their constant attendance in English classes varied from about 1 to 3 years. They were at different levels of proficiency: Elementary (n=8), intermediate (n=31), upper-intermediate (n=24), and advanced (n=27); also their levels of education were different, 49 high school students, 11 university students, 24 participants had bachelor's degree, and 6 participants had master's degree.

Instruments

A questionnaire was used as the instrument of the present study: Mobile Learning Perception Scale developed by Uzunboylu and Özdamlı (2011) is 5-point Likert scale type and consists of 26 items. Mobile learning scale has three sub dimensions: "Aim-Mobile Technologies Fit (8 items)," "Appropriateness of Branch (9 items)" and "Forms of Mobile Learning Application and Tools' Sufficient Adequacy of Communication (9 items)". Answers to the items will be graded in five different columns as "Completely agree", "Agree", "Indecisive", "Disagree" and "Completely disagree". In positive items "Completely agree" is 5 points, "Completely disagree" is 1 point. The points given to the scale range from 26 to 130.

For the sake of reliability, Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale originally used by developers themselves (2012) was determined as .97. In another study by Serin (2012) the same questionnaire was used and Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was determined as .91.

RESULTS

The first research question of this study aimed to explore whether there are any significant differences between the mobile learning perceptions of Iranian male and female EFL learners. To achieve this end, after gathering data through the questionnaire, namely Mobile Learning Perception Scale, participants' answers were compared via an independent samples t test in order to find possible differences of Iranian EFL learners' mobile learning perception in regard to their gender. The results of the analyses are presented below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Comparing Males and Females' Answers to the questionnaire

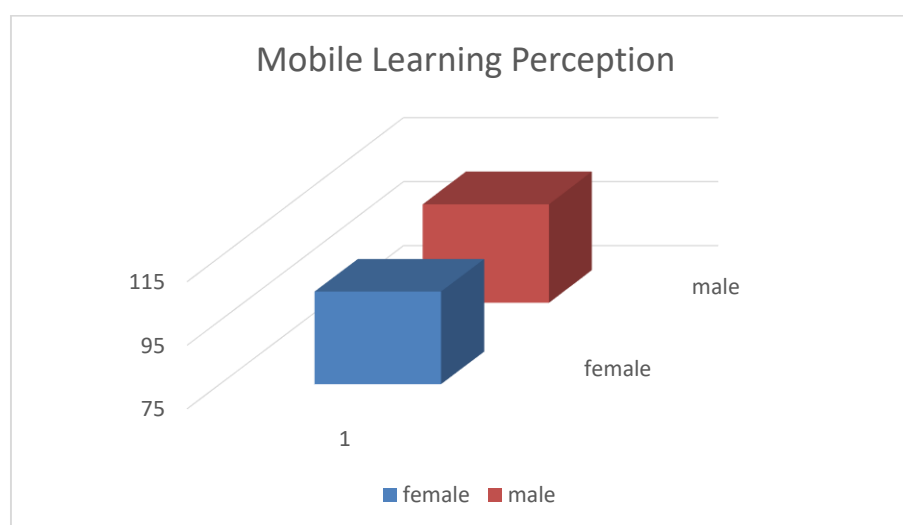
	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest Scores	Female	47	104.1489	10.81460	1.57747
	Male	43	105.8372	10.18853	1.55374

On the questionnaire, the mean score of the female EFL learners ($M = 104.14$) was slightly fewer than that of the male EFL learners ($M = 105.83$). Table 2 shows whether this difference between the two means was statistically significant.

Table 2. Results of the Independent-Samples T-test for Comparing Males and Females' Mobile Learning Perceptions

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
		<i>F.</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal Variances Assumed	.509	.478	-.760	88	.449	-1.68827	2.22010	-6.1002	2.72371
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-.762	87.919	.448	-1.68827	2.21416	-6.0885	2.71197

The difference between the mean scores of male and female learners on the questionnaire failed to reach statistical significance since the p-value was found to be greater than the significance level ($.448 > .05$). This lack of statistical significance for the difference between males and females' perceptions is also graphically shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Male and Female Mobile Learning Perception

Results of the Second Research Question

To see whether there was a significant difference between the mobile learning adequacies of Iranian male and female EFL learners, their answers to the 'Forms of Mobile Learning Application and Tools' Sufficient Adequacy of Communication' in the questionnaire were compared. While the mean score of the females on this part questionnaire was 38.08 that of the males' turned out to be 38.30.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Comparing Males and Females' Answers for Adequacy of Mobile Learning

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Females	47	38.0851	3.88324	.56643
	Males	43	38.3023	4.21751	.64316

The p-value in Table 4 determines whether the difference between the mean scores of the males and females on the questionnaire was statistically significant or not.

Table 4. Results of the Independent-Samples T-test for Comparing Males and Females' Adequacy Perceptions

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
		F.	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differenc e	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal Variances Assumed	.042	.837	-254	88	.800	-.21722	.85386	-1.9140	1.4796
	Equal Variances not Assumed			-253	85.47	.801	-.21722	.85703	-1.9210	1.4866

Since the p-value was greater than the alpha level ($.80 > .05$) in Table 4, it could be reasonably argued that the very slight difference between the males and females' mean scores on the adequacy of mobile learning was not statistically meaningful. This would mean that gender had no significant effect on the mobile learning perception in general and adequacy perception of it in particular. Figure 2 also illustrates this slight difference between the males and females in this regard.

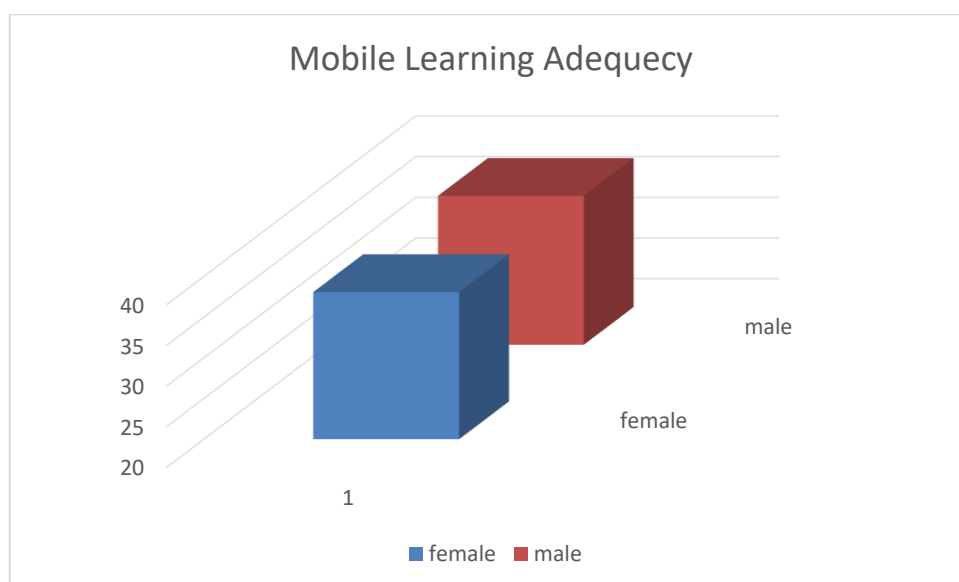


Figure 2. Experimental and Control Groups' Mean Scores on Posttest

According to this bar graph, there is no escaping the fact that on the questionnaire answers in this part, males' and females' perception toward mobile learning adequacy is not different.

All in all, after conducting different analyses, it was made clear that male and female learners' mobile perception and mobile learning adequacy were not significantly different.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that the null hypotheses of the study are accepted. And there is no significant difference in male and female learners' perception towards mobile learning. In this respect both male and female learners showed a positive attitude, and in this respect the findings of the study are in line with Majeed (2011) who conducted a study to investigate a gender based study for e-learning in Pakistan; as it has been mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, his finding showed a positive attitude among students regardless of their gender in consideration of using e-learning. This shows that the use of such technologies and digital environment has been accepted as a new trend which can improve the educational environment along with other advances and development that it has given to human being life. But he also mentioned that male learners have more tendency to use and be exposed to e-learning. That seems to be due to the cultural differences that may influence female learners' tending not to be exposed. Interaction and having both teacher-student and student-student communication have been considered as an advantage of mobile learning in the present study.

Similarly, the same reported study in Chapter Two is Monteith's (2002) findings, he also reported that there is no distinction regarding the gender of learners in his learning style on internet. Another study which has the same findings is the research by Cakir (2011) who found that students were interested in online learning.

Another prominent finding of the present study is that student-student communication facilitated through mobile learning. In this respect Fuxin (2012) also found that smart phones can give a better chance to have interaction between learners and also teacher and students. Azabdaftari and Mozaheb (2012) described that according to their findings and the results of their experiment, the outcome of mobile communication had a positive effect on their language learning.

Vyasand and Nirban (2014) also have found that in Indian institutes and other educational contexts students tend to use the new technology and mobile learning, they also mentioned that Electronics and information technology is the fastest growing segment of industry in India, both in terms of production and exports, they concluded that mobile learning and this new technology can play the role of a significant medium for educational purposes. The closest study to the present study are Ozdamli and Uzunboylu (2015) the result of which revealed that students' perceptions are positive toward mobile learning.

All in all, the findings of the present study along with other similar researches (Azabdaftari & Mozaheb, 2012; Cakir, 2011; Fuxin, 2012; Majeed, 201; Monteith, 2002; Ozdamli & Uzunboylu, 2015; Vyas & Nirban, 2014) has shown that mobile learning would be a way to motivate learners and facilitate their interaction by the use of technology in general and mobile learning in particular.

CONCLUSION

In fact this study aimed to shed more light on the point that students' perception of mobile learning. In addition, the study also tried to determine whether students' gender has any impact on their perception of mobile learning. As it was illuminated in the preceding section of the study, the findings of the study revealed that male and female students' perceptions are not significantly different and they both have positive attitude toward mobile learning. Considering the effectiveness of mobile learning and considering the students as one of the most important stake holders in educational settings it may be ideal to integrate the traditional classes and procedures with more tool-aided one and in this respect e-learning and technology-based instruction can be used.

Mobile use and its advances in these years can be an evidence of the fact that it can be used for the sake of educational purposes and this can also be the use of both intensive and even extensive learning, as it can be used and applied to both in the class and out of class contexts.

The interaction and students to student feedback also can be facilitated by the use of e-learning and smart phones, an advantage of this method can be less stress while communicating with others. As in Oliver (1999) technology based learning has been considered as a scaffolding tool through which teachers' feedback and peer correction can also be aided. In a pure application-based educational program there are still challenges as they cannot be appropriate substitutes for human being and also students should receive training before using them in order to facilitate learning (Hmelo & Day, 1999). Therefore, mobile learning can be a less stressful environment for interaction

and learning, as it has been comparatively shown in Sharples, Taylor, and Vavoula (2005), the mobile learning is user centered and it can be learner-centered in education and it is networked so it can be collaborative in educational settings.

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