AN ANALYSIS OF MOBILE DICTIONARIES IN VOCABULARY TEACHING

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Abstract

In recent years, rapid developments in technology have placed books and notebooks into the mobile phones and tablets and also the dictionaries into these small boxes. Giant dictionaries, which we once barely managed to carry, have been replaced by mobile dictionaries through which we can reach any words we want with only few touches. Mobile dictionaries with their audiovisual contents have become an important source for vocabulary teaching. Further studies are needed to use this source in a more efficient way and to benefit from it more effectively. Starting from this point, this study elaborates on the use of mobile dictionaries in vocabulary teaching. In the first place, advantages and the limits of the use of these dictionaries in vocabulary teaching are tried to be determined students viewpoint to them and how frequently they are used. In light of the emerging data, new ways are sought to use these dictionaries as a more efficient teaching material. For this purpose, a survey was conducted to seventy-eight students of Wiralodra University Indramayu in 2016 -2017 academic year. A survey form was prepared by receiving opinion of an expert and reviewing related literature. Descriptive statistic techniques were used in the analysis of data gathered. At the end of the study, almost all students expressed that they were constantly using mobile dictionaries to learn vocabulary. Besides, students put forth the advantages and limits of them. We hope this study will make contribution to studies regarding more efficient way to use of these dictionaries in vocabulary teaching.

Keywords: Mobile dictionaries, vocabulary teaching, dictionary applications

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is one of the most important elements among others while learning a new language. Because, learning a new language takes place with acquisition of new words. Unknown words pose obstacles while understanding a language. In order to eliminate these obstacles, vocabulary enrichment is needed. Undoubtedly, one of the most important sources of reference is the dictionaries. Dictionaries as one of the fundamental references have long been one of the most important sources helping students by bringing in any words, phrases, terms or idioms, correct ways of writing, vocalization, and assistance to use properly for ages. While a dictionary has various meanings, it is generally defined as a book that deals with a language, certain part of a language or words and idioms used in a specific time period typically in the order of the alphabet and sometimes according to conceptual areas a dictionary makes definition in the same language, clarified
Mobile learning is a type of learning that takes place with the help of mobile devices (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008) and simply means learning anywhere and at any time. While at the beginning, mobile learning focused on the role of mobile technologies and devices in education, in the recent years mobile learning is characterized with the mobility of the user and the informal learning that happens out of the classroom. In this case, any portable and palmtop devices such as portable media player devices, tablets, and mobile phones contribute to mobile learning. From among the portable technological tools, mobile phones are the most commonly used devices for learning (Pecherzewska & Knots, 2007) and due to their portability and accessibility many scholars now consider using them in the educational settings for learning and teaching purposes. Research shows that mobile phones can be used to leverage instruction (Roschelle, 2002).

Mobile learning has certain benefits for language classes as well and allows language teachers to offer access to authentic content, communicative language practice, and task completion (Chinnery, 2006). While the effect of some mobile phone affordances such as Short Message Service (SMS), voice-messaging, cameras, video-recording and Internet access have spawned studies (e.g., Thornton & Houser, 2005; Jee, 2011), “few studies have investigated students’ personal use of mobile apps for learning and the learning benefits” (Steel, 2012: 1).

1.1. Mobile Dictionaries and Vocabulary Teaching

Since the late 20th century, parallel to the recent developments in technology, a radical change has occurred in the education realm and thanks to the information technologies, new facilities and opportunities have appeared. There is no doubt that mobile devices come first among them. Kukulska-Hulme, Shield, (2008) describe learning experience regardless of space bound with the help of mobile devices as mobile learning. According to Sharples (2006), at first mobile learning focused on the role of mobile technologies and devices in education and then a form of informal learning taking place outside classes and requiring no specific place to use. Small devices such as mobile media players, mobile phones and tablets contribute to the mobile learning (Rahimia & Mirib 2014:1470).

During recent years, rapid developments in technology have placed books and notebooks in mobile phones and tablets and also the words into these small boxes. Giant dictionaries that we barely managed to carry have been replaced by mobile dictionaries through which we can reach any words we want with only few touches. One of the most important and distinctive attributes of mobile dictionaries is its provision of opportunities to listen to correct pronunciation. Additionally, some of their attributes such as suitability to update regularly, easy access and portability, being free of charge of majority of them can be counted as factors differing it from those printed dictionaries.

Mobile dictionaries with their above-mentioned characteristics are important source for vocabulary teaching as well because with their audiovisual contents, mobile dictionaries provide with great opportunities in efficient and permanent vocabulary teaching. Doğan (2014: 90) points out the necessity not to neglect making use of visual things in vocabulary teaching and says: “showing pictures and photographs during studies is more effective than just noting down the words and simply explaining them.”
Demirel (2004) argues that teaching vocabulary in a proper and right way ensures person to properly use the recently learned words in each realm of a language and counts some of these techniques as follows:
1. Real objects are shown related to the word.
2. Drawing shapes images and sketches onto the blackboard to explain words.
3. Pictures or paintings, posters and banners taking from materials such as newspapers and magazines are shown.
4. Visual methods are used. (Flash cards, Posters, Interactive CDs, Videos, Short Films and so on)
5. Clarification is made by using formerly thought words.
6. Synonyms and antonyms of the words are given.
7. The word is separated if it is a compound in order to explain.

When we look at the structures of mobile dictionaries, it is seen that above-sorted techniques can be successfully used with these dictionaries. For instance, real objects, images, pictures and videos can be presented through them. Furthermore, improving qualifications such as antonyms and synonyms are also among the ability of these dictionaries. A number of positive results have also been received from studies with respect to this capacity. While Browne and Culligan (2008) received positive results from vocabulary teaching by using flash cards via mobile phones, Thornton and Houser (2005) got successful results from activities via them as for English idioms. Students found these activities not only positive but also beneficial and entertaining at the same time (Stockwell, 2010: 96). And in our study, in line with students’ remarks, we tried to identify what the limits and advantages of these dictionaries are and how efficiently it is employed in classes. For this purpose, answers were sought to following questions:
1. What are students’ points of view about the use of mobile dictionaries?
2. How frequently mobile dictionaries are used in classes?
3. What are the advantages of using mobile dictionaries?
4. What are the problems confronted while using mobile dictionaries in class?

2. Method

2.1. Sample / Participants

Study consists of French, English, German translator candidates studying at university. Sampling is composed of a total of 78 students of Wiralodra University. 69 % of the participants are constituted by women and 31 % of them by men.

2.2. Instrument(s)

A structured questionnaire is used as data collection tool. The form is created by reviewing literature and consulting experts.

2.3. Data collection procedures

In analysis process, Descriptive Statistics are employed. “Descriptive Statistics includes summary information such as how many times each value or a set of value in a variable repeats, how values are distributed around a point designated as the centre, the distance from the midpoint and distance/ relative distance among them” (Akbulut, 2012: 168).

3. Results and Discussion

Results gathered after the survey and discussion related to them is provided below.

Table 1. Frequency of the Use of Mobile Dictionary
Students were asked how often they made the use of mobile dictionaries and 91% of them gave the response “Always”% 8 of them “Rarely”, and 1% stated “Never”. These findings prove that students take advantages of mobile dictionaries to a great extent and these dictionaries are one of the most referred sources.

Table 2. The Adequacy of the Number of Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly Adequate</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 21% of the students surveyed gave the response of “Adequate”, 69% of them said “Partly Adequate” and 10% of them found the number of words “Not Adequate”. Although a considerable number of students made positive remarks, we understand from the gathered data that the word content of these dictionaries should be enriched to turn into a considerable reference.

Table 3. Difference between Mobile Dictionaries and Printed Dictionaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usability</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy access to Information</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portability</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-visual Content</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly Updatable</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 54% of the students expressed easy access to information as the most important distinguishing feature of mobile dictionaries, 27% of them assessed these dictionaries as easy to use. 15% of them gave prominence to portability and 4% viewed regularly updatable feature as the most important distinguishable feature. Features like easy access to information and usability were viewed as the main factors differing these two types of dictionaries from one another.

Table 4. Limits of Mobile Dictionaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet Connection Problems</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Screen and Keyboard Sizes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to View the Content of All Kinds</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment Problems in Word Display</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of internet access was considered the most important limitation. Inability to view the content of all kinds was ranked the second limit with a proportion of 37%. While 8% of students evaluated alignment problems in word display as the limits of these dictionaries, 4% of them prioritized small screen and keyboard sizes. Based on these results, we can conclude that in order to be able to use these applications effectively, the Internet infrastructure should be reinforced. Additionally, the Internet connection problem brings about inability to display content. Small size of these devices are not seen as a problem, at least not big enough that might affect the vocabulary teaching.

Table 5. Limits of Mobile Dictionaries in Vocabulary Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency in translating words with various meanings</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency in the provision of synonyms and antonyms</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency in the display of way of word use (such as verbs and inflectional suffix)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency in explaining</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of idioms

46 % of students pointed out the deficiency in translation of words with various meanings as limitation in terms of vocabulary teaching, whereas 13 % of them emphasized deficiency in the provision with synonyms and antonyms. In the same way, 22 % of students signified deficiency in the display of way of word usage (such as verbs and inflectional suffix) and 19 % of them viewed the explanation of idioms as insufficient. Ratios of given responses are close to one another as seen. This puts forth the necessity to improve content related to each issues.

Table 6. Advantages of Mobile Dictionaries to Students at Vocabulary Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct Pronunciation of Words</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct Spelling of Words</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct Uses of Words</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement of Vocabulary with Activities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alongside the above-mentioned limitations, advantages should also be stated. Correct Pronunciation was appraised as the most significant advantage of the use of mobile dictionary with a rate of 36 %. Correct spelling received 28 % of responses, correct uses of words received % 21 of responses and improvement of vocabulary with activities had % 15 of responses. It is concluded here that opinions are expressed at certain proportions.

4. Conclusions

The aim of the current study was investigating the effect of using mobile dictionaries in vocabulary teaching in contrast to using paperback dictionaries. The findings showed that EFL learners who used the mobile dictionary to learn English improved their language ability more than those who used the printed dictionary. The finding corroborates previous research findings that generally computer-assisted language learning environments can have a positive effect on learners’ achievement in learning English as a foreign language. Using technology promotes language learners’ motivation, creates positive attitudes toward learning a foreign language (Rahimi & Hosseini, 2011). However, the innovative finding of this study is related to using mobile dictionaries in language classes and the learning that is extended to environments out of the classroom, into everyday activities, and learning anywhere at any times (Joseph & Uther, 2009) with the help of one mobile app. “Mobile apps offer a wide range of learning tools [to students] that can be downloaded to their mobile devices and used productively at opportune times in a variety of settings and on-the-go (Steel, 2012: 1). In case of language learning this feature of mobile learning is a more practical help, as “extending language learning outside of class room time, especially where in-class language practice time is limited, is essential to language acquisition (Kennedy & Levy, 2009, cited in Steel, 2012: 2). Moreover, as foreign language learning needs frequent informal practice (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012), mobile phones provide ample opportunities for learners to have continuous connection with the target language. Among mobile apps, using dictionaries is highly regarded by students (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012) because using mobile dictionaries is time efficient and help language learners acquire vocabulary and check verb conjugations (Steel, 2012). The affordances that are included in mobile dictionaries such as visual media
(images, graphics), audio media (pronunciation), multimedia, and searching can also be the reason of better learning when students use mobile dictionaries (Joseph & Uther, 2009).

References


Kukulska-Hulme, A. & Shield, L. (2008). An overview of mobile assisted language learning: From content delivery to supported collaboration and interaction. ReCALL, 20, 271-289.


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