The Openness of Language Learning : A Survey of Using Mobile Technology to Enhance Chinese Language Learning

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Abstract. The advancement of mobile technology has enabled language learning to become more interactive and interesting. Mobile learning brings flexibility and openness to language learning. This paper focuses on a study which was conducted with Chinese Language major students at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Burapha University in order to find out the potential of mobile learning to enhance Chinese language proficiency. The methodology used for this study was an online questionnaire survey. The results revealed that most of the students have positive attitudes towards mobile learning and believe that mobile phones could be used to enhance Chinese proficiency.

Keywords: Openness, Language Learning, Mobile Learning, Chinese Language

Introduction

Mobile learning is one of the major developing areas in recent years in the educational field. Mobile learning is presented as part of the teaching-studying-learning process. Mobile learning is defined as studying and communication that uses mobile technologies and other mobile applications, such as networked communicators and other appliances (Tella, 2003).

The advancement of mobile technology has enabled language learning to become more interactive and interesting. Mobile Learning brings flexibility and openness to language learning. It generates a new generation of foreign language materials, teaching and learning materials that are freely available online for everyone to use, whether you are an instructor, student or self-learner. This new development is the opposite of the traditional language classroom, which is closed, its location is fixed, limited to certain classes; time is also fixed, and only a few sessions per week. The mobile technology has broken through time and space constraints, the learner through the mobile device is enabled to choose any time for language study and practice.

Mobile technologies are becoming more accessible and popular. As we can see every day on university campuses, mobile devices have become an integral part of students' lives, putting truly authentic and engaging cultural materials at their fingertips. Because these mobile devices offer many tools for formal or informal language learning (Edwige, 2012). Meanwhile, the number of students learning Chinese as a foreign language has increased steadily (Jing Wang, 2012). Since 2008, more than 500,000 students have studied Chinese in Thailand at all education levels (MGR online, 2008). Within this context, it is crucial to consider the role mobile devices might play in helping students to learn Chinese. Researchers in the field of computer-assisted language learning agree that the use of technology in specific language learning situations is more significant than the technology itself (Kern, 2006). The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of mobile technology to enhance Chinese language learning from Chinese language major students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Burapha

University, and to understand students' attitudes towards mobile language learning.

Literature Review

The process of learning can be divided in to formal and informal learning. Formal learning includes all types of intentional, planned and often class-based learning, as happens, for example, at school or in a language learning course. Informal learning on the other hand contains all sorts of learning that happens spontaneously outside any classroom situation and it is completely learner-driven (Terras and Ramsay, 2012).

Mobile learning combines both types of learning, as it can happen in a scheduled and intentional way as well as in a spontaneous manner. It adds a certain amount of control to the learners themselves (Rodriguez-Arancon, Arus and Calle, 2013).

There are few studies which have concentrated on identifying the use of mobile technologies in facilitating Chinese language learning. A study conducted by Jing and Leland (2012) is one of the few examples of empirical studies on this topic. They studied the exploring mobile technologies for learning Chinese. The aim of study was to reveal how learners of Chinese as a foreign language use mobile technology to study Chinese outside the classroom. The sample was eleven English-speaking students who had learned Chinese for varying lengths of time at a Midwestern US University. It was found that, while students were enthusiastic about using mobile devices to learn Chinese, the number of applications they used and the variety of activities they engaged in were limited. Findings suggested that the effective incorporation of mobile devices to learn Chinese depended on collaboration with other students and scaffolding by the teacher (Jing and Leland, 2012).

Another study has been done by Zengning (2011). The aims of this study was to reveal how the mobile phone is perceived as a language learning tool and what opinions students have after their mobile phone learning experience. A total of 24 part-time adult learners majoring in English participated in this research. A questionnaire survey was conducted after a 4-week vocabulary learning experience assisted by mobile phones. Results supported the idea that mobile phones provide an alternative source for adult learners to learn vocabulary and cater to the particular needs of adult learners to "learn anytime and anywhere". Vocabulary learning with mobile phones allows learners to be exposed to the distributed vocabulary items on the regular basis, which can be a complementary approach to massed vocabulary learning, as in the traditional paper-based vocabulary learning (Zengning, 2011). Therefore, the two studies reviewed have found that mobile devices are deemed as efficient tools for language learners with additional support for different learning styles.

Research Objectives

The following two research objectives were specified for this research:

1. To collect information of using mobile technology to enhance Chinese language learning from Chinese language major students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Burapha University; and

2. To ascertain students' attitudes towards mobile learning.

Methodology

The methodology used for this study was an online questionnaire. The students for this study were 36 Thai students that had elementary, intermediate and advanced Chinese language level, 1st - 4th year students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Burapha University who were currently learning as Chinese foreign language majors. The researcher selected the entire population of the elementary, intermediate and advanced level Chinese language major students of the above Faculty. This strategy was used to maintain the quality and effectiveness of this study.

The objectives of the questionnaire were follows: Part One collected general information about the Chinese language major students. Part Two focused on collecting information related to their mobile usage. Part Three was designed in such a way as to identify the students attitudes towards mobile learning. Most of the questions were closed-ended with few open-ended question to licit respondents' comments.

Survey Findings

General Information

Information of the students who responded to the questionnaires are presented as follows:

Table 1: Gender of Students

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	4	11.10
Female	32	88.90
Total	36	100.00

(Source: Research Questionnaire)

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents were female: 32 (88.90%) of the total of 36 students. Only 4 (11.10%) male students were in the sample.

Table 2: Level of Class

| Class level	Frequency	Percent
1st year	6	16.67
2nd year	18	50.00
3rd year	10	27.78
4th year	2	5.56
Total	36	100.00

(Source: Research Questionnaire)

Table 2 shows that half (50%) of the respondents were 2nd year students. This is followed by 3rd year which is 10 (27.78%), 1st year which is 6 (16.67%) and 4th year which is 2 (5.56%).

Mobile Usage

Which of the following mobile technology do you own?

This question was asked in order to identify the widely available types of phones among the university community. The students were allowed to select the answer either 1. Ordinary mobile phone (without internet connection) or 2. Smartphone (access to internet). 100% of the students owned a phone which have Smartphone that can access to the internet.

How often do you use your mobile phone?
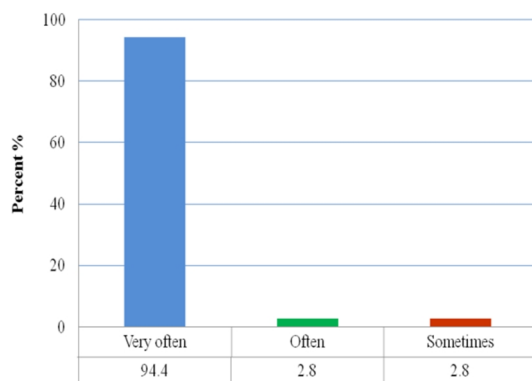
Picture 1: Frequency of Using the Mobile Phone
*(*Source: Research Questionnaire)

Picture 1 shows how often the students use a mobile phone in their daily life. Students were given the range to rate of 1 for never, 2 for rarely, 3 for sometimes, 4 for often and 5 which is very often (daily). Based on the findings, 94.40% of the students responded that they used mobile phone very often (daily) and 2.8% of the students responded both often and

sometimes. This shows that the vast majority of the students used their phone every day.

How would you rate your mobile technology skills?
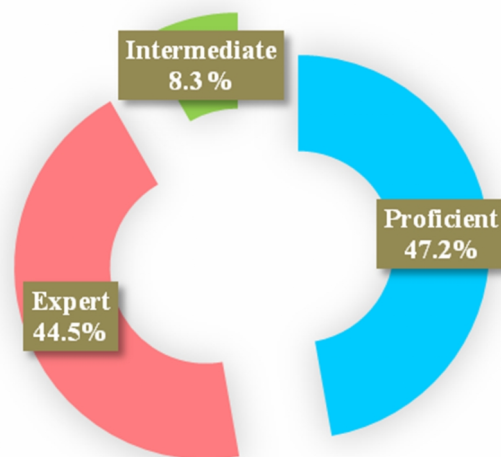
Picture 2: Mobile Technology Skills
(Source: Research Questionnaire)

Picture 2 shows the students' mobile skills rating. Students were asked to rate themselves based on their mobile technology skills. A total of 47.2% of the students rated themselves as proficient, 44.5% rated themselves as expert and 8.3% rated themselves at an intermediate level in using Smartphone.

Have you used a mobile phone to learn Chinese? (Multiple choice questions)

Table 3: Student's Activities with Mobile Phones

Activities with mobile phones	Frequency	Percent	
To translate	36	100.00	
Listen to Chinese songs	32	88.90	
Chat with their family and friends	32	88.90	
Check the meanings of new words or look up for vocabulary	28	77.80	
Watch Chinese movies online	28	77.80	
Play games	13	36.10	
Search the information of Chinese history and watch Chinese webcast	1	2.80	

(Source: Research Questionnaire)

The information in Table 3 above provides feedback from the student as to whether they have used their mobile phone to learn Chinese. If yes, students stated the activity that they generally undertake. All the students agreed that they use their mobile phone (Smartphone) to learn Chinese. 100.00% responded that they used their mobile phone to translate. 88.90% of students listened to Chinese songs and chatted with their family and friends. 77.80 % of students used it to check the meanings of new words or to look up vocabulary and to watch Chinese movies online.

36.10% of students used their phones to play games and another 2.80% responded that they used their mobile phone to search for information about Chinese history and to watch Chinese webcasts.

Mobile technology is useful for learning Chinese.
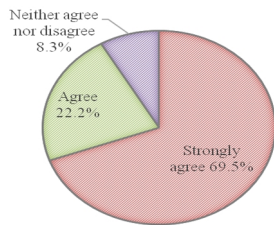
Picture 3: Students' Preferences for Mobile Technology for Learning Chinese

(Source: Research Questionnaire)

Picture 3 shows students' responses that mobile technology was useful for learning Chinese. The purpose of the responses to this item was to infer students' perceptions towards mobile technology. The responses showed the students' preferences on the usefulness of mobile technology in learning Chinese. A total of 69.50% strongly agreed and 22.20% agreed that mobile technology is useful in learning Chinese. Only 8.30% did not agree or disagree.

What do you mostly use in learning Chinese on your mobile phone? (Multiple choice questions)

**Table 4 : Student's Mobile Usage in Learning Chinese**

Mobile usage in learning Chinese	Frequency	Percent
Check meaning of vocabulary	35	97.20
Translate Chinese to Thai or Thai to Chinese	33	91.70
Learn new words	31	86.10
Listen to pronunciation	26	72.20
Learn to speak Chinese	24	66.70
Search various information sources	2	5.60

(Source: Research Questionnaire)

Table 4 shows the mobile usage of the students in learning Chinese. This table is based on a more specific question on students' preferences on the usefulness of mobile technology in learning Chinese, whereas Table 3 was a general view on mobile usage. In this item, students stated the activities that they specifically do on their mobile phone to learn Chinese. The responses showed that 97.20% of the students used their mobile phones to check the meanings of vocabulary, 91.70% translate Chinese to Thai or Thai to Chinese using the mobile phones, 86.10% learn new words on mobile phones, 72.20% listen to pronunciation using mobile phones, 66.70% learn to speak Chinese using the mobile phone and another 5.6% used the internet *via* their mobile phone to search various information sources.

How would you rate your overall Chinese proficiency?
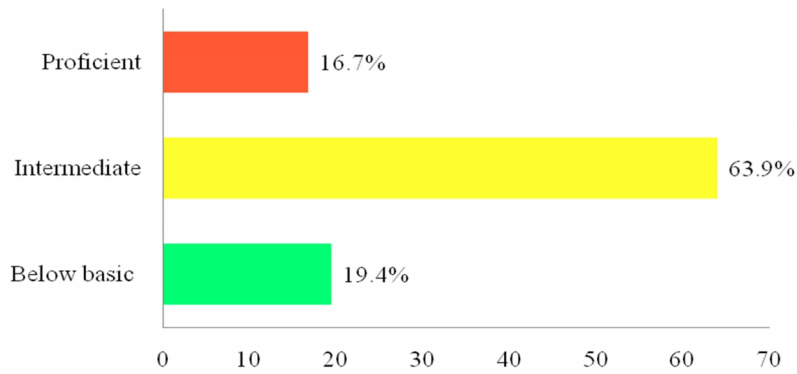
Picture 4 : Chinese Proficiency Level

(Source: Research Questionnaire)

Picture 4 shows students' Chinese proficiency level. In this questionnaire item, students rated themselves of their overall Chinese proficiency. 63.9% rated their proficiency at intermediate level, 19.40% as below basic and 16.7% responded proficient.

This was to know how well they think they can understand the instruction and handle the msobile phone.

Which four language learning skills are you using your mobile phone to enhance your Chinese learning? (Multiple choice questions)

Table 5: Mobile Phone Enhances Language Learning Skills

Mobile phone enhances language learning skills	Frequency	Percent
Reading	34	94.40
Listening	30	83.30
Writing	13	36.10
Speaking	9	25.00

(Source: Research Questionnaire)

Table 5 shows the language learning skills that students used their mobile phone to enhance their learning of Chinese. The responses showed that 94.40% of the students used their mobile phones to enhance reading skill, 83.30%

responded listening skill, 36.10% responded writing skills and 25% responded speaking skill.

Which of the four language learning skills you would like to enhance in future?
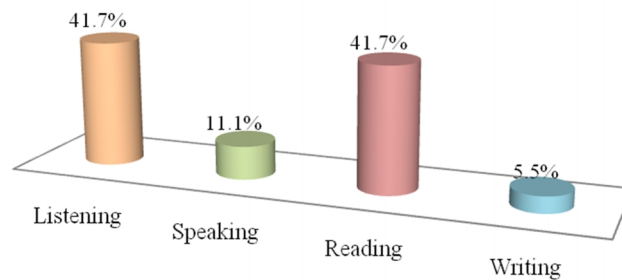
Picture 5: Four Language Learning Skills to Enhance in Future

(Source: Research Questionnaire)

The finding in the Picture 5 shows that, based on the priority for four language learning skills, 41.7% of the students have identified that reading and listening is highly important which should be enhanced in future, while 11.1% of

students responded speaking and 5.5% responded writing.

Does your Chinese knowledge affect learning of other studies?

When raising the question with regard to the impact of Chinese language in other studies, 94.40% of students feel that Chinese affects the learning of other subjects while, 5.60% of students stated that it did not affect their learning of other subjects.

Attitudes Towards Mobile Learning

The findings obtained from all the 10 items in the questionnaire are presented in the tables below. The findings from the survey questions help to answer research question 2 on students' attitudes towards mobile learning.

Table 6: Students' Attitudes Towards Mobile Learning

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1. I think mobile phones could be used to teach or learn Chinese.	61% (22)	36% (13)	3% (1)	-	-	100% (36)
2. I think I can improve my Chinese language skills through a mobile.	36% (13)	50% (18)	14% (5)	-	-	100% (36)
3. I installed a learning application in my mobile phone to improve Chinese proficiency.	61% (22)	28% (10)	11% (4)	-	-	100% (36)
4. Learning through mobile devices helped me to utilize my time productively.	36% (13)	56% (20)	8% (3)	-	-	100% (36)
5. I always enjoy learning Chinese through mobile phones.	36% (13)	47% (17)	17% (6)	-	-	100% (36)
6. I could understand the meaning of Chinese sentences easily assisted by mobile phone.	44% (16)	36% (13)	17% (6)	3% (1)	-	100% (36)
7. I learned extra Chinese words through mobile phones.	50% (18)	42% (15)	8% (3)	-	-	100% (36)
8. I use my mobile phones as much as possible during Chinese class time.	50% (18)	39% (14)	8% (3)	3% (1)	-	100% (36)
9. I am willing to purchase a mobile phone with advanced features if it will help me to improve my Chinese learning.	22% (8)	33% (12)	39% (14)	6% (2)	-	100% (36)
10. I believe using mobile phones in Chinese learning makes me more productive.	19% (7)	64% (23)	17% (6)	-	-	100%

						(36)

Remark : (Frequency)

(Source: Research Questionnaire)

Table 6 shows the percentages based on findings of item 1 from the survey questionnaire. 22 (61%) out of 36 students strongly agreed that mobile phones could be used to teach or learn Chinese in their overall learning process. In addition, 36% agreed to the statement, while 3% gave neutral responses. Therefore, over 50% students said yes to this statement.

Item 2, when asking about the language skill, 36% of students strongly agreed and 50% agreed that Chinese language skills can be improved through mobile, when comparing to only 14% provided a neutral response to this statement. It showed that a majority of students think that they can improve their Chinese language skills through mobile technology use. So, it seems that mobile technology has a positive impact on students' learning.

Based on the students' responses to item 3, more than 89% (61% strongly agreed, 28% agreed) of students intend to install a learning application in order to improve their Chinese language proficiency, while 4% gave a neutral response.

Item 4 shows that a majority of students agreed (56% agreed, 36% strongly agreed) that learning through mobile devices will allow learners to utilize their time effectively, while 8% gave a neutral response.

In response to item 5, 36% or 13 students strongly agreed that they enjoyed learning Chinese through mobile phones, 47% (17 students) agreed and another 17% (6 students) recorded a neutral response to this statement. This is a positive result, as none of the students strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement, confirming that mobile phones allowed them to enjoy learning Chinese.

Based on Item 6, the highest value of 44% showed that 16 students strongly agreed that they could easily understand simple sentences with the assistance of mobile phones, while 36% agreed, 17% were neutral and 3% disagreed with this statement. The majority agreed that mobile phones provide great assistance in comprehending Chinese sentences. However, there were students who gave "neutral" and "disagree" response. Therefore, it can be said that it is the individual's choice of learning technique.

Item 7 shows that the highest percentage of students at 50% strongly agreed that they comprehended words and texts better through the use of mobile phones and 42% agreed, while 8% gave neutral responses. These percentages showed that students did increase their vocabulary list, while it can be assumed from the neutral responses that it depends on the situation for this minority of students.

Based on the students' responses to item 8, the research showed that 18 (50%) students, strongly agreed, 14 (39%) students agreed, and another 3 (8%) students said neutral, while 3% gave a disagree response. A total of 32 students or more than a half of the students agreed that they try to use their phones as much as possible, while only 1 (3%) student disagreed with the statement.

In students' responses to item 9, 22% strongly agreed, 33% agreed, while 39% recorded a neutral response and another 6% disagreed with this statement. It showed that a majority of students were willing to purchase a mobile phone with advanced features if it would help improve their Chinese learning.

The students' responses to item 10 were highly positive, because 64% agreed and another 19% strongly agreed that mobile phone use made their learning more productive. Only 17% did not take a stand and gave a neutral response. This shows a positive feedback towards the usage of mobile phone in Chinese as a foreign language learning. In addition, since there is no disagreement, it can be reported that mobile phones have a positive impact on a more productive learning process.

Conclusion

The conclusion and discussion of findings in this paper are based on the research objectives that have been outlined earlier in this paper. Through the survey of online questionnaire, it can be clearly seen that mobile phones have already become a popular and frequently used device by students, as well as in their educational studies. The survey results demonstrated that most of the students had positive attitudes towards mobile learning and believed that mobile phones could be used to enhance their Chinese language proficiency. So, mobile technology enhances the impact of mobile learning on traditional language learning strategies and this study found that mobile phone technology do play an important role in contributing to language learning achievement.

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