International Conference
ICT for Language Learning

# BYOPHD: Challenges and Issues

**Manal Almarwani**[1]

## Abstract

*English continues to develop as the global language of knowledge, business, commerce, and the gateway to drive the economy in countries worldwide. The desire to participate in the knowledge society, in which English is the dominant language, and help to prompt the economy of the country towards globalization has meant that there is a strong emphasis on learning English as a foreign language by all university students in Saudi Arabia. Mobile technologies have created new prospects and opportunities for learning English. Bringing personal handheld devices by students and faculty in higher education institutions is emerging as individual practices and personal attempts to enhance learning and teaching of English within the comfort zone of both students and faculty. Higher education institutions can make a pragmatic transition from these individual practices and personal attempts of integrating mobile technologies into learning and teaching, to institutional implementation as a cost cutting strategy by calling for a Bring Your Own Personal Handheld Device (BYOPHD) institution-wide strategy. High level of acceptance of BYOPHD strategy is reported, therefore, there is a need to have a stated institutional policy to regulate and govern the implementation process. This paper reports on challenges and issues related to BYOPHD from EFL students' perspective at higher education. Students have reported several challenges and issues that can be addressed in formulating the institutional policy.*

*Keywords: BYOPHD, Mobile technologies, English, Policy*

## 1. Introduction

Over the last few years, mobile information and communication technologies (MICTs), with advanced capabilities, have created new prospects and opportunities for language learning in particular and learning in general. Many studies have investigated students' perceptions and acceptance of mobile learning; results indicated essentially positive attitudes and a high level of acceptance [1,3]. Further researches have reported different uses of mobile technologies in language learning [7,15]. However, reviewing the large body of literature on mobile learning, one has to acknowledge the high level of mobile technologies penetration among young people, as well as the high technical capabilities. Therefore, acquiring these advancements possibly will be the cheapest and easiest element in the complicated process of integrating mobile technologies into learning and teaching. Simply, universities could usefully implement "Bring Your Own Personal Handheld Device" (BYOPHD) policy among students and staff in order to promote the integration of the use of mobile technologies into learning and teaching.

## 2. Context

More and more students are joining higher education in Saudi Arabia every year. Official figures indicated that 393,131 freshmen had joined higher education in 2016 [8]. All students joining the major schools and programs should pass through the Preparatory Year English Language (PYEL) program, which is a compulsory prerequisite. The PYEL aims at advancing the English proficiency of Saudi students moving into the higher education. However, "due to the large number of students taking this program, the lack of faculty to teach them, and the lack of the appropriate space for face-to-face teaching and learning, new technologies for learning have had to be adopted, to enable English language learning outside the classroom and reduce the time that students spend every day in the university" (p. 7) [1].

After investigating the readiness for, and acceptance of, mobile learning and teaching EFL in higher education in Saudi Arabia. Results indicated that smart phones were the most popular devices, owned by 81.4% of EFL students and 79.7% of EFL instructors [1]. This was key consideration for encouraging BYOPHD institution-wide strategy, especially that the UNESCO Policy Guidelines for Mobile learning highlights the convenience associated with owing mobile technologies which facilitate

[1] Taibah University (Saudi Arabia)

the implementation of BYOPHD strategy [5]. Likewise, Kukulska-Hulme stated that “ownership of the device makes a difference, since a tool that has only been borrowed may not be used in the same way as one that is owned and very familiar” (p. 159) [6]. It is prominent that young students who grew up with mobile technologies are the driving force for consumerization of mobile learning in Saudi universities.

However, despite that the government is focusing on innovation in advanced technologies and infrastructure in the education sector, that contribute to economic growth and going toward achieving the Saudi vision 2030 [17], students are still reporting some challenges and issues related to the integration of mobile technologies and BYOPHD. These challenges are: fit-for-purpose network connectivity, information technology (IT) support, lack of knowledge, code of conduct, and equity issues.

## 3. Fit-for-Purpose Network Connectivity

To accommodate BYOPHD, universities need to upgrade the network bandwidth capacity, and make sure there are enough wireless access points. When the WiFi network on campus is not stable, the teacher has to come up with a backup plan, and students have to spend much time waiting for loading contents [12]. In the case of Taibah University in Saudi Arabia, 61% of students have reported the absence of WiFi connection, while 12% of students, who confirmed using the WiFi on campus, have pointed out difficulties in WiFi connection [1]. In 2016, Taibah University accelerates the data transfer rate from 755 Mbps to 1455 Mbps [14], but they are expecting users to use the internal network on desktops for administrative work, computer labs for teaching and learning, etc. therefore, there is a high demand for improving the wireless reach, and speeds of the access points to cover all campuses and buildings, especially the new buildings which are not connected to the internal network yet. Accordingly, there is still much to do with infrastructure before adopting BYOPHD policy, unless students will be using previously downloaded applications or existing content on their devices.

## 4. IT Support

Students using mobile technologies are divided into users with greater experience and users with less experience. Both of them, are expecting technical support, but at various levels. Less experienced users of mobile technologies would depend more on IT support; by contrast, experienced users, who are familiar with technology, would be less dependent on external support [16]. However, it is obvious that supporting multiple models of mobile devices with different operating systems is much more complicated than supporting a range of identical devices provided by universities [10]. Quinn discussed the issue of institutional policy on mobile delivery and stated that “a top issue is whether to support learner-owned devices or to provide them” (p. 101) [9]. Nevertheless, it is crucial to state that clearly in the institution policy guidelines whether students or the IT department are responsible for fixing any technical issues encountered by students while they are using their mobile technologies for learning. If a university decided to be responsible for IT support, then, the cost can be reduced by creating student-to-student network; so experienced users can support those who are less experienced. Supporting that, Borowski reported the survey results of BYOD’s effect on the IT help desk and concluded that users are more skilled at using their own mobile devices than institution-issued devices. So, they would run into fewer technical problems and would require less IT support, and solve more technical problems without outside support [2].

## 5. Lack of Knowledge

Students are not always aware of the full potential of mobile technologies [1]; and most likely lacking the skills and Knowledge to implement mobile technologies and applications in a way that enable them to acquire English language effortlessly. Therefore, support should not only include technical issues, more importantly, they should also cover educational practices. Furthermore, when universities plan to raise the awareness of students about useful language learning opportunities using such a technology, they should consider the more sophisticated users of mobile technologies. When such users look for training, Sudhaus argued that they are seeking more advanced uses of these technologies, with a scaffolding process between training and actual practice [13]. In view of the fact that mobile technologies are out there in students’ hands, an investment to overcome the shortage of knowledge and skills needed to utilize mobile technologies for learning is more important than investment in technology itself.

## 6. Code of Conduct

Despite the positive effect of personal ownership of mobile technologies, it presents a challenge to institutional control over these technologies, within a university setting [11]. Therefore, there is a need to set out guidelines and code of conduct for using mobile technologies within institutional walls, and clearly define proper and improper usage in advance of implementing BYOPHD strategy. These rules balance the freedom and responsibilities of students [11]. In case that a university wants students to comply with the code of conduct completely and avoid legal issues, it needs to make sure that students comprehend the essence of the institution's code of conduct.

## 7. Equity Issues

Even though a recent survey shows that 81.4% of EFL students at Taibah University already own and use smart phones for general uses as well as for enhancing language learning in one way or another [1], but the rest of students are not. In this case, BYOPHD strategy may widen the digital divide [10]. Universities must make sure that not a single student is disadvantaged because of lacking mobile technologies. Moreover, digital divide may occur because of different platforms; therefore, "when selecting library e-books, online databases, learning management systems, and e-textbooks, part of the criteria must be how accessible these materials are on a wide a range of operating systems. In a BYOD scenario, students might be bringing smartphones or tablets running Apple's iOS or Android." (p. 85) [4]. A loan scheme can be announced for disadvantaged students to as a solution for such a challenge. Furthermore, it is essential to ensure equity of opportunity for students who cannot access the internet while they are off-campus for economic or geographic reasons, before directing them to the impressive and growing range of learning opportunities through mobile technologies.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper has reported some key challenges and issues that need to be considered before calling for BYOPHD strategy institutional wide and formulating its policy in Saudi higher education. Finally, it is crucial to conduct a pilot study to test BYOPHD initiative for further understanding of the challenges associated with such a trend.

## References

[1] Almarwani, M. "E3-Electronic education for English: developing mobile learning and teaching in Saudi Arabia", Diss, University of Lincoln, 2016.
[2] Borowski, C. "BYOD's effect on the IT help desk burden: industry view 2014". Software Advice. 18 September 2014. From http://www.softwareadvice.com/crm/industryview/byod-help-desk-burden-2014/
[3] Chung, H. et al. "A study of EFL college students' acceptance of mobile learning", Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences 176, 2015, 333-339.
[4] Johnson, D. "On board with BYOD", Educational Leadership 70(2), 2012. 84-85.
[5] Kraut, R. "UNESCO policy guidelines for mobile learning", France, UNESCO, 2013. From http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002196/219641e.pdf
[6] Kukulska-Hulme, A. "Will mobile learning change language learning?", ReCALL, 21(2), 2009, 157–165.
[7] Kukulska-Hulme, A. & L. Shield "An overview of mobile assisted language learning: from content delivery to supported collaboration and interaction", ReCALL, 20(3), 2008, 271-289.
[8] Ministry of Education. "Higher education statistics", 2015-2016. From https://www.moe.gov.sa/en/HigherEducation/governmenthighereducation/Pages/AdmissionStatistics.asp
[9] Quinn, C. "The mobile academy: mLearning for higher education", John Wiley & Sons, 2012.
[10] Santos, I.M. "Key challenges associated with bringing personal mobile devices to the classroom", QScience Proceedings, 12th World Conference on Mobile and Contextual Learning, mLearn 2013,16.
[11] Savill-Smith, C. & Kent, P. "The use of palmtop computers for learning: a review of the literature (Research report)", Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, 2003. From http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/10655/1/031477.pdf
[12] Song, Y. & Kong, S.C. "Affordances and constraints of BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) for learning and teaching in higher education: Teachers' perspectives", The Internet and Higher Education 32, 2017, 39-46.

[13] Sudhaus, P. “Teachers as learners: higher education faculty learning to use technology for instruction”, Diss. University of Arizona, 2013.
[14] Taibah University. “Deanship of information technology report”, 2016. From https://www.taibahu.edu.sa/Pages/EN/Sector/SectorPage.aspx?ID=94
[15] Taj, I. H., et al. “Impact of mobile assisted language learning (MALL) on EFL: a meta-analysis”, Advances in Language and Literary Studies, 7(2), 2016, 76-83.
[16] Venkatesh, V., et al. “Consumer acceptance and use of information technology: extending the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology”, MIS Quarterly 36(1), 2012. 157-178.
[17] Vision 2030. “Saudi vision 2030 document”. From http://vision2030.gov.sa/sites/default/files/report/Saudi_Vision2030_EN_0.pdf