Language Learner Attitudes towards Technology and their Preferences for Learning Tools/Devices at Two Universities in the UAE

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Abstract

Many language learning programs, excited over the benefits of digital and mobile technologies/tools, may be adopting new educational technology policies and procedures. It is important for programs to base these decisions on student feedback, because "understanding which technologies are more or less effective for students can translate into strategic pedagogical investment" (Dahlstrom, 2012, p. 5). Previous studies have investigated student device choice (Dahlstrom & Warraich, 2012; Cassidy et. al., 2014); however, fewer studies have looked specifically at which devices students choose for certain language learning tasks (e.g. writing an essay, completing a worksheet.) This study aims to provide a more comprehensive account of the technological devices (e.g. laptops, phones) and learning tools (e.g. books, paper) students prefer to use to complete specific language learning tasks within a university context. This study also seeks to evaluate student attitudes towards using technology for learning, in order to provide recommendations on the most effective way to integrate digital technology in the language learning classroom. Data from questionnaires and focus-group interviews were collected from 1102 participants (in a foundation studies and general studies program) across two universities in the UAE to investigate the following research questions: 1) What are student attitudes towards using digital technology for learning in regards to enjoyment and perceived usefulness?; 2) What do students prefer to use to assist their learning for specific language learning tasks?; 3) How do student opinions about digital technology and preferred learning tools and devices differ between programs? Findings suggest that participants enjoy learning how to use new technology, believe it improves learning, and prepares them for future jobs. Books/paper were the most preferred resources for language learning, followed closely by laptops, while tablets and smartphones were much less preferred for specific learning tasks. Also, respondents preferred learning through a combination of traditional resources (e.g. books, paper) and digital technological tools (e.g. laptops, tablets). These findings can be used to recommend to educators and administrators the need to adopt learning outcomes related to digital literacy in the language learning classroom, and the importance of incorporating both traditional tools and newer technological tools for learning.

Keywords: *Student attitudes, digital technology, device choices, learning tools, language learning;*