Investigating the Effectiveness of iPad Based Language Learning in the UAE Context

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Abstract

As the variety and importance of IT continues to grow, educational institutions try to keep up-to-date by using technology educationally. At the fore in educational technologies are such challenges as going paperless and its effects on language learning. To refer a phrase from Scollon (2003) relevant to modern intangible innovations in EFL field, language learners are placed in a “nexus of practice”, a spot of engagement tightly allied to different histories, practices and participants.

The belief in the equivalence of human thinking and learning vs. technological functioning was closely linked to epistemological notions of ‘knowledge’ as a group of elements that, alike ‘if-then’ rules, could be mechanically processed through signs, symbols and production mechanisms. It can be foreseen that upcoming modern theories of learning will similarly tend to meet the challenges and demands of the knowledge society and look at learning as a coding and retrieving practice about conceptual notions and artifacts.

History of learning, particularly language learning, is rich with various related theories and novelties for the time. This makes it obvious that the description and understanding of language learning process has changed over time and is still in its transformational modern stage, which necessitates a need to explore and investigate pros and cons of innovative changes in the field of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) paperless classroom. An example of this is a tertiary level college in the United Arab Emirates that went paperless in 2012 and implemented iPads for its Foundations Program, eliminating paper and pen teaching-learning methods from the classroom. The innovation brought up enormous challenges in the technical and methodological fields, as well as in language learning ways, skills and practices. Therefore, this study aims at exploring the results of using technology educationally by looking into learner practices and attitudes toward using iPads in language learning, as well as looking into students’ language achievement the paperless classroom could bring. The research questions guiding this study are the following:

1. Is there a relationship between classes taught through iPads and beginner level Emirati students’ language achievement?
2. What are beginner level Emirati students’ attitudes toward iPad implementation as a language-learning tool in terms of learner satisfaction, motivation, perceived tool usefulness and learning effectiveness?

3. Is there a relationship between beginner level Emirati students’ attitudes toward iPad implementation as means of language learning and their language achievement?

4. What are the emerging themes of the teacher’s reflective journals in the evaluation of their lessons and diagnosis of problems?

Several studies have been published on iPad implementation in the field of education (Hung, Sun and Yu 2015, Butcher 2014, Saudelli and Ciampa 2014, and Sullivan 2013). However, there are limited studies conducted in the EFL field in the UAE context (Gitsaki and Robby 2014, and Gitsaki, Robby, Priest, Hamdan and Ben-Chabane 2013). Therefore, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the growing field of iPad based language learning in the UAE higher education.
References


