IS MOBILE LEARNING A FEASIBLE TEACHING APPROACH IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM?

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Abstract: Integrating a mobile-learning (M-Learning) into a language classroom is an interesting topic to discuss; however, little is known about how much this technology-based language teaching is feasible for teachers to use in the language classrooms. This study aims at describing how M-learning has been implemented in English classrooms of non-English Department students. The questionnaire of the online survey was employed to collect data from the respondents. The students from English Department (Management) became the subjects of the study. This study found that most students in two different classes had positive perception towards the implementation of M-Learning in English class in terms of the curriculum (70%), learning enjoyment (85%), easy use (75%), assessment activities (85%), the materials (85%), teaching and learning activities (90%), and teacher's feedback (80%). Despite the fact that students consider the prevailing M-Learning a useful and relevant teaching strategy to use, this teaching online is also subject to some weaknesses, such as: time consuming for giving feedback, copy right issues, cost of buying the devices and internet connection service.

Keywords: *M-Learning, Hybrid Class, Favorable Teaching and Learning, Teaching Approach*

INTRODUCTION

While mobile devices are quite ubiquitous, many language instructors are still reluctant to integrate technology into their classrooms. Peachey (2010) surveyed more than 500 teachers and asked questions concerning their views about mobile-learning. Nearly all the respondents mentioned that they had their own mobile devices with the internet connection. However, only 34% reported that they had used them for learning or teaching in the classrooms. The majority (60%) never implemented M-learning nor integrated any mobile app technology into their classroom. Peachey's findings may imply mobile learning is still challenging to most teachers.

A number of researchers mention that mobile technology greatly assists students in improving their language skills (Kukulska-Hulme's 2009; Sharples et al, 2009; El-Hussein & Cronje, 2010). For example, Jeng, Wu, Huang, Tan, & Yang (2010) mentioned several advantages of using mobile devices for learning such as enabling the students to share their learning portfolios, and to enjoy favorable learning condition with rich relevant feedback. Gui (2016) mentioned that the mobile apps had provided a variety of topics, structures, content sizes, and focuses. They enabled the students to practice drilling, to enhance their pronunciation skills, to improve speaking skills either from video lessons, references, or authentic contents.

Oz (2015) studied mobile-assisted language learning perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers. He found out that there was overwhelming evidence confirming the findings of the present study and the effectiveness of m-learning applications in educational environments. The findings also confirmed that a great majority of pre-service EFL teachers agreed with the appropriateness of m-learning for L2 instruction. Thus, the highest perceptions were related to the facilitative role of m-learning technology in L2 instruction and learning, ease of prompt access to materials, perceived convenience of mobile applications due to their portability which helps teachers to readily share the teaching tasks with other colleagues and the convenient environment they provide for effective communication and discussion on teaching and learning topics.

Despite the fact that most language instructors (73%) agree upon the importance of mobile devices, most of them seemed to be unprepared with the integration of technology into their classrooms' activities (Peachey, 2010). Some questions need to be addressed: why do language instructors not make use of this technology for their teaching? Is it because they do not know how to

use it? Or, are they reluctant to use it? More specifically, the question is formulated as follow: is mobile learning feasible to use for teaching a language?

Based on this rationale, this preliminary research is conducted. By involving about 25 students of two study programs, this study aims at describing if a mobile-learning teaching approach is feasible to use in the language classrooms.

METHOD

The research was conducted in the English class for Management Study Program students, at Ma Chung University. This study started from late August to October 2016, involving 25 students as the research subjects. This class applied a supplemental hybrid model (Zao & Breslow, 2013), a combination of a conventional classroom/face-to-face and online learning. In this supplemental model, the teacher asked students to attend the same number of class meetings, but to access technology-based materials outside of the classroom as additional resources. During the meetings, the researcher did the following: giving lectures about new topics, having a discussion of the task or learning difficulties, or solving the problems the students had. For the online learning, the researcher used several mobile applications such as Socrative (for evaluation purposes), Edmodo (for giving announcements, sharing the material, giving the assignment) and shared Google doc (give feedback /collaborative projects). Data were obtained through online survey via survey monkey. The writer asked the respondents to use their mobile devices, opening their web browser on the Internet. By typing and clicking the address link of the monkey survey, they answered all the questions available. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, focusing on the central tendency of respondents' responses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings

The present study covered ten questions: the relevancy of the hybrid English curriculum, willingness to use mobile devices, the handy use of mobile application, the assessment of Socrative application, the assessment of Edmodo application, the activities in the hybrid class, teacher's management skill, possible improvement of language skill, teacher's feedback, and students' beliefs on M-Learning as a reliable teaching-learning strategy. The following are the findings covering the aforementioned issues, presented in the form of diagrams.

In question one, the respondents were asked if the hybrid English curriculum was relevant to their needs to learn English. The finding shows that the majority of the students (56.52%) viewed the content of the curriculum as relevant to their needs. Moreover, 8.7% of them even gave strong approval of this aspect. For the majority, the curriculum was quite complete, allowing them to practice all language skills (reading, speaking, writing, and listening) and enriching them with relevant managerial language inputs. Only 34.78% mentioned that the curriculum is relevant enough to their needs.
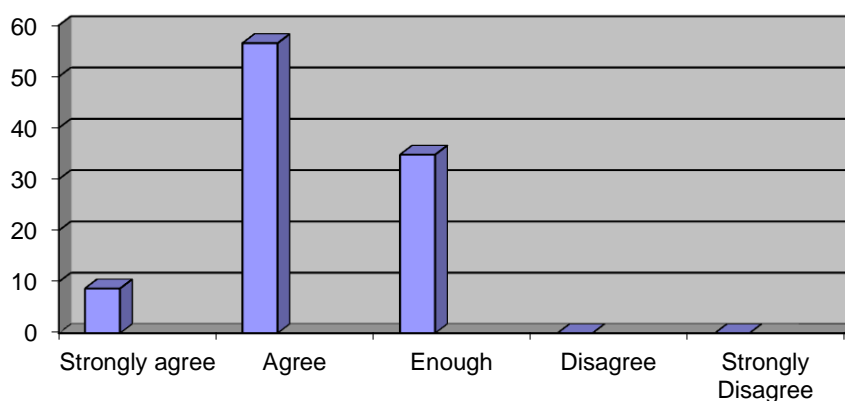

Figure 1. The Relevancy of Curriculum with Students' Needs

In question two, the respondents were asked if they had no objection to using mobile devices for learning. 4.35% mentioned that they strongly agreed with the statement. 34.78% agreed to have mobile devices for learning. Meanwhile, the majority (52.17%) had a neutral answer. The rest 8.7% disagreed with the statement. This finding indicates that the students have no objection to using the mobile devices for learning. The writer believed the question was relevant since the students had to spend money buying the devices. Nevertheless, it turned out that all of them had already had their mobile devices with them.
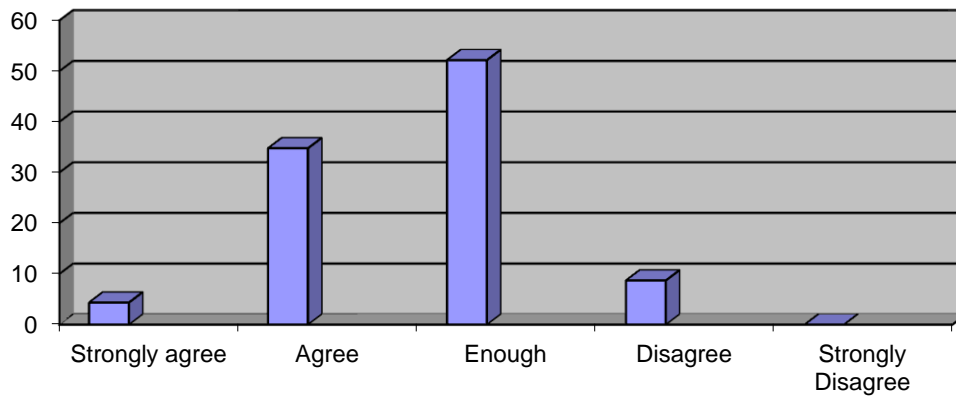
Figure 2. Willingness to Use Mobile Devices for Learning

In question three, the respondents were asked if they find the mobile application easy to use. In the class, the students needed to use three applications: Edmodo, Socrative and Google doc. This study found that the majority 56.52% agreed that they had no difficulties to operate the apps. Moreover, about 17.39% strongly agreed that the applications were very easy to use. 21.74% students had a neutral response, with the rest 4.35% stating their disagreement with the statement.
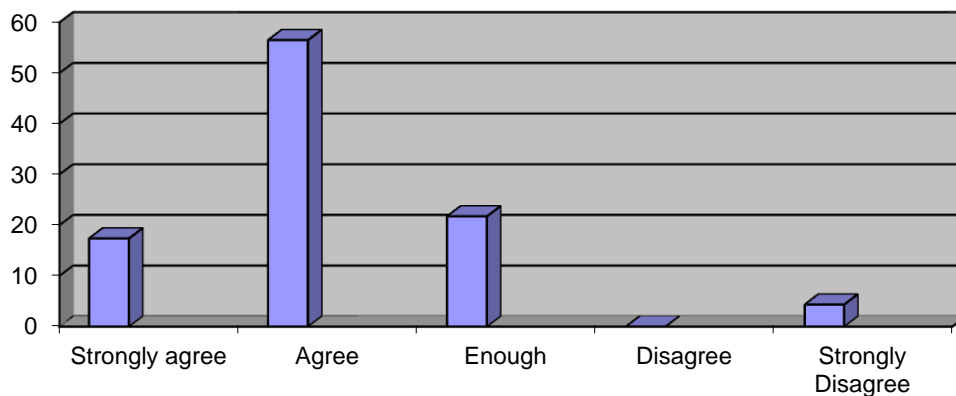

Figure 3. Mobile Application Handiness

Question four concerns on how Socrative has helped the teacher and the students during the assessment. About 8.7% held the view that they strongly agreed with the statement. 47.83% agreed if Socrative was a reliable mobile application for assessment. About 26.09% held a neutral view. The rest 17.39% disagreed with the statement. This finding implies that most students find Socrative a good application for evaluation. This app enables them to do their test, get direct feedback on their answers, and know the scores quickly. For the minority, this internet based app is quite troublesome. In practice, they often have problems with the internet connection. Bad internet connection often kept them from doing the test at their best.
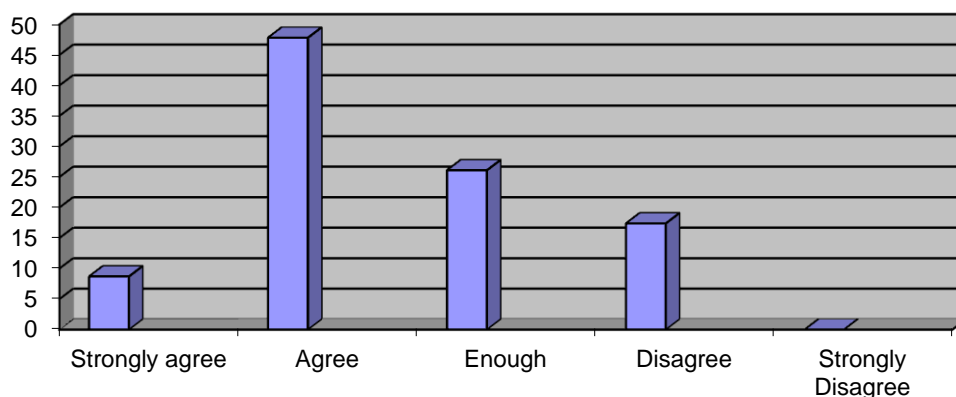

Figure 4. The Assessment of Socrative App

In question five, the respondents were asked if Edmodo app was a relevant application to help the students updated with teacher's announcement. The finding showed that the majority favored this app: 13.04% strongly agree; 52.17% agreed with the statement, and 21.74% held a neutral view. This

finding implies that students view Edmodo very helpful. With this app, they were able to know teachers' current information, to submit an assignment, to get materials and to post their comments in the discussion forum. Only a few numbers of students disfavored this app: 4.35% showed their disagreement, and 8.7% mentioned their strong disagreement.
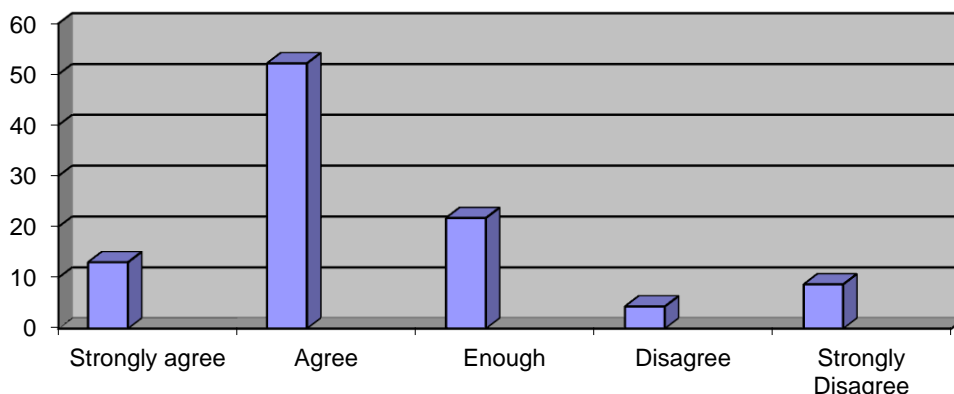

Figure 5. The Assessment of Edmodo App

In question six, the respondents were asked if the teacher had given interactive and various activities. The study found that the majority favored the teacher's teaching techniques in the hybrid class. They viewed that they found out that the activities were quite various and interactive, and challenged them with a new learning experience. In this respect, 30.43% have shown strong agreement, and 52.17% agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, 17.39% held a neutral view.
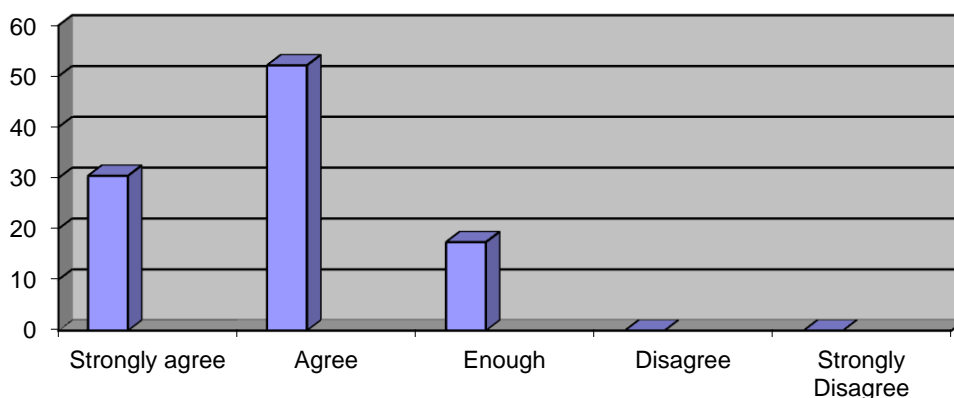

Figure 6. Activities in the Hybrid Class

Question seven is to ask if the teacher has a good class management skill. The majority enjoyed teacher's class management: 21.74% strongly agreed with the statement. 56.52% agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, only 21.74% mention it was enough for them to effectively learn with their teacher's class management.
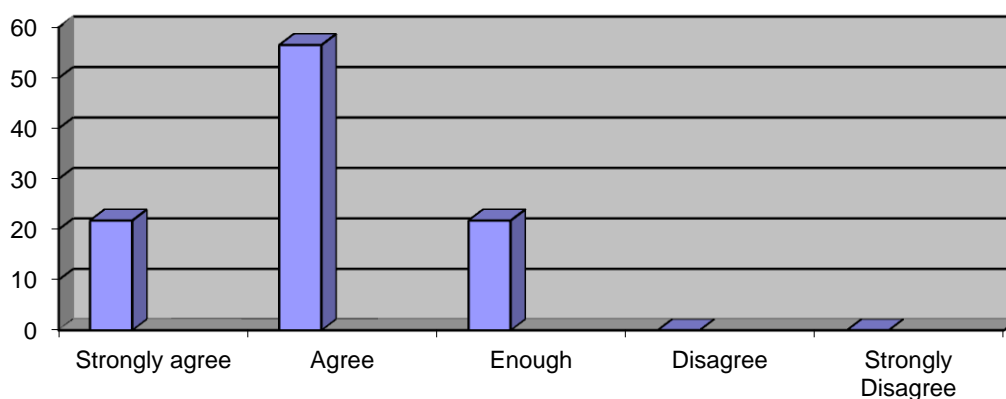

Figure 7. Teacher's Class Management Skill

In question eight, the respondents were asked if the activities in the hybrid class could improve students' English skill. 8.7% strongly agreed with the statement. 47.83% agreed with it. 39.13% say it is

enough. Meanwhile the rest, 4.35% disagreed with the statement. This finding implies that the students favor the teacher's class management skill: arranging the learning activities, organizing the group members, scheduling the activities, sharing the materials, etc.
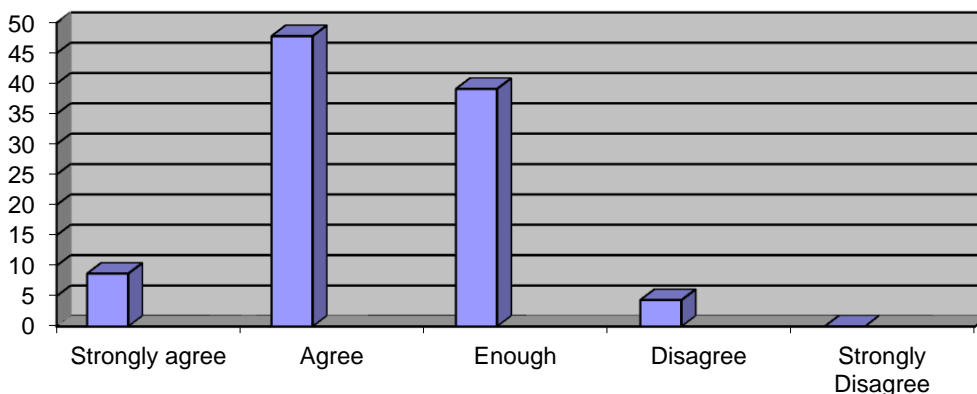

Figure 8. Possible Improvement of Language Skills in the Hybrid Class

In question nine, the respondents were asked if the teacher had given good feedback on students' work. 26.09% mentioned they strongly agreed with the statement. 34.78% mentioned they agreed with the statement. 34.78% held a neutral view. Meanwhile, 4.35% disagreed with the statement. This finding implies that the students feel satisfied with the way teacher gives feedback to their work. While asking the students to work on the project using the Google doc, the teacher not only monitors but also gives his feedback to the students' work at his pace.
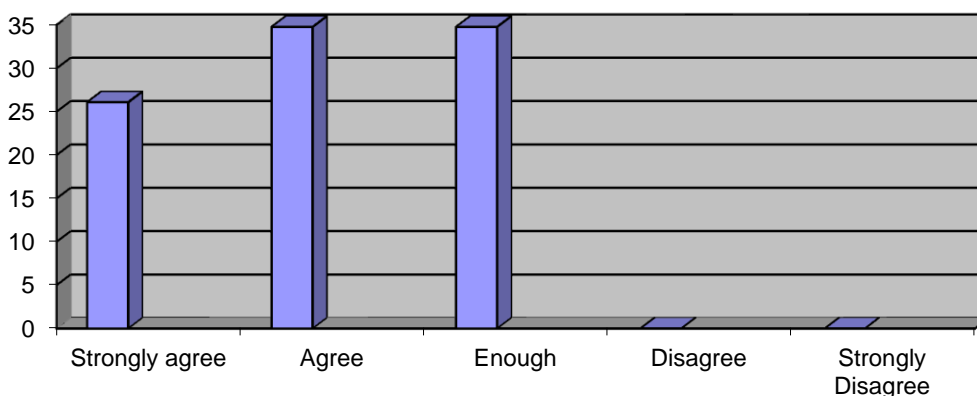

Figure 9. Teacher's Feedback in the Hybrid Class

In question 10, the respondents were asked if a hybrid class was a reliable teaching-learning strategy. There were 8.7% students who strongly agreed with the statement and 69.57% who agreed with the statement, while 21.74% held a neutral view. This finding implies that most students have positive perception about the hybrid learning. They believe that this teaching approach will be helpful to motivate, improve and help students with their language proficiency.
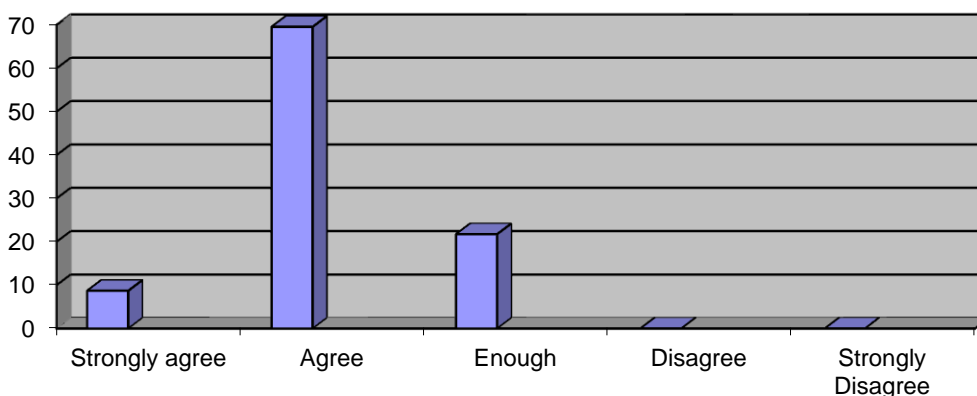

Figure 10. Students' Beliefs on M-Learning as a Reliable Teaching-Learning Strategy

Discussion

The study found that students had a positive perception of the hybrid model of learning, combination of conventional teaching and learning the process in the classroom and learning with mobile learning models. Almost all aspects of teaching and learning activities with this hybrid method are positively assessed by the students: curriculum content, teaching materials, strategies the way teachers teach, activity, quality feedback, until the mobile app from the app. While the model of conventional learning in the classroom enables both lecturer and students to discuss new topics, solve problems, and review the materials, m-learning has intensified the quality of learning through the following aspects such as mobility in physical space, mobility of technology, mobility in conceptual space, mobility in the social space, and dispersed learning over time (Sharples et al, 2009). The nature of mobility provided by mobile devices has offered the students autonomy to make decisions and take responsibility for the completion of their tasks (Carson, 2007; Ustunluoglu 2009; Reinders& White, 2016). They have freedom to determine when and where they study and do chores.

Connectivity with the students facilitated with mobile learning is by no means free from problems: lack of access, the cost of mobile devices and wireless service, and also teachers' workload (Reinders, 2010). While some mobile applications are highly dependent on internet connection, students' work is likely to be hampered if the internet connection becomes unstable. Procurement of mobile devices with an internet connection would cost money. In general, almost all smartphones with android system allow us to run all applications. But for certain applications (Google doc / Google drive), smartphone model with a wider screen will be preferable, but with more expensive prices. In addition, the lectures are likely to have potential workloads. Given the increasingly favorable connectivity through m-learning, there will be numbers of students who want to interact with the lecturer: asking for feedback, advice, etc. Thus, the lecturers need to be wise; specifying the rules on this issue. Accordingly, they can avoid a pile of questions or workloads from the students.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The quality of learning can be intensively increased with a hybrid model. While the conventional class enables the teachers to discuss the new topics, solve the problems, and help their students with their learning difficulties in the classrooms, mobile learning also allows them to get connected, and to intensify the students' learning process: distribute and share the teaching materials, explain the topics, announce and arrange the assignments, give feedback, etc. However, teachers need to be mindful of the potential problems due to all favorable facilities offered by mobile devices application: the cost of the mobile devices and the internet service, and workloads.

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