DOES LANGUAGE LEARNING POTENTIAL AFFECTS ESL LEARNERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS MOBILE LEARNING?

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Abstract ~ Factors which affect learners' attitude for using mobile learning are not clear despite the widespread ownership of mobile devices. In particular, there is a lack of research in investigating the factors affecting English as Second Language (ESL) learners' attitude for using mobile learning which is grounded by the theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This paper reviews SLA theories and the role of perceived language learning potential as an extended factor affecting ESL learners' attitude towards mobile learning. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is also discussed as it can be enlarged and extended if language learners are given the opportunities to have access to more information and authentic language materials as well to do more practices on what has been taught. Moreover, it is essential to look at how degree of opportunity present for beneficial focus on form affects the learners' attitude towards mobile learning thus permitting ESL teachers to creatively integrate mobile learning in begetting efficient ESL learners.

Keywords: Perceived Language Learning Potential; English as Second Language (ESL); Attitude towards mobile learning; Technology Acceptance.

1.0 Introduction

Technology holds great potential for significantly improving second language learning (Chapelle 2001; Salaberry 2001; Egbert 2009). For the past few years, language educators have looked into electronic technologies for some time as a way to enhance second language development (Chapelle 2001; Salaberry 2001). Therefore, the term technology is no longer considered alien in the field of education and now the use of mobile technology in teaching and learning has started to attract interest from educators (Rashidah Rahamat et al., 2011). Other than computers, mobile devices are seen to have proven as potential tools in increasing the learning of the language. With the fast growth of the new generation of mobile devices such as mobile phones and tablets, the potential of using mobile in becoming an effective tool for learning has increased (Supyan et al., 2012). In the context of learning English as second language, mobile phone has proven effective as teaching and learning tools; for example, for vocabulary practices, English expressions and English communication practices (Kwon & Eun, 2010). Since mobile technology could act as an efficient mediator for enhancing English language learning, mobile learning is proposed to support students' learning needs as well as achieving the target needs of English language courses at many education institutions. In the past few years, a surge in the use of mobile devices as educational tools has led to an increase number of educational institutional exploring the possibilities of using these ubiquitous devices by their students, both within the classroom and beyond (Engel & Green, 2011; Messinger, 2011).

Studies have shown that mobile devices do bring positive impacts in improving English language proficiency. Chinnery (2006) for example pointed out that those mobile devices such as mobile phones, PDAs and iPods are all possible tools for enhancing language learning. Ally et al. (2007) stated that ESL and other languages are also being taught using mobile devices. There are studies which have successfully used mobile devices for teaching pronunciations and listening skills (e.g. Uther et al., 2005), vocabulary and grammar (Fatimah & Abdulmohsen, 2015) which has shown significant positive outcomes. Kennedy et al. (2008) also supported that mobile devices are suitable for vocabulary learning and that the ubiquitous usage of mobile phones among college students also makes it practical choice for research on mobile learning.

Nevertheless, although mobile learning could be a viable support to cope with the students' language learning needs, the support could prove ineffective in the implementation later if the students resent the use of it

(Sharples et al. 2005). Understanding the factors that influence students' technology acceptance and perception in different contexts is vital in integrating ICT in classroom and making it a successful programme (Harwati & Melor, 2010; Melor et al., 2010a). In addition, Venkatesh et. al (2003) also claimed that learners should accept and intend to use a proposed solution before the solution could be implemented. Moreover, in order to maximize the utilisation of the technology in teaching and learning, the perceptions of the users towards the technology should be taken into consideration (Harwati & Melor, 2012; Melor et al., 2010b).

Many technology acceptance researches related to students' attitude and acceptance towards mobile learning adapted models such as Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis et al. (1989) and also Unified Theories of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by Venkatesh et al. (2003). Yet, as suggested by Pedersen and Ling (2003), traditional technology adoption models may be modified and extended when researching technology adoption of mobile services in a different context. There is still lack of a comprehensive understanding regarding the factors affecting the adoption of mobile learning (Nyakundi Kimani & Abanti, 2014). Researches which deal with mobile learning are frequently critical of a lack in focus in two areas: Second Language Acquisition theory and how students engage with the technology, what they actually do when completing ESL tasks using mobile devices. In this light, an adoption model of mobile learning in the context of English as Second Language (ESL) learning is needed. Thus, this paper reviews the implications of the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories for mobile learning among ESL learners and posits the role of perceived language learning potential as an extended factor affecting ESL learners' attitude towards mobile learning.

2.0 Theories of Second Language Acquisition

The adoption and use of technologies in language acquisition and learning has become a research topic (Chapelle, 2001; Stockwell, 2012). One of the advantages of using technology for language learning is that language learners can choose the learning materials they are interested in or that are useful to them available at standalone computers or accessible via the internet at school or at home with or without teacher support (Lee et al., 2016). However, language learning could be moderated or navigated by individual differences (Ellis, 2006). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher believes that it is important to look into the theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). According to Krashen (1981) 'language acquisition' involves a subconscious learning process and learners need to be exposed to meaningful interaction and natural language communication in order to convey meaning and infer rules rather than learning structures in a systematic manner. Based on Myles (2002), theories of SLA can be divided into three groups which are Universal Grammar (UG) models, cognitive models, interactional and sociocultural models. In UG models, second language development is seen as driven and constrained by an innate mental language faculty that makes intervention beyond the provision of sufficient linguistic input largely futile (Kenning, 2007). Cognitive models state that learning a language involve a shift from controlled to automatised processes, with, in the case of connectionist models, an emphasis on pattern building (Kenning, 2007). With UG models, the focus is on explaining learner-internal mechanism, whereas, cognitive models place more stress on how the input is decoded by learners.

In contrast to UG models and cognitive models, interactional and sociocultural models focus on the role of interaction, with attention to socio and cultural context. From an interactional perspective, the main requirement is that in common with classroom discourse, linguistic exchanges involving computers, whether in the form of oral discussion around computers, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), or learner-computer interactions, should contain repetitions, recasts and expansions of previous utterances, which are held to aid learning (Kenning, 2007). In socio-cultural framework, LeLoup and Ponterio (2003) have highlighted the ability of technology for language learning to provide an arena for natural, meaningful and realistic language production and reception between and among native and non-native speakers of the target language. Warschauer (1997) stated that when viewed in the context of sociocultural learning theory, which emphasizes the educational value of creating cross-cultural communities of practice and critical inquiry; these features appear to make online learning a potentially powerful tool for collaborative learning.

Above all, it is noted that attempting to comprehend input is a key focus of several SLA theories which have roots in the Comprehensible Input hypothesis, one of a number of hypothesis in Krashen's (1982) Monitor Theory. Comprehensible Input suggests that acquisition occurs when learners understand messages that are just beyond their current stage of development. Long (1983; 1991; 1996) on the other hand, emphasises the importance for learners to focus on form while they are processing meaning, which is one of the possible outcomes of negotiation of meaning as learners' attention can temporarily shift from meaning to form as comprehension problems arise (Long & Robinson, 1998). Focus on form through negotiation of meaning occurs during the completion of a meaning-focused task as negotiation of meaning and modified output are claimed to be more prevalent in goal-oriented tasks than in casual conversation (Pellettieri, 2000). This then lead to an

approach known as Task Based Language Learning (Ellis 2002). Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) is a relatively new approach to Second Language Acquisition (SLA). It requires learners to complete meaningful, real-world tasks such as writing an email, letter, essay or article, making a phone call, conducting an interview, and designing and creating media. The focus of a task is primarily on pragmatic meaning and any focus on form, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, lexis, etc., tends to be addressed according to issues that emerge during participation in the task itself. This makes Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL) particularly suitable for individualised learning and promoting learner independence. Based on Ellis (2008), a task involves a primary focus on pragmatic meaning; has some kind of 'gap' which involves linguistic resources needed chosen by the participants to complete the task; as well as, has a clearly defined outcome. All in all, a task should create context that facilitate SLA, create opportunities for focusing on form and can be easily related to students' real-life language needs. It is believed that students are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation in a task-based approach (Plews & Zhao, 2010).

3.0 Vygotsky's Theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

ZPD is one of the three major themes in Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978). According to Social Development Theory, Vygotsky envisages that social interaction precedes development where consciousness and cognition is the end product of socialisation and social behaviour. Vygostky defines the ZPD as "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem- solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygostky 1978).

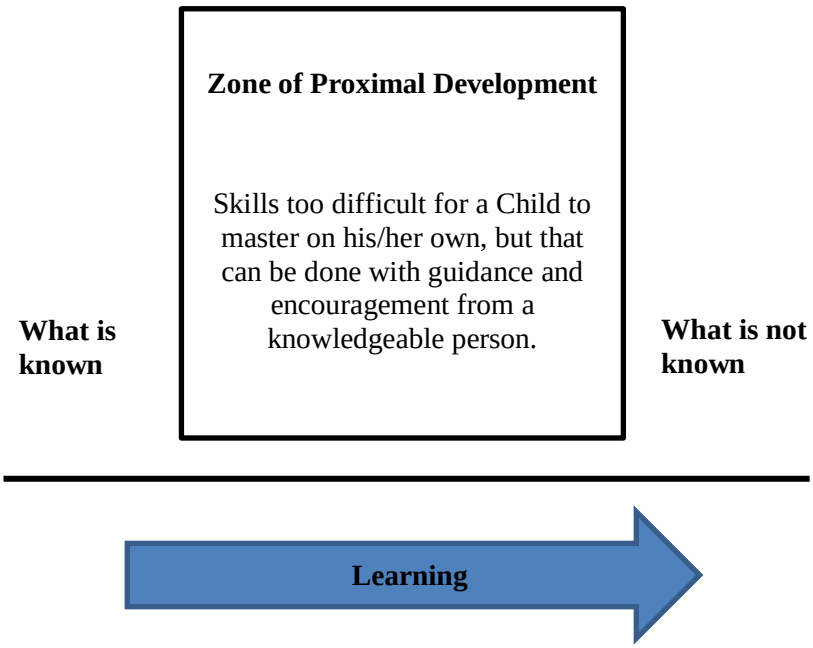

Figure 1: Zone of Proximal Development

Referring to Figure 1, ZPD is the distance between the most difficult task someone can do alone and the most difficult task someone can do with help (Vygotsky in Mooney, 2000). In his theory, Vygotsky stresses that interaction is vital for a learner in the edge of learning where the learner can benefit from the interaction to enhance his or her learning achievement. He stresses that interaction between the learner and other more skilful peers could effectively aid in developing the learner's skills and strategies. ZPD concept was originally applied in face-to-face tutoring but later it was found to be also successful in other settings where technology devices could serve as scaffolding support. These technology devices such as mobile devices could result in learners' learning process become more systematic, integrated, efficient, continuous, and focused. Furthermore, the online environment which facilitates the learners' learning process allows them to participate and manage their own learning (Isman, 2005).

Vygotsky's idea of zone of proximal development (ZPD) was also discussed by Supyan (2008) in the context of ESL learners via online forum. As discussed by Supyan (2008), an extension of learning process may continue to occur in a conventional setting where learners get together physically after class hours apart from the formal learning which takes place in the physical classroom. In other words, learning may take place within particular zones outside of the classroom. The prescribed zone usually has a set of objectives to be achieved by the learners. However, during the learning process, some learners may learn and/or acquire more knowledge or skills beyond targeted objectives if there is room for students to do so. The non-prescribed zone is determined by the learners' own initiatives and efforts.

Supyan (2008) suggested that the size of the ZPD can be enlarged and extended if language learners are given the opportunities to have access to more information and authentic language materials as well to do more practices on what has been taught. Language learning process is not limited within the classrooms but may continue to occur in a conventional setting where learners get together physically after class hours. This is thus, the intention of this study to suggest that mobile learning is implemented to enhance the learning of ESL. Consequently, the more the ESL learners learn and acquire, the bigger their potential zone will become as shown in Figure 2.

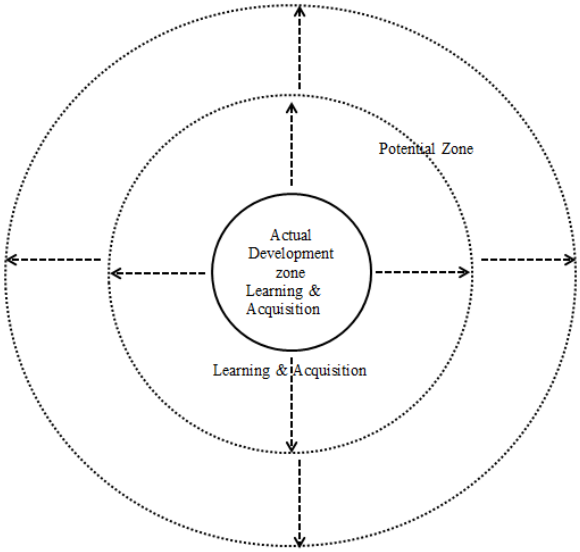

Figure 2: Learning and acquisition in ZPD (Supyan, 2008)

Based on Figure 2, with the advancement of mobile technology, ESL learners are now able to extend their learning process. It is important however to ensure the learners set their objectives or their own learning outcomes. ESL learning materials and activities could be easily obtained from the internet with the use of their mobile devices. All these learning materials/activities capitalize on scaffolding the learners to reach their projected learning outcomes where assistances are offered based on the learners' individual needs, level and pace within their ZPDs. In the scope of this study, Vygotsky's ZPD was employed to theorise mobile learning which capitalised on interaction where scaffolding serves to aid learners to achieve their learning goals. In mobile learning, the mobile and students and social domains interact to support formal and informal learning and learning as a constructive and social process.

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4.0 Perceived Language Learning Potential

Perceived language learning potential is adopted from Chapelle's criteria for CALL evaluation (2001). Language learning potential refers to the extent to which the activity can be considered to be a language learning activity rather than simply an opportunity for language use. The difference between language learning and language use might be best characterised by the extent to which the task promotes beneficial focus on form. Hubbard (1988) describes that in Computer-assisted Language Teaching (CALL), the underlying principle is that it provides comprehensible input at a level just beyond that currently acquired by the learner, motivates the learner to learn the language, provides a challenge but does not produce frustration or anxiety and allows the

learners the opportunity to produce comprehensible output. It is therefore important that the students perceived the use of mobile learning will provide enough practices for them for the purpose of learning listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. Given that learning English language using mobile learning is a form of language learning, another reasonable step for implementing mobile learning is to employ it based on the recommendations from theory or research in instructed Second Language Acquisition. Ultimately, in the context of mobile learning for learning English as Second Language (ESL), it is expected to have definitive SLA results specifically from research on learning English using mobile learning, but to date there has not been a sufficiently established base for such results. Consequently, this study takes findings from CALL domains and interprets them in the mobile learning context.

Above all, given the importance of focus on language for language acquisition, characteristics which are relevant for promoting focus on form – interactional modification, modification of output, time pressure, modality, support, surprise, control and stakes – need to be considered in an argument for language learning potential (Chapelle, 2001). Perceived language learning potential refers to question do task conditions present sufficient opportunity for beneficial focus on form. Empirical research demonstrating the language learning potential of mobile learning needs to show that learners have improved in their control of the aspects of the target language focused on in the activity. Language learning potential has centred on particular aspects of mobile learning that are hypothesised to be beneficial. Chapelle et al. (2005) suggested that students should have sufficient opportunity under this factor. The use of technology for effective language teaching and learning should be based on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) principles (González-Lloret 2003). Learners need to have opportunities to learn the target language and that they should engage in learning to maximize opportunities for good interaction as well as opportunity present for beneficial focus on form (Chapelle, 1998). As mobile technologies gain in popularity and capability, they will continue to merit further examination for their language-learning potential. In this study, the language learning potential is based on whether ESL learners think that they will get enough practices by using mobile learning. Thus, it is rational to include perceived language learning potential as one of the factors that affects' ESL learners' attitude towards mobile learning.

Mobile learning practices for ESL learners, therefore, need to be supported by SLA theories in order to create the learning environments that offer learners comprehensible input and encourage learners to communicate and interact with their peers. It is not enough to technically master e-tools: Teachers need to find ways of engaging learners in web-based tasks by calling learners' attention to their culture; providing learners with meaning-focused tasks which allow learners to use language for real communication; creating production oriented tasks which derive from the input in order to contextualise language use and form; and, offering learners feedback based on task outcomes that takes the form of providing explanations about the language they have used (Pérez, 2008).

5.0 Conclusion

This study proposed that perceived language learning potential should be considered as one of the factors affecting ESL learners' attitude towards mobile learning and eventually influence their perceptions and acceptance. As discussed earlier, perceived language learning potential refers to the degree of opportunity present for beneficial focus on form. This suggests that it is important for the students to believe that they would likely to get enough practice for learning English language. This is in agreement with Chapelle et al. (2005) that language learning potential refers to the extent to which the activities can be considered to be a language learning activities rather than simply an opportunity for language use and that students should have sufficient opportunity to practice under this factor. This study also supports the notion by Furuya, Kimura & Ohta (2004) which have shown that mobile devices allow students to access multiple choice questions and answers, and practical exercises and allow students to review, listen and practice speaking, and provide services such as phrase translation, quizzes and live coaching (Yuen, S.C.Y. & Wang, 2004). Most importantly, this implies the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which was found to be also successful in other settings where technology devices could serve as scaffolding support. These technology devices such as mobile devices could result in learners' learning process become more systematic, integrated, efficient, continuous and focused. This is also in line with Supyan (2008) who suggested that the size of the ZPD can be enlarged and extended if language learners are given the opportunities to have access to more information and authentic language materials as well to do more practices on what has been taught. Language learning process is not limited within the classrooms but may continue to occur in a conventional setting where learners get together physically after class hours. Consequently, the more the ESL learners learn and acquire, the bigger their potential zone will become. Moreover, according to Supyan (2008), ESL students need some kind of social support or scaffolding in order to improve and increase their learning. With the proper guidance, ESL students can then increase their zone of proximal development and become more self-directed as they know what to do next in that learning process (Supyan, 2008). As a conclusion, given the preceding discussion, it is clear that the use of mobile learning to enhance English as Second Language learning must be tied to current theory and

research. This study shows that Second Language Acquisition should not be ignored but embeds in Technology Acceptance models when it comes to investigating English as Second Language (ESL) learners.

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