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Media students using mobile phones in the Arabian Gulf to improve English writing and video production skills

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Abstract

Purpose – A variety of alternate technology-enhanced teaching approaches are now available to university students to broaden their learning experiences and complement conventional face-to-face teaching. This paper aims to outline a study conducted at an English Medium Instruction (EMI) University in the Arabian Gulf where students were studying media. The study explored an innovative teaching approach that sought to enhance the students' interaction with mobile phone applications as part of their learning experiences during the course.

Design/methodology/approach – The focus of the study was on enhancing the students' English writing skills such as vocabulary, spelling and grammar and on improving their technical skills such as in video production. The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data.

Findings – The results indicated that mobile phone applications were helpful in improving students' journalistic writing skills where they had a good level of proficiency in English, more so than students with poor English who are more dependent on traditional learning methods. Students also benefitted from mobile phone video production workshops that were intensive and creative. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that courses and labs in media courses have skilled technicians that can train students in creative mobile phone video production while faculty members need to be trained and proactively encouraged to use mobile phones for teaching and learning purposes.

Originality/value – wBased on the results of this study, it is recommended that courses and labs in media courses have skilled technicians that can train students in creative mobile phone video production while faculty members need to be trained and proactively encouraged to use mobile phones for teaching and learning purposes.

Keywords Mobile phones, Smartphones, Intensive English program, Writing skills, Technical skills, Vocabulary, Grammar, Journalism, Video production, Media education

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The UAE has the highest mobile phone adoption rate in the MENA region (see ArabianBusiness.Com, 2018). With this in mind, integrating mobile phones into the teaching and learning process in higher education institutions is of paramount importance and it is,



therefore, vital for educators to understand how this technology can be used to enhance courses and to master the successful inclusion of mobile phone technology in classroom pedagogy.

Students in the Arabian Gulf find writing in English, especially writing professionally as in journalism, extremely difficult. With a completely different alphabet system, opposite writing direction (right to left in Arabic) and only a limited number of English words borrowed from Arabic, Arab learners find the English language extremely challenging (Dowswell and Eppard, 2018). In addition, the Arab pedagogy is traditionally based on rote learning and for the most part, there is minimal engagement in extensive reading activities that could help enhance students' vocabulary and creative writing skills. A study conducted in an Arab higher education institute showed that students did indeed face difficulties, particularly with expressing themselves in writing using sophisticated and appropriate vocabulary (Edwards, 2017). Several faculty members at that institution felt that it was not their place or they did not have the time to cater for these difficulties and that additional language support should be provided (Edwards, 2017). Furthermore, media students face serious challenges in mastering English writing and need more flexible content-gathering techniques for creative video scripting and video production. Mobile phone use is ubiquitous and connecting it to education especially in media studies, is crucial especially in the Gulf where research on this topic is scarce.

This study sought to investigate how mobile phones can enhance Arab students' writing and creative skills in an English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) higher education institution in the Gulf. Understanding how mobile phones can improve writing and vocabulary skills is especially important in the Arabian Gulf where students in the K–12 sector are educated in Arabic and learn English as a foreign language, but when they graduate from high school they have to go through government English language exam to enter an EMI University (Al Hussein and Gitsaki, 2018). Even students who pass the English exam are not sufficiently proficient in English to pass courses in communication and media, which require a high level of English in professional journalistic writing and video scripting. There is a pressing need for a more creative approach to improving students' English proficiency such as using mobile phones for learning.

Educational studies indicate that technology is most attractive to students when it is integrated seamlessly into a curriculum. Research has also indicated that smartphones are valuable as educational tools because of their portability, the ease with which information can be retrieved and shared and their capacity to host thousands of educational applications. In addition, student responses to online teaching platforms as a supplement to traditional teaching methods have generally been positive (Kraft and Seely, 2015).

The current study explores how the integration of mobile phones into an undergraduate media course can help enhance media students' writing and video production skills.

Literature review

The focus of this study is on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and how it can improve English writing and video production skills. Despite the proliferation of mobile devices, there is still limited awareness of how journalism students are prepared for the changing nature of the workplace *vis-à-vis* mobile devices.

A recent study conducted in the US examined how journalism educators, students and practitioners used rapidly changing mobile technologies. In-depth interviews were conducted among the top journalism schools in the USA. Interviews with students revealed both an increase in the presence of mobile technologies in the classroom and new instruction on how to write for multiple platforms. Graduate students noted that this pedagogical shift

had influenced how writing is taught in terms of interactivity and critical thinking. The study showed that journalism educators are incorporating mobile technologies into the traditional curriculum rather than creating courses centered solely on mobile pedagogy. Journalism educators warned of falling into the trap of believing that technology will solve everything; that it is not the technology that controls users, rather than users control the technology to suit their needs (Walck *et al.*, 2015).

Another study was conducted in a private medium-sized university in the northeast of the USA, using Social Construction of Technology theory to investigate whether mobile phones can have a place in the classroom. Using in-depth qualitative interviews, the study found an unexpected paradox. Students rarely used mobile technology in the classroom and, moreover, did not expect to use it in a formal classroom environment, while outside the classroom they fully endorsed the educational applications of mobile phones. The Social Construction of Technology theory holds that consumers influence technology according to their needs. If the technology does not help the user, it will not be required and purchased. According to the theory, as the professors in this study did not use mobile phones at all and the classes did not use any mobile technology for educational purposes, it followed that students would disapprove of using mobiles in education. This also means that as the instructors' views on mobile applications evolve, mobile devices will be used more in the classroom (Laskin and Avena, 2015).

A qualitative research study conducted in three universities in the USA, where instructors had been integrating smartphones into their courses for at least two semesters, showed that the advantages of mobile computing devices for student learning were: accessing information quickly; enhanced communication with fellow classmates and instructors; various learning opportunities available including recording videos or voice memos; and immediate access to the course's content and other classmates. The disadvantages of learning with mobile computing devices were: frustration with applications that did not work; small mobile device keyboards; and finding devices to be a distraction from offline learning. Students felt the devices were not always used solely for class purposes and could be distracting (Gikas and Grant, 2013).

Mobile-assisted language learning

MALL is a relatively recent field of study that emerged in the mid-1990s and focused on the use of mobile devices for teaching and learning languages. Among the topics dealt with in MALL, studies are pedagogical and instructional design, teacher training and infrastructure for the implementation of mobile learning (Gitsaki and Robby, 2014). The three critical recommendations for effective mobile learning experiences when designing and implementing MALL were: effective instructional strategies, training or professional development workshops and ongoing technical support and assistance (Kim *et al.*, 2017). Early studies investigated how mobile learning with access to updated and new content can enhance English writing and vocabulary skills. The technology was found to be an effective learning tool that can "facilitate the attainment of learning goals for individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, move, read, write, understand English, sustain attention, organize, engage and remember" (Brand, Favazza and Dalton, 2013, p. 10).

MALL has gained tremendous popularity even in the Gulf region. Iranian researchers have explored the use of mobile devices for language learning and English proficiency in terms of vocabulary, listening comprehension, speaking, learning strategies and grammar. Results indicated that even though Iranian students were discouraged from using mobile devices in the classroom, they were interested in the use of electronic dictionaries installed on their mobile devices to learn new vocabulary (Dashtestani, 2016). A study in Saudi Arabia

investigated the use of mobile phones for learning purposes among university students. Using the technology acceptance model (TAM), which is an information system theory that models how users come to accept and use technology (Chung *et al.*, 2015), the study showed that students thought mobile devices were useful for accessing their courses materials, searching for information related to their discipline, sharing knowledge and conducting assignments. However, the findings also indicated that perceived innovativeness did not show a strong positive correlation with the perceived usefulness of mobile learning (Seliaman and Al-Turki, 2012). In the UAE, a study conducted in 2014 evaluated the iPad initiative that involved 14,000 post-secondary students and faculty staff in three Federal Institutions (Gitsaki and Robby, 2014). The results indicated that while the use of the iPad and other mobile devices for engaging in language learning activities inside and outside of the classroom has had a catalytic role to play in students' success, the instructor remains an important factor for enhancing student motivation and engagement with the iPad.

In regard to the use of mobile devices for teaching journalism, a study that took place in two journalism high school classes taught in a large, urban public high school in a northern state in the USA, examined the impact of using mobile phones on producing newspapers among marginalized students. Students noted how their use of their phones changed as a result of taking the journalism course; they had become more critical of what they saw on social media. Students also said that using smartphones in journalism classes is of added value, but this depends on the maturity of students (Cybart-Persenaire and Literat, 2018).

The act of writing and communicating in the 21st century increasingly involves digital technologies and especially mobile devices (Cybart-Persenaire and Literat, 2018). As discussed earlier, students in the Gulf struggle with mastering English writing and especially in professional writing such as journalism (Dowswell and Eppard, 2018). Based on this evidence, the present study used instructional strategies using mobile device applications, as these were deemed useful for Arab media students. As students in the Gulf struggle with mastering English writing, the "Here and Now" of mobile learning might help overcome these difficulties, especially as mobile learning is: Engaging, Authentic and Informal. Engaging students in informal learning outside the classroom through activities can motivate them to learn and help them to succeed (Martin and Ertzberger, 2013).

Mobile phones in video production

The evolution of news, how it is delivered to mobile audiences and the subsequent modification of journalism schools' curricula can be informed by two theories: the idea of a media ecology and niche theory. Media ecology explains the evolutionary nature of media through advances in technology and niche theory focuses on how media adapts to compete. Although these theories have been used to examine the influence of rapidly changing technologies on new media, they have also been applied to traditional media during debates on how television consumption impacted the use of radio. Now the debate is on how new media affects traditional media and whether it complements or displaces it. As newspapers and television stations change the way they disseminate news, journalism education has also shifted and changed with the industry, demonstrating how the evolution of media means a greater reliance on digital media in journalism schools (Walck *et al.*, 2015).

Rábová (2014) investigated whether mobile filmmaking can be a creative medium. This was a qualitative research case study called "24 frames, 24 hours" and it comprised short films dubbed Hypervideos. According to Rábová (2014):

Hypervideo is digital video and hypertext, offering to the viewer and author the richness of multiple narratives, even multiple means of structuring narrative (or non-narrative), combining digital video with a polyvocal, linked text (p. 38).

In other words, they are short film narratives. The study included 43 participants who were mainly film, media and communication design students. Participants had to collaborate with each other to produce the best short film or Hyper video. Participants had to film in a 2-h time frame on the day of shooting, then edit the final video down to 2min (Rábová, 2014). The main purpose of this was to engage participants in a creative process, along with checking the success of mobile filmmaking as a creative medium. Once the videos were shot and the final editing completed, the short movies were uploaded to <www.24frames24hours.org> and a *YouTube* page, for a global audience to give their feedback. All 43 participants uploaded content, suggesting they were clearly engaged in the workshop.

A study at the University of Wollongong in Australia explored student feedback after participating in the mobile phone newsroom run as part of their Bachelor of Journalism course. The study demonstrated that through a consistent and structured exposure to newsroom practices, students understood the power of the mobile multimedia newsroom and the value of an authentic real-world learning environment (Burns, 2017).

In the Gulf, there is a dearth of research on the use of mobile devices in media departments and journalism schools. There are almost no studies that explore the impact of mobile learning on journalistic writing and how curricula can be updated to reflect new developments in video production filmmaking. The current study sought to explore:

- To what extent do mobile phones enhance students' educational outcomes, both in terms of linguistic and technical skills? How do students perceive mobile learning?
- To what extent can mobile phones be better used to enhance the writing and creative technical skills of media students?

The study

The current study uses a sequential design with an intervention and pre- and post-intervention measurements using both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments. The data from each stage of the study were analyzed and used to inform the subsequent stages and data collection.

Participants

The participants in this study were 28 female students from the media department in a Gulf EMI university. The students were in their second and third year studying one of two courses: journalistic writing and video production. English proficiency in EMI universities in the Gulf is extremely important for both writing and technical courses. Therefore, an emphasis on enhancing students' English proficiency is of critical importance. Students' proficiency in English varies greatly. Those who had passed the IELTS had quite a good grasp of English, but they still needed instruction in journalistic writing. These participants had graduated from private schools where English is first taught in elementary school. Those who had not passed the IELTS and had taken the intensive English program at the university had a poor to intermediate level of English proficiency. Even though these students had completed the intensive English program, they still struggled to write in English. The majority of these students had graduated from public schools, where English is taught in high school only. Only 12 participants from both courses were interviewed and they were the top students in terms of grades, participation and attendance. These students were selected not only because of their discipline and dedication to learning but also because of their proficiency in English.

Research design

The first stage of the study was the pre-intervention, involving direct surveys of students' perceptions and attitudes toward mobile phones for learning. The survey, sent via Survey Monkey, was composed of 10 open- and closed-ended questions asking students about their experience with mobile phones and whether they consider them as learning tools. The questions were divided into four sections: using mobile phones and the flexibility of owning one; using mobile phones to improve English proficiency; using mobile phones for video production including photography; and, frequency of mobile phone use in class and whether instructors encourage their use or not.

The second stage of the study was a semester-long intervention that encouraged students to use mobile phones and access online resources, read online and write online blogs. Students were instructed to download software applications to their mobile phones that would improve their vocabulary such as *Dictionary.com*, *Visual Thesaurus* and *Wordle*, applications to create words such as *Wordflex* and applications which allow them to create mind maps of words. These applications were given by the instructor from the intensive English program as extra support to the course instructor to further help students who had a low level of English proficiency. The English language instructor visited the class once a month to see those students who needed extra support with writing in English.

All the course exercises given to the students in the class were written and solved in wikis via the university Blackboard platform. Technical skills were assessed by asking students to use photo editing software and video editing software such as *iMovie* and *Video Maker*. Data were collected by way of assignments and exams. Students' progress was measured by tracking their grades to see if there was any improvement throughout the semester, as well as monitoring any improvement in writing, grammar and spelling and in the usage of different software in the photo and video editing.

The third stage of the study was a post-intervention interview at the end of the semester to explore students' experiences of using mobile phones for learning. The interview questions were sent to the students via email. To triangulate the data from the pre-intervention surveys and post-intervention interviews, the interview questions were focused on the same issues that the survey was designed around. In total, 12 students participated in the interviews; six students from the writing for journalism course and six from the video production course.

Data analysis

The data from the questionnaires underwent descriptive analysis. Content analysis was used to analyze the data from the interviews. The data from the interviews were transcribed, then, based on thematic analysis, common themes were identified and reported. The results were analyzed against students' usage of mobile phones in their courses and the impact of this usage on students' grades for their assignments throughout the semester.

Results and discussion

Pre-intervention stage

All of the study participants owned mobile phones and five of them owned two: one for phone calls and the other for social media or they wanted to keep a second phone just in case the other ran out of battery. This is indicative of the students' obsession with mobile phones and that cost was not an issue for them, unlike the Iranian students in [Dashtestani's \(2016\)](#) study.

When they were asked whether they learn better when using mobile phones, almost all of them responded negatively, while a small number said sometimes and very few students said "yes". However, most of those who do not think mobile phones are effective for learning

had never used them as a learning tool. Most of the time they use them to chat and for social media; as a result, they were easily distracted when they had to use them for learning purposes much like the students in [Gikas and Grant \(2013\)](#). Others thought that mobile phone screens are too small and preferred laptops for learning. Only one student said that she preferred traditional teaching methods. Those who sometimes used their mobile phones for learning did so either because they are faster than laptops or on an occasion when they did not want to bring their laptops to university.

Only 10 students used mobile phone devices for their courses, mostly to check their emails and the Blackboard site. Some reported that they used them for notes for their presentations, others for translating and some for mathematical calculations. According to the students, the reason behind their limited usage of mobile phones in class was that their instructors had forbidden them claiming that most students get distracted by social media and phone conversations when they use them. Most students agreed that this was the case, but some thought they would not get distracted if they used specific applications and programs that are only found on mobile phones. All students reported that these specific mobile phone applications were not used in any of their courses.

With the exception of only two, all students thought that mobile phones can increase their vocabulary and improve their writing skills. Though they all knew that they could improve these skills with simple spell checks, grammar checks, online translation tools and by reading articles on their mobile phones, some students reported that they wanted to learn about specific mobile phone applications to help them improve their English. In regard to video recording, all but two students used mobile phones. Five students thought that video editing is easier on a laptop, but they still wanted to learn how to edit using a mobile phone. Two students used mobile phones only for social activities like *Instagram*, but for high-quality pictures and editing, they used their professional cameras. Those who used their mobile phones used different applications such as *photoedit*, *picart*, *photovideo*, *photo wonder*, *vsco*, *snapseed* and *doodle snap*.

In terms of privacy, eight students thought that having photographs and videos on mobile phones was not an issue and were already sufficiently cautious about what they publish. They did not know what media ethics and the UAE law says about publishing pictures. Only two students who were concerned about privacy knew what the law stipulated and was aware of the penalties. All students expressed a desire to learn more about using mobile devices to enhance their learning outcomes, including in writing and broadcast production.

The main findings from the first stage of the study were that students are so obsessed with mobile phones that some of them even own more than one. So according to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) theory, there is student acceptance of mobile phone technology. This is a similar finding to that of the study conducted by Seliaman and Al-Turki in Saudi Arabia in 2012.

All students understood the value of mobile learning and expressed a desire to learn to use applications for educational purposes but were forbidden from using phones during class because most get distracted when using them by social media and conversations. This echoes the results of the study conducted in Iran ([Dashtestani, 2016](#)). For courses, students used their mobile phones only for checking their emails and Blackboard site as they had not been trained to use them for educational purposes to enhance their academic performance.

These findings are compatible with the Social Construction of Technology theory that suggests consumers influence technology based on their needs. According to the theory, as instructors do not use mobile applications at all and the classes do not use any mobile technology for education, it follows that students disapprove of using mobile devices for

education. This also means that as the next generation of instructors emerges, their views on mobile applications will have evolved and as a result, mobile devices may be more widely used in the classroom (Laskin and Avena, 2015).

Based on the analysis of the pre-intervention survey, the instructors of writing for journalism and video production designed an intervention that aimed to use mobile phones as part of their teaching methods. After the first stage of the study, it was apparent that even students who were using their mobile phones to learn were not using them effectively and needed more guidance. The instructors recognized that the students were eager to learn about new applications and techniques to enhance their writing and technical skills.

Intervention stage

The second stage of the study focused on student performance during assignments and exercises using their mobile phones. Assessing language skills in writing for journalism was achieved by asking students to use mobile phones and access online resources, read online and write online blogs. Writing skills were tested by way of class exercises, home assignments, projects, quizzes and exams. There was enormous progress between the sample writing that was elicited from the students at the beginning of the semester and other assignments throughout the semester. The course used both traditional learning methods such as lecturing students in class and technical learning methods, for example, asking students to download online newspaper applications via mobile phones.

The instructor of the journalistic writing referred students performing poorly with their English to the intensive English program where they were shown how to correct any grammatical mistakes in their writing assignments. The majority of the class comprised students with insufficient proficiency in English. In addition, the intensive English program instructor visited the class every month to offer additional support and show them how to use new applications, including dictionaries and visual thesauruses. Mobile applications were shown to have helped the students in their writing assignments and improved their productivity, whether for a news story or a feature story assignment. Progress in students' spelling, grammar and vocabulary was assessed by tracking their grades in each of these areas. Students' grades, especially the poor performers, showed great improvement over the semester where they had the support of the intensive English program, climbing from Ds and Cs to Bs and As. These students depended more on traditional learning methods than those students with good English proficiency.

In regard to the use of mobile applications, 18 out of 28 students with good basic English writing skills improved their vocabulary and style of writing. This was demonstrated in their home assignments. However, mobile applications had little impact on students with poor English language skills because they needed further help. The intensive English program had a huge impact on students' writing skills, especially students with weak grammar and writing skills. One of the main advantages of the intensive English program was that it clarified to students that they should not be afraid to show their limitations in English writing and try to improve as their performance in the intensive English tutorial did not affect their main course grades. This also resulted in less plagiarism, especially when compared with students who had not used the services of the intensive English program. Without the support of the intensive English program, mobile applications would offer no benefit to these students.

The students' technical skills such as video production, were far better than their writing skills. In fact, the course did not have a great deal of impact on the broadcast productivity of students because their existing skills were quite good. The instructor taught students the basics of writing for broadcasts; the technical skills were taught by the lab specialist in the

department. In total, 21 students used their mobile phones for recordings but their laptops for editing, using different applications such *iMovie* and *Video Maker*. Students were extremely quick to learn how to use the video production application, but they needed further training. Three students used mobile phones for both recording and editing. Those students attended a workshop given by the media department in mobile video production. Four students used professional cameras for recording and used laptops for editing. The lab specialists in the media department supported the students with equipment such as a camera and stand and trained students to use them, but the specialists in the lab did not have the skills to train the students in how to edit videos on mobile phones. The broadcast assignments of students were outstanding. All but two students performed well above average.

Post-intervention

In the third stage of the study, the instructors of journalistic writing and video production interviewed students at the end of the semester to explore their experiences of using mobile phones for learning and what progress they made.

Six students from each of the two courses were interviewed. To improve their writing skills, students reported using mobile phone applications that the instructors from the intensive English program had shown them how to use such as *Merriam-Webster*, word clouds and a word dictionary, helping them to improve their spelling and grammar. As one student stated, "There are many applications that are useful such as dictionaries. These ones have improved my spelling and grammar and I have learned many new words." For the journalism part, students used mobile phone applications to access online newspapers and write online blogs, as well as use thesaurus applications. Only two students thought that laptops were more convenient due to their bigger screens. One of these students used a mobile phone only for downloading applications that cannot be found on laptops. All students agreed that thesaurus mobile phone applications improved their vocabulary and also improved their writing skills. One student said:

I started downloading applications after the professor described to us how useful they are for writing skills. As I have a limited vocabulary, it really helped me to improve on that.

For video recording and editing on the journalistic writing course, three students reported using mobile phones because they were extremely easy to use, fast, convenient and produced good quality footage. One student stated:

It is very easy to carry compared with an actual camera. Now with more advanced technology smartphones are able to shoot videos in HD, which adds more value to your video clip.

Another student reported:

The quality was amazing. I had trouble holding the phone because my hands were shaking, but there is a stand that you can buy for smartphones to prevent camera shake. It's very useful.

Students had all the necessary applications, they were able to shoot videos in HD and then edit them with software like *iMovie*, the *viva* video application and *magisto* video editor.

The other three students used professional cameras such as a hand-held stabilized camera called the DJI Osmo and a Canon camera. One student stated:

I avoided using my smartphone to videotape my project, as I wanted a higher quality video. Instead, I used a hand-held DJI Osmo stabilized camera. It's a camera that shoots in 4K resolution. The stabilizer made it easy to record videos that were less shaky than they would be on a

smartphone. It uses the smartphone as a viewfinder and saves the videos directly onto the smartphone application.

Students thought professional cameras produced a higher quality video and used their laptops for editing with software such as *iMovie*. One student said:

My experience of videotaping is that if you want HD clarity and saturated colors, you need to use a professional camera. Moreover, using a camera is much easier for me than a phone with an impossibly small screen. During my project, I used my Nikon so that the video would look better.

All the students interviewed on the journalistic writing course thought that mobile phones were more convenient and helpful for creating videos than camcorders, but they still need more training on how to use them and this is why some did not use mobile phones in their video assignments. One of the students said:

There should be more courses that focus on smartphone videography as a lot of short films are shot on phones. As we all have smartphones, it would be useful to teach amateur videographers how to make their videos look visually appealing using a smartphone.

Only one student said that she preferred a camera with a stand for her video assignments because her hands shake too much to use a mobile phone. She also thought that the clarity, sound and screen quality was better on a video camera, as are the image effects and filter options.

Six students who were interviewed from the video production course used iPhones to video their newsgathering assignment. All the students said that the use of mobile phones for video recording is very convenient and easy. They all felt that as they always carry their mobile phones with them all the time, newsgathering is much easier as they do not have to go to the effort of booking the camera and microphone kit in advance. They had greater flexibility in choosing the story for the assignment. Three students said that the audio quality is not very good with mobile phones. Two students felt they had to compromise a lot on the visual quality and one student mentioned that the editing was difficult with the sheer volume of recorded content, including many unnecessary shots. All the students felt that if they were trained on mobile phones and also had the necessary accessories for shooting, the video quality would improve and mobile phones could be used to gather news stories quickly and easily.

Regardless of the degree to which students used mobile devices for their video recording and editing, all students reported that they wanted the media department to offer more workshops and courses teaching them video production techniques on mobile phones. One student suggested that mobile phone video production courses should be provided especially in video and filming elective courses.

Summary

The students' responses and the outcomes of this study correspond with the findings of research conducted at other universities and tally with media education theories. The study confirms the importance of how media evolves with new technological advances (media ecology theory) and how it adapts to compete (niche theory). The evolution of news, how it is delivered to a mobile audience and the subsequent modification of journalism schools' curricula are informed by these two theories (Walck *et al.*, 2015). The findings of this study also support Martin and Ertzberger's study that "Here and Now" mobile learning is engaging, authentic and informal. Mobile learning captured the media students' attention, particularly new applications because they found it more fun and informal compared with the dry, formal lecturing method (Martin and Ertzberger, 2013).

The study also makes the point that journalism educators should incorporate mobile technologies into existing curricula rather than creating courses centered solely on mobile

pedagogy. The study supports other studies that have explained the importance of journalism educators avoiding the trap of believing that technology is going to solve everything. Technology has its limits because it has to meet users' needs (Walck *et al.*, 2015).

The findings of this study are also compatible with other studies that found there to be three critical, practical recommendations for designing and implementing effective mobile learning experiences for MALL: effective instructional strategies, training or professional development workshops and ongoing technical support and assistance (Kim *et al.*, 2017). Training or professional development workshops on mobile learning is also crucial in video production, especially for creative assignments such as mobile filmmaking.

One of the most important findings in this study is that students with poor English need further language assistance to fulfil their potential with the effective use of new mobile phone technology. English tuition has to be improved at schools, especially in public schools because the intensive English program at universities cannot be a substitute for long-term English language education in schools. Journalism classes at high school can be extremely useful for students who are planning to major in media. In the study conducted by Cybart-Persenaire and Literat (2018), students who took a journalism class at high school in the USA earned higher grades and demonstrated better writing and grammar skills in college than those with no prior education in journalism.

Conclusion

The value of this study lies in its contribution toward understanding the impact of students' usage of mobile phones on enhancing their writing and video production skills. This is the first study that focuses on Arab students majoring in media in the Gulf. Students in the Gulf generally and in media studies specifically are struggling with English writing and creative skills in video production, so studying how mobile phones can improve students' learning outcomes is critical.

The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was collected through direct surveys of 28 media students and their assignments and exams. Qualitative data was gleaned from interviews. In the beginning, students were not used to using mobile phones for learning due to a common perception that mobile phones are for entertainment and socializing. Course instructors also discouraged their use. However, the desire to use mobile phones for learning purposes is there with mobile phone applications having a greater impact on students with good English writing skills. All students reported that thesaurus applications had developed their vocabulary and writing skills. To use mobile phone applications to improve English writing skills, students must already have a fair or good level of proficiency in English writing. Students who are struggling with English still need the support of the intensive English program. While students are happy using their mobiles for video recording, only a few use their phones for video editing – more training is needed in this regard. The lab in the media department needs technicians who can support students with mobile video production, not only provide them with equipment. The department also needs to give more intensive creative mobile video production workshops and courses. Faculty members need to be trained and encouraged to use mobile phones for learning purposes and have the requisite skills themselves in mobile video production and writing for journalism.

There are several limitations to this study that should be taken into account in future research. First, the study only considered mobile learning among female students. Also, the sample in this study is relatively small and is drawn from only one media department so it is difficult to generalize the conclusions. Time constraints for the authors of this study account for these limitations. Support for research and use of mobile technologies in teaching and learning is critical to keep up with emerging technologies for better journalistic writing and video production for Arab media students in the Gulf.

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