

EFL Students' Attitude towards the Effect of Mobile Phone Apps on Understanding the English Language Culture

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Abstract: *This research aims to study EFL students' attitudes toward mobile phone app' effect on understanding the target language culture. The study samples consist of 38 students who study EFL at Shaqra University College of Science & Human studies. The researcher used a questionnaire to investigate their attitudes toward mobile phone apps' impact on EFL culture and cultural topics. The obtained results show that mobile phone apps positively affect understanding the target language culture. This result is proven by the items' overall mean score (1 to 12) is 3.81. The overall mean of the score items (13 to 24) is 4.32, indicating that mobile phone apps provide an abundance of cultural topics. So, EFL students have positive opinions towards mobile phone apps' impact on understanding the target language culture and its cultural topics.*

Keywords: Mobile phone apps, EFL students, EFL culture, cultural topics

1. Introduction

Mobile phones have undergone tremendous changes and uprising over the past few years with the rapid development of modern science and technology. People can now communicate and access more information from all over the world with their different applications. These devices are small, smart, portable, and comfortable to utilize. They are also regarded as teaching and learning tools and widely used to make the teaching-learning process more useful because they can provide the students and teachers with considerable and high-quality information and materials, enhancing language teaching and learning.

Furthermore, mobile phone apps can help students to improve their target language skills, vocabulary, grammar. However, the students cannot thoroughly learn the target language until they understand its culture. Thus, learning the target language culture is necessary for achieving linguistic proficiency. Therefore, EFL students need to support their understanding of the target culture with a flexible and active device. In this respect, mobile phone apps can serve as a convenient learning device to help students be aware of the linguistic and cultural knowledge to enhance their language competence. That is why the current study was conducted to investigate Saudi EFL students' attitudes towards the effect of mobile phone apps on understanding the target language culture.

1.1 Research Question

- 1) What are the students' attitudes towards mobile phone apps on understanding EFL culture?
- 2) Do mobile phone apps provide plenty of cultural topics of the target language?

1.2 Research Hypothesis

This study hypothesizes that:

- 1) EFL Students' attitudes towards mobile phone apps' effect on understanding the target culture are positive.
- 2) Mobile phone apps provide plenty of cultural topics of the target language.

1.3 Research Aims

This study aims to determine EFL students' attitudes towards mobile phone apps' effect on understanding the target language culture and its cultural topics.

2. Literature Review

Recently, mobile phones brought radical changes to the lifestyle of people. Besides, they are used for communication and interaction between people; also, they are regarded as one of the new educational trends because it is equipped with several apps that make it educationally useful. Additionally, these apps can be considered valuable learning tools to improve target language skills, vocabulary, and grammar and understand its culture. These applications include E-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Google Hangouts, Snapchat, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube, VLC media, etc. Hence, students can utilize these apps in a meaningful way to improve their knowledge of the target language and its culture.

The previous study has shown significant findings that encourage mobile phone apps' integration in learning a target language and its culture. For example, Ruhe (1998) has investigated e-mail to learn about the target language culture. Hanna and Ne Nooy (2009) assert that online public discussion in a foreign language provides the potential for learners to experience cultural differences unfettered by physical location. It also offers language learners and teachers a venue to focus on intercultural communication. Also, some of the studies' findings defined the term culture, identified the relationship between language and culture, and provided the different cultural topics of the target language as follows:

2.1 What is Culture?

The definition of the term 'culture' has always been a challenging task for many researchers. They defined it differently. For example, Chastain (1976: 388) portrays culture as "the way people live." Kramsch (1998:127) also defined culture as "a membership in a discourse community that shapes a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and action." Besides, Breslin (1990:11) identified culture as "widely shared ideals, values, information and uses of categories, assumptions about life, goal-directed activities that become unconsciously accepted as right and correct by people who identify themselves as members. of a society. Brown (2000:176-177) suggests that culture is "a way of life." He goes on to say that culture also includes "the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a given group in a given period." Furthermore, Seelye (1984:16) suggests that culture is a broad concept that embraces all aspects of human life. It includes everything people learn to do. It is everything human has learned. Culture shapes our thoughts and action and often does so with a heavy hand".

2.2 The Relationship between Language and Culture

The relationship between language and culture is very complicated. Language is an integral part of the culture, and it also is an expression of culture. Therefore, many scholars assure the close relationship between language and culture; for instance, Sapir (1970: 207) suggested that language does not separate from culture, from a socially inherited collection of practices and beliefs that determine people's structured lives. Also, Agar (1994, 28) puts it: Culture is in Language and Language are loaded with culture." Moreover, Byram (1989:94) adds that "the language holds the culture through the denotations and connotation of its semantics, which is why it is important to teach culture through its language." Kramsch (1998:3) identifies three ways of how language and culture are bound together. First, language expresses cultural reality-with words. People express facts and ideas and reflect their attitudes. Second, language embodies cultural truth, and people give meaning to their experience through communication. Third, language symbolizes cultural fact, and people give their language as a symbol of their social identity.

Also, Buttjes and Byram (1991) claim that:

Language is not simply a reflector of objective cultural reality. It is an integral part of that reality through which other parts are shaped and interpreted. It is both a symbol of the whole and a part of the whole, which shapes and in turn shaped by sociocultural actions, beliefs, and values. (18)

Moreover, Brown (2000:177) claims that language is a part of a culture, and culture is a segment of a language; the two are entirely intermixed; therefore, one cannot detach the two without reducing the significance of either language or culture. Furthermore, Dennett & Lekberg (1986:149) argue that:

1-Language cannot be translated word for word. All languages have idiomatic expressions that carry

connotations above and beyond the meanings of the separate words themselves. 2-The tone of a speaker's voice carries meaning. All languages have different 'tunes' or patterns of intonation. Similarly, the degree of loudness/softness used by speakers is a characteristic of the language itself. 3-Each language – Culture employs gestures, body movements that convey meanings. Gesture and body movements are not necessarily the same for all languages. 4-Languages use different grammatical elements for describing all parts of the physical world. 5-All cultures have taboo topics. A part of knowing a language is knowing what one can and cannot say to whom on what occasions. 6-In personal relationships, the terms for addressing people vary considerably among languages. Even in informal American Culture, there are commonly agreed-upon rules indicating when their first name addresses people and when they are called by a title such as Mr., or Mrs., or Dr. Therefore, the relation between language and culture is robust because language is an integral part of the culture and expresses culture.

2.3 Cultural Topics of English Language:

Chastain (1988: 304) has compiled a cultural list using an anthropological perspective. Similarly, to Brooks, he claims 37 topics on his list, including family, home, money, religion, holidays, clothes, good manners, and non-verbal communication. Additionally, Durant's (1997: 31) list consists of food, customs, the legal and judicial system, holidays, housing and gardens, social attitudes, and political expression. Furthermore, Razi (2012) divided culture into 45 topics. He divided these topics into nine categories: a. Intellectual values: thought, habits, beliefs, traditional values, etiquette, ethics, and ideas. b. Lifestyles: unique dances, unique jewelry, hobbies, particular skill, unique tools, dressing habits, food, and games. c. Behaviors: non-verbal behavior patterns, verbal behavior patterns, other behavior patterns, means of communication, and reactions to particular situations. d. Media: television shows, news broadcasts, popular websites, advertising, scientific/ technological accomplishments, and printed materials (newspaper and magazines). e. Artistic values: music, cinema, art, and literature. f. Family: family life, taboos, relationship, and daily life. g. Minor values: public holiday, weather conditions, traffic rules, and travel habits. h. Major values: history, geography, and philosophy. i. Formal values: legal system, politics, and the economy.

3. Method

A descriptive study explores EFL students' attitudes toward mobile phone apps' effect on understanding English language culture. The study is carried out at Shaqra University college of science and Humanities studies in Saud Arabia.

3.1 Participants

The participants consisted of 38 EFL students at Shaqra University. For the aim of this study, the students were chosen randomly.

3.2 Instrument

The kind of tools used in this study is a questionnaire. It is constructed to collect information from EFL students' attitudes towards mobile phone apps' impact on understanding the target language's culture. The questionnaire's items were written and adapted from relevant surveys available in the previous literature.

3.3 Procedure for Collecting and Analyzing Data

Before conducting a questionnaire to EFL students, a jury of six university EFL instructors from Shaqra University was requested to validate the questionnaire. The researchers modified the questionnaire's items according to their comments and recommendations. Cranach's Alpha correlation coefficient is used to measure the reliability of the instrument. The gained result from this test indicates the reliability of the tool since Cronbach's Alpha value is more than(0.862)

For analyzing the data, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 20) was used. The questionnaire is designed according to Likert type from 5-1 scale values to represent the different five choices (e.g., strongly agree to strongly disagree). Therefore, the frequencies, means, percentages, and standard deviations of the participants' responses were calculated. The outcome of the study is divided into tables (1) and (2). For facilitating of discussion, the researcher adopts these strategies: mean values more than 4.20 are regarded as strongly agreeing, mean values less than 4.20 as agreeing, and mean values less than 3.5 as disagreeing.

4. Discussion

The data collected from this questionnaire may confirm or disconfirm the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: EFL Students' attitudes towards mobile phone apps' effect on understanding the target culture are positive.

Table 1

No	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean score	Standard Deviation	Likert scale
		No.	No.	No.	No.	No.			
1	Mobile phone apps help students to become more tolerant and open-minded towards other peoples and their cultures.	0	2	7	22	8	3.92	0.784	Agree
		0	5.3	18.3	55.3	21.6			
2	Mobile phone apps increase students' motivation to understand EFL culture	1	2	10	18	7	3.73	0.821	agree
		2.6	5.3	26.3	47.4	18.4			
3	Mobile phone apps help students to create critical thinking regarding target culture and their own cultures.	0	3	16	17	7	3.74	0.86	Agree
		0	7.9	28.9	44.7	18.4			
4	Mobile phone apps help students create critical thinking regarding target culture and their own cultures.	2	1	10	18	7	3.71	0.984	Agree
		5.3	2.6	26.3	47.4	18.4			
5	Mobile phone apps allow students to compare different elements of the target culture with their native culture.	0	1	3	16	18	4.34	0.745	Strongly agree
		0	2.6	7.9	42.1	47.4			
6	Mobile phone apps integrate the learning of the target language and its culture.	0	0	2	4	32	4.21	0.991	Strongly Agree
		0	0	5.3	10.5	84.2			
7	Mobile phone apps make the learning of the target language culture more enjoyable.	0	4	3	12	19	4.13	0.463	Agree
		0	10.5	7.9	36.6	50			
8	Mobile phone apps are essential in understanding the English language culture.	0	0	4	13	21	4.45	0.686	Strongly agree
		0	0	10.5	34.2	55.3			
9	Mobile phone apps enable the students to use the language grammatically, socially, and pragmatically appropriate.	0	1	5	10	17	4.26	0.795	Strongly agree
		0	2.6	13.2	39.5	44.7			
10	Mobile phone apps provide names of people, rivers, cities, etc.	1	1	2	11	16	3.74	0.95	agree
		2.6	2.6	5.3	28.9	42.1			
11	Mobile phone apps effectively develop all language skills.	1	2	11	16	8	3.74	0.95	agree
		2.6	5.3	28.9	42.1	26.1			
12	Mobile phone apps equip the students with political issues (current political events, national symbols, etc.)	0	1	12	13	12	3.95	0.868	agree
		0	2.6	31.6	34.2	31.6			

Data obtained from the table (1) shows that the overall means values of the items (1 to12) are more than 3.81 out of (5). This result indicates that EFL students' perceptions of mobile phone apps' effect on understanding the target culture are positive. The finding also shows that the highest mean score (4.45) goes to this item: Mobile phone apps are essential in understanding the English language culture

while the high mean score (3.71) goes to the item: understanding the target culture enable the students to be more competent and reduce intercultural misunderstanding

Hypothesis 2: Mobile phone apps provide plenty of cultural topics of the target language

Table 2

No	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean score	standard deviation	Likert scale
		No.	No.	No.	No.	No.			
		%	%	%	%	%			
13	Mobile phone apps supply students with target language literature (Novels, drama, poems, famous writers, etc.).	1	4	8	17	8	3.71	1.016	Agree
		2.6	10.5	21.1	44.7	21.1			
14	Mobile phone apps help students recognize the target language's ways of greeting, friendly exchange, and farewell.	1	1	13	16	7	3.79	0.898	agree
		2.6	2.6	34.2	42.1	18.4			
15	Mobile phone apps display objects such as figurines, tools, jewelry, or images from the target culture.	1	3	7	14	13	3.92	1.050	Agree
		2.6	7.9	18.4	36.8	34.2			
16	Mobile phone apps equip students with games (the most popular games played outdoors, indoors, young and adult)	0	2	5	18	13	4.14	839	Agree
		0	5.3	13.2	47.4	34.2			
17	Mobile phone apps supply students with the rules of behavior (pattern of politeness, etc.).	1	0	5	22	10	4.05	0.805	Agree
		2.6	0	13.2	57.9	26.3			
18	mobile phone apps provide students with the practical use of non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, etc.).	0	0	3	20	15	4.32	0.620	Strongly agree
		0	0	7.9	52.6	39.5			
19	Mobile phone apps supply students with the types of meals, food, and drink (each meal's unique character, the food, the seating arrangement, etc.)	2	1	7	18	10	3.87	1.018	Agree
		5.3	2.6	18.4	47.4	26.3			
20	Mobile phone apps equip students with sports (what organized and professional sport are most famous for the public).	2	3	8	15	10	3.74	1.107	agree
		5.3	7.9	21.1	39.5	26.3			
21	Mobile phone apps provide students with Value judgment (good-bad, right-wrong, acceptable-unacceptable).	1	1	8	16	12	3.79	0.944	agree
		2.6	2.6	21.1	42.1	31.6			
22	Mobile phone apps supply films and television programs to allow students to witness the behaviors of the native people.	2	3	8	15	10	3.74	1.107	agree
		5.3	7.9	21.1	39.5	26.3			
23	Mobile phone apps inform the students of the values and attitudes of the native speakers of the target language	2	2	9	14	11	3.79	0.822	agree
		5.3	5.3	23.7	36.8	28.9			
24	Mobile phone apps supply students with authentic texts (short stories, poems, articles, books, etc.).	0	0	3	20	15	4.32	0.620	Strongly agree
		0	0	7.9	52.6	39.5			

Based on the data obtained from table 2, mobile phone apps provided the students with an abundance of cultural topics to improve their understanding of the target language. This result proved by overall means value of the items (13 to 24) is 4.21. The highest mean score (4.32 out of 5) goes to the item that Mobile phone apps supply students with authentic texts (short stories, poems, articles, books, etc.). Also, the same result (4.32 out of 5) goes to mobile phone apps that provide students with the practical use of non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, etc.) while the high mean score (3.74) goes to Mobile phone apps supply films and television programs to allow students to witness the behaviors of the native people.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study attempted to investigate EFL Students' attitudes toward mobile phone apps' effect on understanding the target culture. After carefully gathering the appropriate data, SPSS is used to analyze it. Thus, frequency counting, percentages, means, and standard deviations were applied to analyze and explain data. Finally, based on the result obtained, conclusions and recommendations were presented in the following points: the first point: EFL students display positive attitudes toward the effect of mobile phone apps on understanding EFL culture since their overall mean score is more than (3.81) out of (5). This result means that

understanding the target culture using mobile phone apps is significantly beneficial in developing positive attitudes towards the target language, reducing intercultural misunderstanding, and enabling the learner to be more competent. The second point, Saudi EFL students have positive attitudes toward the cultural information provided by mobile phone apps. The target language's cultural topics introduced by mobile phone apps foster empathy with the target language community and increase awareness of cultural norms, ways of life, values, attitudes, and beliefs representing linguistics norms.

6. Recommendations

These results recommend that the teachers integrate mobile phones into their teaching of the target language and its culture. The findings also recommend that curriculum designers shift from traditional curricula to incorporate mobile phones into their curriculum planning. Moreover, universities should regard mobile phones as a significant part of teaching and learning programs. Finally, the researcher recommends replicating this study using a larger sample of participants from all the Saudi universities and teachers that could produce more reliable and comprehensive results.

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