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What's going on at the MALL?

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Abstract

Close to 100% of tertiary students in Japan now own a mobile device. As language teachers, we may have considered using them for computer-assisted language learning; however, navigating the vast array of mobile applications can be a daunting task. Moreover, given that student ownership of iOS and Android devices is almost evenly split, a teacher is often unable to choose applications that are accessible to the entire class. This paper shows details of a 2014 study in mobile usage trends (among Japanese university students) and derives input from a panel of educators who investigated mobile use in education for language learning purposes. Panel discussion and floor interaction revealed similar challenges across platforms, and possible solutions

to these problems in teacher education and administrative cooperation.

Introduction

The report shares results of a 2014 study regarding trends in mobile technology, as presented at the 2014 Paperless Innovation and Technology in Education conference. The findings suggest mobile assisted education is attractive to students. With teacher insight and administrative cooperation, successful integration of mobile technology into educational reform is feasible.

Literature review

There is argument among educators as to the value of mobile technology in education. A 2012 article in *Language Learning & Technology* reveals that personal bias about mobile use can affect one's interpretation of its innate value (Stockwell, 2012). This tendency to favor one medium at the expense of another is also observable among language learners. A 2008 study of students in Japan revealed that PCs were generally favored over mobile technology for use in language learning (Stockwell, 2008). A similar study in 2013 has shown little change in student usage patterns with regard to mobile technology (Stockwell, 2013), yet, students continue to carry them and use them during and outside of class. This panel sought to identify trends in mobile device use among Japanese university students and specific attitudes related to their function as a potential language-learning tool.

Method

An online questionnaire was distributed to students from five private universities in Tokyo during January 2014. Data was collected concerning device ownership, software adoption, frequency of use, and attitudes about mobile technology in education.

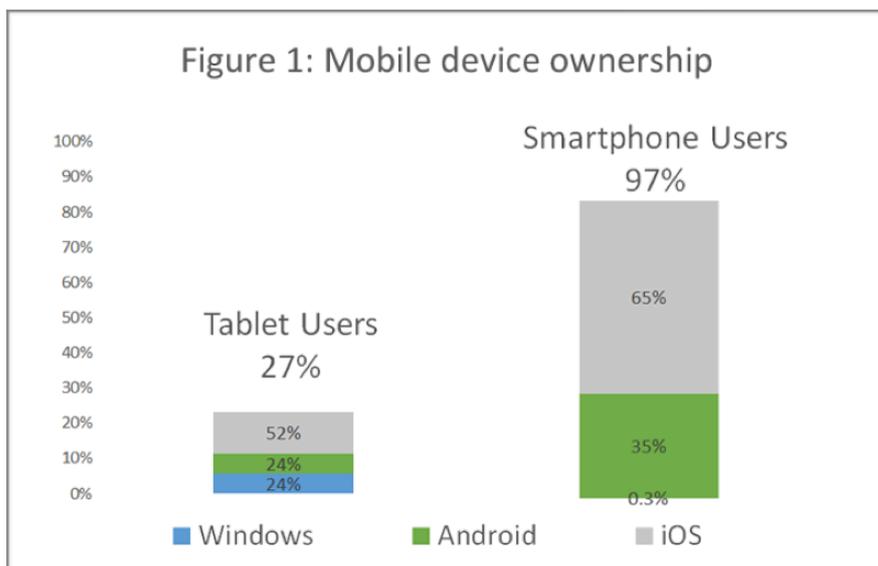
Participants

A total of 374 first and second year students from: Tokai University, Tamagawa University, Keio University, International Christian University and Waseda University responded to the questionnaire.

Results

Tablet Ownership

Figure 1 indicates that 27% of students (81) owned a tablet device. Within this group, 45 owned an iPad, 21 owned an Android tablet and 21 owned a Windows tablet. The first implication of this result



for teachers is that a bring-your-own-device (BYOD) strategy, where students bring their personal tablet devices to class is still a long way away. As the survey was conducted in January, we also asked whether respondents planned on buying a tablet device in 2014. A further 56 (17%) students responded that they plan on buying a tablet. When combined with the current tablet ownership figures, this increase in tablet ownership suggests that there are growing possibilities for teachers to incorporate tablet-based teaching approaches.

The most significant, yet unsurprising implication from our results was that students do not own the same type of device. Despite the fact that just over half of respondents own an iPad, device ownership is shared between three operating systems (see Figure 1). Therefore, teachers need to be mindful that certain applications are only available on specific platforms and some web based applications run differently on different platforms. The teacher may need to be prepared to offer technical support spanning different device platforms.

Smartphone ownership

Our questionnaire was able to identify that 97% of respondents own a smartphone. For teachers, this result suggests that personal devices can be used for learning tasks inside or outside the classroom. Furthermore, all classrooms/institutions evaluated in this study had access to wireless Internet; hence students could access faster Internet connections (opposed to 3G or 4G), and students who did not own a smartphone could still participate with tablets or iPod touch devices. Similar to our findings about tablet devices, students own an assortment of smartphones that use a variety of platforms. However, in the case of smartphones, iPhone ownership among our

respondents is considerably higher at 206 (65%) users, with a little over a third (35%) owning an Android phone and one student reporting to own a windows smartphone. Once again, teachers need to be mindful of the functions and capabilities of each platform if they choose to move forward with smartphone-based lesson content.

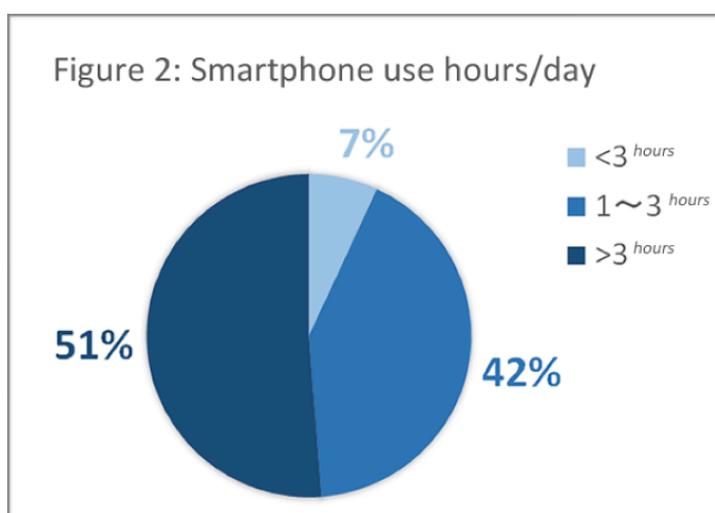
Frequency of use

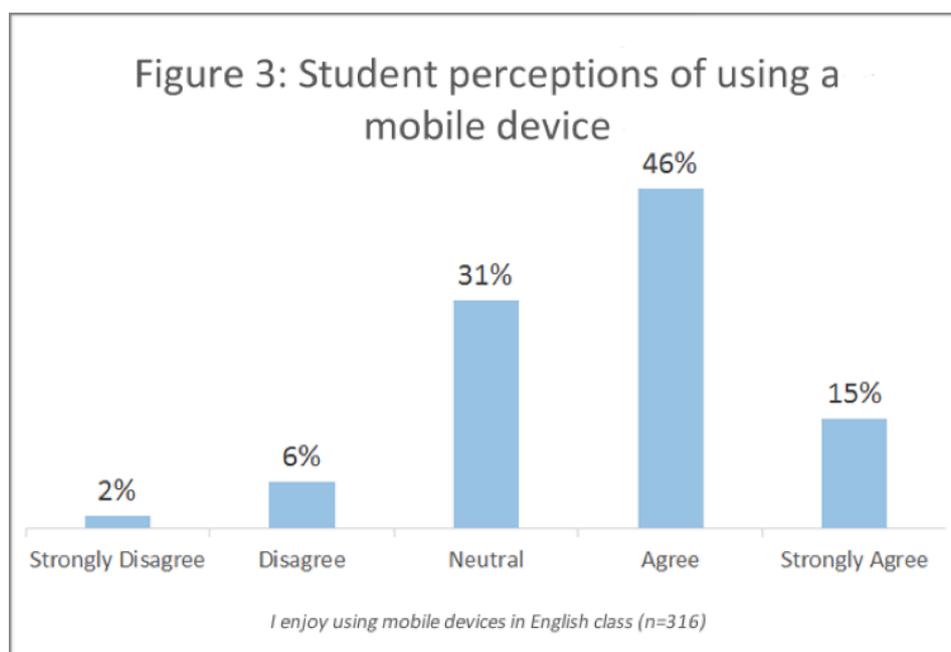
We also asked smartphone owners to report (see figure 2) on the amount of time spent using their devices daily. The authors of this study were shocked to discover that over half (51%) of our respondents spend more than three hours every day using their

smartphones. Furthermore, when this figure is combined with those students who reported 1~3 hours of use per day, an overwhelming 93% (298/334) of our respondents spend over an hour each day on their smartphone. We see two implications for teachers with this finding. Firstly, students may perhaps be less inclined to use this device in class because they are already using it so much outside of class. Second, because students are already using their smartphones frequently throughout the day, we can assume that students are very skillful users of their mobile device. This means that teachers might not be called upon for technical instruction and more importantly, they are able to rely upon students to support each other should any technical issues arise.

Student perceptions of mobile learning

We surveyed students concerning their attitudes toward mobile use in education. We learned that 53% of students (8% tablets & 45% smartphones) prefer their mobile device to a personal computer for language study. In addition, we learned that





students have a positive perception of using mobile devices in the classroom. When asked if a mobile device could be a powerful device for language study, 225 (72%) either agreed or strongly agreed. Language teachers now find themselves in a context where almost all students own a smartphone or tablet device, and students are open to using this technology for language study (see Figure 3).

Discussion

Discussion at the conference ranged from issues related to a specific device or software, to attitudes about mobile technology. In addition, a list of useful cross-platform solutions (e.g., Google Drive, Evernote, and Dropbox) was compiled and published to the web in real-time (<https://sites.google.com/site/dmllpanel/>). Discussion also ranged to challenges in mobile use, including student preference for their own personal devices and administrative roadblocks.

Conclusions

It seems that mobile technology offers exciting possibilities and students may be ready to use it for learning. However, despite the potential for such technology, teacher awareness and administrative red tape remain significant challenges to implementing mobile-friendly approaches to language learning.

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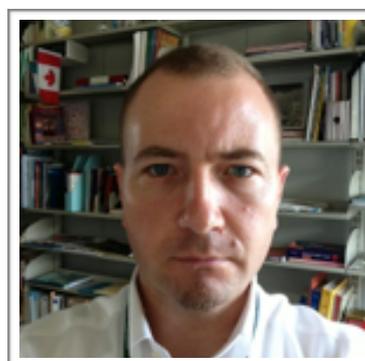
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Bios:

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Brett Milliner is an assistant professor in the Center for English as a Lingua Franca at Tamagawa University and lecturer in the faculty of law at Keio University. Brett's major research interest is mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and he is a regular contributor to Digital Mobile Language Learning (<<http://dml.jaltcall.org>>). When Brett isn't working he can be found surfing or moonlighting as a yoga teacher in Kamakura.

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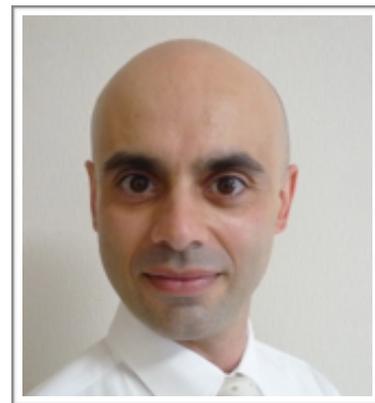
Simeon Flowers, MA TESOL. A fifteen year veteran of English teaching, Simeon likes to keep things fresh while also serving a pedagogical purpose. He enjoys teaching beyond the language and providing authentic experience through creative adaptation of technology. Simeon is a regular contributor to Digital Mobile Language Learning.

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Dan Ferreira, MA TESOL, has been teaching in the Tokyo/Kawasaki/Yokohama region for 11 years. He is currently teaching full-time at ICU and part-time at Waseda (Science and Engineering Department). He is comfortable around technology and he looks forward to the day when every student coming to class with a tablet becomes standard issue. Dan is a regular contributor to Digital Mobile Language Learning. His research interests include writing (EAP), vocabulary acquisition, and edtech.

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