

Tablets in second language learning: learners' and teachers' perceptions

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Abstract. This study explores the perceptions of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and teachers on using tablets in their language classrooms, focusing on the device's four inherent affordances: learnability, usability, motivation, and willingness to use the technology. Adopting a quantitative and qualitative approach for data collection and analysis, our findings revealed overall positive perceptions from both ESL learners and their teachers on all four measures adopted (all above 3.4/5); these results were also corroborated by our thematic analysis of the interviews.

Keywords: MALL, tablets, ESL learners, ESL teachers.

1. Introduction

The four themes that guided our study (i.e. learnability, usability, motivation, and willingness to use the technology) are commonly found in most Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) perception studies. What is known about users' perceptions of MALL-based pedagogy (including tablet and non-tablet devices) is that students and their instructors view the use of these platforms positively. For instance, it has been acknowledged that the use of MALL-based pedagogy has the potential to enhance learning in the following ways: (1) it improves the overall learning experience, i.e. learnability (Diemer, Fernandez, & Streepey, 2013); (2) it increases learners' levels of comfort, i.e. usability (Itayem, 2014); (3) it boosts motivation (Cardoso, 2011; Huang, 2013); and (4) it increases students' willingness to use the technology (Cumming & Rodriguez, 2013).

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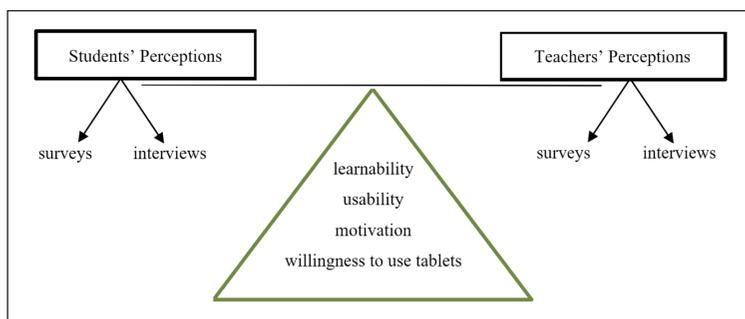
Although previous research has investigated the pedagogical use of tablets in the domain of higher education (e.g. [Cidre, 2015](#)), elementary and secondary education (e.g. [Kirsch & Bes Izuel, 2016](#)), students with disabilities (e.g. [Cumming & Rodriguez, 2013](#)), and teacher training (e.g. [Hopkins & Burden, 2015](#)), there is little research exploring the perceptions of ESL students and even less involving their teachers ([Cifuentes, Maxwell, & Bulu, 2011](#)).

2. Method

This study explores the perceptions of 45 young adult ESL learners and their 11 teachers on the use of tablets (predominantly Apple iPads) in their classrooms at an English language school in Montreal, Canada. A quantitative and qualitative approach was used to collect and analyze the data.

For the quantitative aspect of the study, participants were asked to anonymously fill-out a survey consisting of five-point Likert scale items (ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' – learners' and teachers' surveys questions were adapted from [Rossing, Miller, Cecil, & Stamper, 2012](#); and [Young, 2016](#) respectively), which probed their perceptions of the four target themes: (1) learnability (n=14; e.g. using iPads helps me improve my listening skills in English), (2) usability (n=12; e.g. I find it is easy for my students to use iPads in reading activities), (3) motivation (n=11; e.g. using iPads motivates me to read English texts), and (4) willingness to use tablets (n=10; e.g. I will use the iPad for teaching my classes in the future). To verify the internal consistency of the items included under each perception marker, a Cronbach's alpha analysis was run on the survey data of all participants. All Cronbach's alpha coefficients were greater than .70, indicating high internal reliability within each theme adopted in the study.

Figure 1. General design of the study: themes and instruments



Finally, the qualitative data were obtained through face-to-face interviews (e.g. *What do you think are the benefits [or disadvantages] of using iPads for learning English?*), which were subjected to a thematic analysis. Figure 1 above displays the general design of the study.

3. Results and discussion

Our findings revealed positive perceptions from both ESL learners and teachers on all four measures adopted. As can be observed in Table 1, the participants rated their experience using tablets mostly above 3.4 (/5) on all four thematic measures adopted. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the results.

Table 1. Learners' and teachers' perceptions on learnability, usability, motivation, and willingness to use tablets

	Learnability		Usability		Motivation		Willingness to use tablets	
	M/5	SD	M/5	SD	M/5	SD	M/5	SD
Learners	3.27	0.10	3.5	0.14	3.14	0.25	3.58	0.12
Teachers	3.42	0.21	3.57	0.17	3.16	0.17	3.46	0.24

Note. All mean values are out of 5.

These results were also corroborated by our thematic analysis of the interviews. Overall, users displayed positive attitudes toward using iPads pedagogically. From the learners' perspectives, for instance, participants believed that they: (1) improved their English ("I can increase my listening or practice my speaking") – learnability; (2) highlighted the convenience of using iPads in learning English ("we can take more notes in more details") – usability; (3) emphasized their motivation and interest in using the device ("I think it makes the education easier") – motivation; and (4) expressed their willingness to continue using tablets, particularly because of their professional needs ("I prefer to use iPads because our society is developing, so we need to use this in the future") – willingness to use.

Consistent with the literature, our results indicate that there was an overall positive attitude from both learners and teachers toward the use of iPads in L2 education. As such, our findings regarding users' perceptions on *learnability*, *usability*, *motivation*, and *willingness to use iPads* comply with previous studies on learners' and teachers' attitudes toward their use in L2 classrooms (e.g. Diemer et al., 2013; Young, 2016). In particular, our findings align with those reported in Itayem (2014), where a clear relationship was found between learners' perceived *learnability*,

usability, and *willingness* to use iPads. As learners recognized the usability and learnability potentials of the device, they became more willing to use it in their future language learning endeavors.

4. Conclusions

To conclude, our findings revealed that, overall, both students and teachers view the pedagogical use of the target technology positively across the four themes. As such, the study's main contribution is to add more data and analysis to the investigation of users' perceptions of the pedagogical implementation of technology (tablets in our case), particularly including both learners and teachers. Another interesting contribution is that, contrary to most previous studies that acknowledged a potential 'novelty effect' in their findings (e.g. [Cardoso, 2011](#), for whom the effect is claimed to positively affect performance in the initial stages of the pedagogical implementation of a new technology), most learners (n=31/45) and teachers (n=11/11) stated that they had been using iPads pedagogically for more than one year. This way, our findings can be said to provide a more accurate and reliable portrayal of users' perceptions of tablets, after the novelty effect has worn off.

Based on the results and the users' recommendations for implementing tablet-based L2 education, there are some implications that we would like to put forward, on the assumption that an ill implementation of any technology can considerably diminish its pedagogical impact ([Rossing et al., 2012](#)). Importantly, to ensure the proper and effective use of tablets in class, teachers need to build up their knowledge of technology through adequate training, in order to enhance their level of comfort with the device. Furthermore, providing teachers with devices and allowing them to have enough preparation time ensures a well-established pedagogical infrastructure ([Young, 2016](#)), which will foster higher comfort levels among its users ([Diemer et al., 2013](#)) and, consequently, increase the chances of the technology being effectively and efficiently integrated into the L2 classroom.

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