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The Case of Mobile-assisted Language Learning among Undergraduate Language Learners in Georgia

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Abstract

Mobile learning is one of the developing areas in educational field. Power of computers and laptops has changed the way learning happen and made it easy to access all materials and resources. A rapidly growing amount of literature in the area of mobile learning depicts the increasing use of mobile technologies for learning. Mobile phones as a new addition to information and communication technologies have created new ways to help learners in the process of foreign language learning. The main aim of the study was to find out university students' attitudes towards mobile learning in Georgia and the potential of it to enhance the English language proficienc . The methodology used for the study was an online questionnaire. The results revealed that most of the respondents have positive attitudes towards mobile learning and believe that mobile phones could be used to enhance the English language proficienc .

Keywords: English language, language learning, mobile learning

Introduction

The digital age is characterized by the rapid growth of information and communication technologies. Among all communication mediums, mobile devices, such as as cell phones, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and smartphones are very effective, as there is no need for language learners to be in class or to sit at a computer to receive learning materials. Therefore, educators have been attempting to provide a learning environment through mobile devices and aiming at developing mobile learning (m-learning) tools for educational purposes (Miangah & Nearat, 2012). As the demand of acquiring foreign languages increases and people's free time decreases, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) offers an effective solution. This paper focuses on finding out the suitability of m-learning among the university students in Georgia, Tbilisi by selecting the target audiences as university students of the BA cycle.

Mobile Learning and Its Characteristics

There is no proper definition of mobile learning, as many authors have derived with various definitions. The understanding of mobile learning will itself influence the progress and direction of mobile learning and its perception and acceptance by the wider educational community. According to Traxlor (2005, p.262), mobile learning is "any educational provision where the sole or dominant technologies are handheld or palmtop devices". This definition may mean that mobile learning could include mobile 'phones, smart phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and their peripherals, perhaps tablet PCs and perhaps laptop PCs, but not desktops in carts and other similar solutions' (ibid, p. 263).

Few studies have been concentrated on identifying the use of mobile technologies in use of English language learning. A study done by Al Aamri and Kamla Sulaiman is an example of it. They have studied the current use and practices of mobile phones in the process of learning English Language by Sultan Qaboos University (Oman) students. The existing uses and practices were identified through a questionnaire and it was stated that students use mobile phone in learning, but in a very limited way (Aamri& Suleiman, 2011). Another study has been done by Burston (2011) on realizing the potential of mobile learning for language learning by identifying the obstacles in mobile learning, such as intrusiveness, cost, practical and technological constrains and theoretical & pedagogical foundations. In sum, as mobile phone features have increased, while their cost decreased, attention has increasingly focused on them as an ultra-portable language learning tool. Above all, what has attracted interest in the use of mobile phones as learning devices is their potential to support anywhere and anytime (Burston, 2011).

The essential characteristic of the mobile devices for learning is their size and weight which make them portable.

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Thus, in MALL there is no need for learners to sit in a classroom or at a computer to get the material. Keypad vs. touchpad, screen size and audio functions are significant as input and output capabilities. Depending on them, Miangah and Nearat (2012) considered mobile devices as extensions, but not substitution for existing learning devices, for not all learning contents and activities are applicable for mobile devices (Gay, Stefanone, Martin & Hembrooke, 2001).

Mobile phones, PDAs and smart phones offer various additional uses beside the phone and Short Message Service (SMS), including Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS), voice messaging, video recording, cameras, internet and wireless access and, therefore, file-sharing between teachers and students and amongst students themselves. The obtained data, if needed, can be transferred easily to the PCs. Further, some of the PDAs and smart phones have a handwriting recognition feature. Nevertheless, the future success of these devices, according to Beatty (2003), is tied to their ability also to accommodate voice recognition. Such differen features in the market are compatible to the different needs of the users. Their costs also vary. But the basic activities can be performed by all mobile phones. Thus, teachers need consider the costs and devices.

Learners' skills in using mobile devices must also be taken into consideration. Besides, learners' prior knowledge and experience in using mobile devices for learning is crucial. Their attitudes towards learning via mobile devices play a vital role in learners' output quality. The attributes of mobile devices as inexpensive and sophisticated ones have increased the number of its users. The World Bank conducted a study in 2012 that revealed that around three quarters of the world's inhabitants have an access to a mobile phone (Russell &Cieslik, 2012).Urmia University (AL-Qudaimi, 2013, p.3) in Iran carried out another study indicating that 44% of mobile phone owners browse the internet via their mobiles. This manifests the potential of the application of such devices for learning and urges educators to provide tools and software for learners in teaching contexts.

M-learning and teaching

The communicative potential of mobile devices can be seen as a crucial prerequisite for m-learning.

Thus, the application of m-learning in teaching draws the foreground of the sociocultural dimension. At the same time it impacts the cognitive dimension of learning, besides, it permits to decrease the amount of ready-to-use information (Pachler, 2009).Such effects of m-learning can occur in the process of either in-classroom or out-of-classroom application of mobile devices in teaching. In-classroom utilization it activates close interaction, conversation and decision-making among students due to m-learning activities, especially if students are divided into small groups. Such learning experience can hardly be achieved out of the classroom.

Numerous methods of teaching can be assisted by m-learning either inside or outside the classroom. One method is game-based learning, in which the materials are designated to be integrated with aspects of the physical environment. In this kind of learning environment, activities are easier to fulfil by using the mobile technology serving as a link between a real world of knowledge and the visual world of the game. For example, TimeLab is a game about the changes in the climate and its effects. Players succeed in getting information about the introduction of the possible new environmental laws via their mobile devices in different locations as they progress in the game. The results of the games are discussed in the classroom (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009). Another method that can be aided by m-learning is the collaborative approach, in which different learners exchange their knowledge, skills and attitudes through interaction. This encourages learners to support, motivate and evaluate each other and, therefore, obtain substantial amount of learning. Miangah and Nearat (2012) believe that learners who are good at using mobile phones would be successful in this respect. Besides their pedagogical utilization, mobile devices have been used as a flexible means of student-teacher communication for practical or administrative matters, such as course updates and reminders. Likewise, student-student synchronous and asynchronous communication can beheld via mobile devices to portray the social interaction that is mediated by cultural tools (Pachler,2009).

In addition to communication as a practical matter, mobile devices have been used as referrals to related websites and up-to-date instructional resources (Levy & Kennedy, 2005). As an example, Thornton and Houser (2003) developed a web page for PDAs and smartphones to support the English course.

Via collaborative, communicative, and knowledgeable activities and games with and supported by mobile devices, m-learning has the potential to meet the required conditions for effective learning, particularly as a process of cognitive and social development, whether occurring face-to-face, distance or online. Colpaert (2004) signifies that developing aMALL environment must precede deciding the role of mobile devices in the learning process. In other words, devices are basic equipment of learning on condition that the learner has adequate skills for using them. In this respect, Salaberry (2001) agrees with Colpaert and opposes 'technology-driven pedagogy', but he overstates by declaring that modern technologies have not offered pedagogical benefits as obvious as traditional second language instruction. Beatty (2003, p. 27) provides a further exaggerated caveat by claiming that "teachers need to be concerned about investing time and money in unproven technology" .A fair and reasonable opinion is stated by Chinnery (2006), who considered technologies, including mobile devices, as instruments and instructional tools in language instruction, but not instructors. Hence, the effectiv use of any instructional tool in language learning requires a thoughtful application of second language pedagogy.

Mobile devices, as instruments, contain various activities to the different skills of language learning, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, reading, grammar, listening and speaking. Different activities are supported and performed by mobile devices, depending on the used model and its facilities.

Method

A mixed type of online questionnaire was implemented for university undergraduates for eliciting the data. The questionnaire was composed with the help of the survey software package (www.surveymonkey.com). Students' responses were gathered within four weeks. A total of 48 questionnaires were completed and returned.

The objective of the questionnaire was to collect general information about the awareness of mobile learning, information related to the respondents' mobile usage, learning prefer-

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ences, andattitudes towards mobile learning.

Results

Question1: What is you gender?

1. Male 2. Female

Figure 1: *Respondents' gender*

The majority of the respondents (83.33%) taking part in the survey were female students compared to males (16.67%).

Question2: Do you have a mobile phone?

1. Yes 2. No

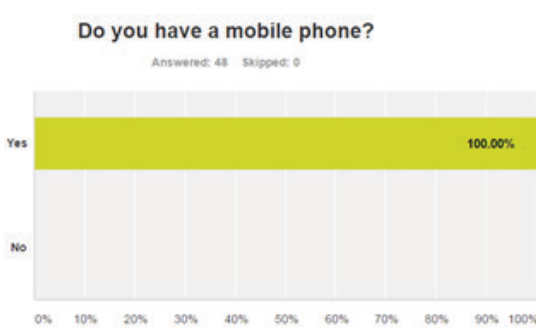

Figure 2: *Respondents' mobile possession*

All the respondents responded positively to the question concerning mobile phone possession. Consequently, the percentage was 100%.

Question 3: Circle the features you mainly use in your mobile phone.

1. Playing games
2. Watching video
3. Listening to music/radio
4. Taking photos
5. Sending MMS
6. Sending SMS
7. Giving phone calls

The results were as follows: none of the respondents skipped the question. The majority of the students (79.17%) responded that they use the mobile phone for sending SMS, while the minority (6.25%) uses it for sending MMS. 72.92% uses it for giving phone calls, 68.75% - for listening to music/radio. More than half of the respondents (54.17%) use it for taking photos, 39. 58% - for watching a video and 22.92% uses it for playing games.

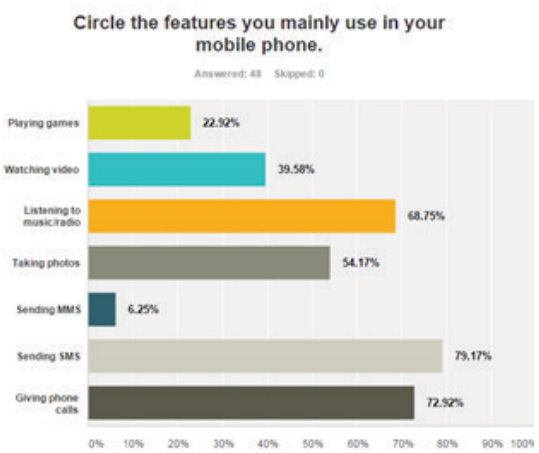

Figure 3: *Frequently used mobile features*

Question 4: Do you use your mobile phone for browsing the Internet?

1. Yes, frequently
2. Yes, rarely
3. No, I am not aware of it
4. No, I do not have that feature
5. No, I am not interested in using the Internet

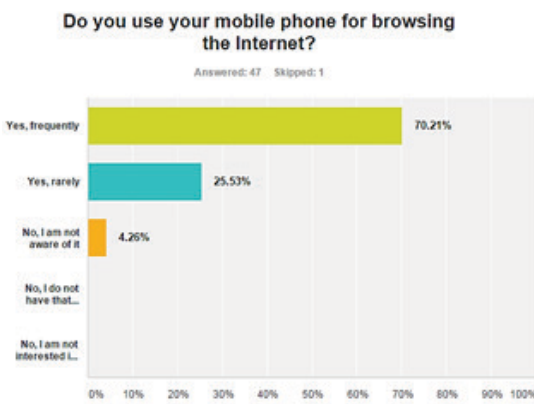

Figure 4: *Internet browsing via mobile*

According to the results, all the respondents have the Internet browsing feature in their mobile phones and all of them are interested in it, whereas only 4.26% is not aware of browsing the Internet at all. 70. 21% frequently uses the mobile phone for browsing the Internet, while 25.53% does it rarely.

Question 5: Rank the following options with respect to your learning style.

1. Listening for instructions
2. Watching video
3. Role play
4. Games
5. Interacting with friends
6. Questions and answers
7. Text

4 respondents out of 48 skipped the question.

The goal of this question was to identify whether respondents were visual, auditory, tactile or kinesthetic learners.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total	Score
Listening for instructions	32.56% 14	20.93% 9	11.63% 5	9.30% 4	16.28% 7	2.33% 1	6.98% 3	43	5.09
Watching video	13.64% 6	27.27% 12	13.64% 6	15.91% 7	20.45% 9	6.82% 3	2.27% 1	44	4.68
Role play	6.82% 3	11.36% 5	18.18% 8	15.91% 7	9.09% 4	34.09% 15	4.55% 2	44	3.70
Games	2.27% 1	4.55% 2	15.91% 7	18.18% 8	9.09% 4	9.09% 4	40.91% 18	44	2.82
Interacting with friends	11.36% 5	2.27% 1	20.45% 9	20.45% 9	25.00% 11	11.36% 5	9.09% 4	44	3.84
Questions and answers	4.55% 2	20.45% 9	11.36% 5	15.91% 7	9.09% 4	31.82% 14	6.82% 3	44	3.73
Text	29.55% 13	13.64% 6	9.09% 4	4.55% 2	11.36% 5	4.55% 2	27.27% 12	44	4.23

Figure 5: *Respondents learning habits*

32.56% of the respondents placed listening to instructions as their first preference regarding their learning styles. 29. 55% preferred text as learning style. The 3rdpreferred option was watching a video with 13.64% followed by interacting with friends (11.36%). Role play (6.82%), questions and answers (4.55%), and games (2.27%) were given the 5th, 6th and 7th places, respectively.

Question 6: Does your English language knowledge affect your other studies?

1. Yes 2. No

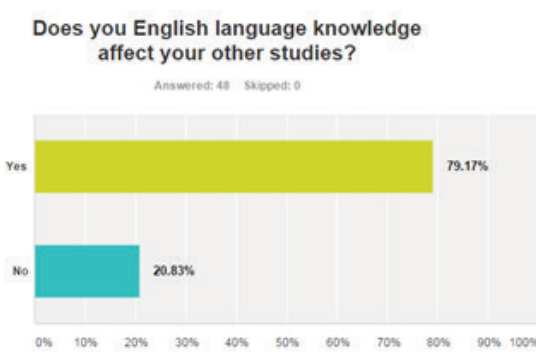

Figure 6: *Respondents' opinions about English language effect on other subjects*

When asking the question with regard to the impact of English language on other studies, 79.17% of the respondents feel that language knowledge affects their knowledge of other subjects, while only 20.83% of the students do not feel so.

Question 7: Which of the language aspects would you like to enhance?

1. Reading 3. Listening
2. Writing 4. Speaking

When asking the respondents their opinions about the language aspects they want to enhance, the result was as follows: 75% - speaking skill which follows with 47.92% of listening skill. Writing skill is preferred to be enhanced by 33.33%, while only 18.75% focuses on reading skill.

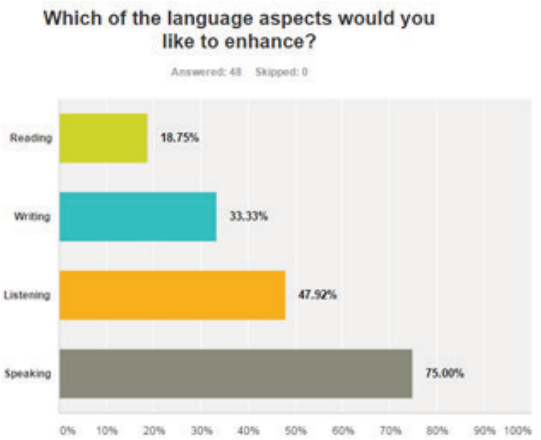

Figure 7: *Respondents' opinions about the preferred skills to enhance*

Question 8: Are you aware of mobile learning?

1. Yes 2. No

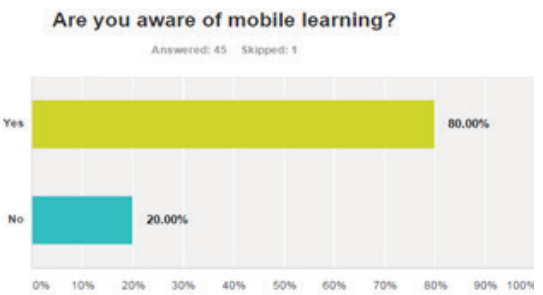

Figure 8: *respondents' mobile learning awareness*

When asking about the awareness of mobile learning, 80.00% of the respondents answered positively, while 20.00% - negatively.

Question 9: I believe mobile phones could be used to teach/learn English language.

1. Strongly agree 4. Disagree
2. Agree 5. Strongly disagree
3. Neutral

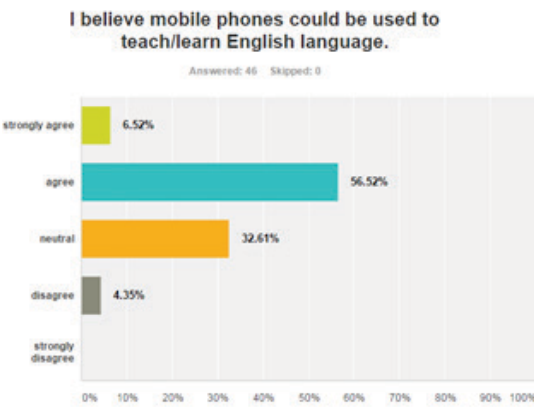

Figure 9: *Respondents' expectance regarding mobile learning*

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None of the respondents disagrees strongly with the idea that mobile phones could be used to teach/learn English language. 56.52% agree with the idea, but only 6.52% agree strongly with it. 32. 61% provided a neutral answer and only 4.35% disagree with the given idea.

Question 10: I would purchase a mobile with advanced features if it helped me to improve my English language learning.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

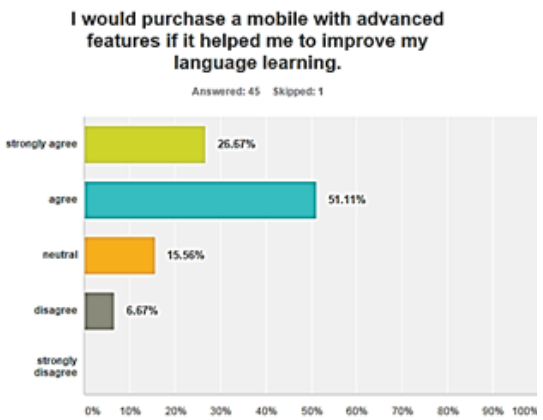

Figure 10: *Respondents' attitudes about purchasing a mobile with advanced features*

As it was expected from the answers to the previous question, more than half of the respondents (51.11%) were ready to purchase a mobile with advanced features if it helped them in improving English language learning. 26.67% strongly agreed with the given idea, while 6.67% disagreed with it and 15.56% had neutral position.

Question 11: I would like to install a learning application in my mobile to improve my language proficienc .

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

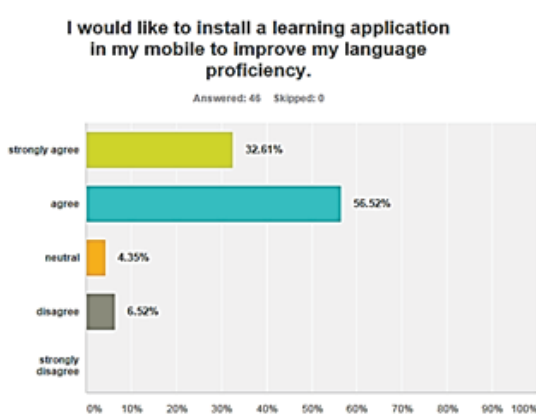

Figure 11: *Respondents' attitudes on installing a learning application*

Nobody disagreed strongly with the idea of installing a learning application in the mobile to improve language proficienc . The lowest percentage (4.35%) of the respondents had a neutral position regarding the statements. 6.52% disagreed with the statement, whereas the highest number (56.52%) agreed which was followed by 32.61% of the respondents strongly agreeing with it.

Question 12: I would pay for the Internet connection for my mobile if I could learn through it.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

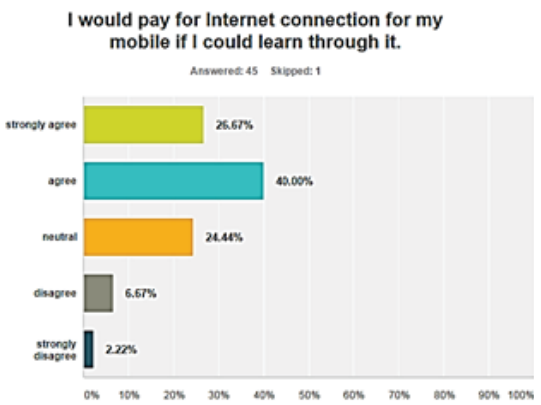

Figure 12: *Respondents' attitudes on having additional expenses for the Internet connection*

When asked the question about additional expenses for the Internet connection, 40.00% of the respondents agreed with the statement meaning that they would pay for the connection if it helped them to learn language through it. 26. 67% strongly agreed with the idea. A little bit lower number - 24.44% - had a neutral attitude towards the idea. Quite a low number of the respondents (6.67%) disagreed with the statement followed by 2.22% of the respondents disagreeing strongly. It is clear that students are so eager to use mobile applications to enhance their language proficiency that they are ready to have additional expenses for it.

Question13: Learning through mobile devices will help me to utilize my time productively.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

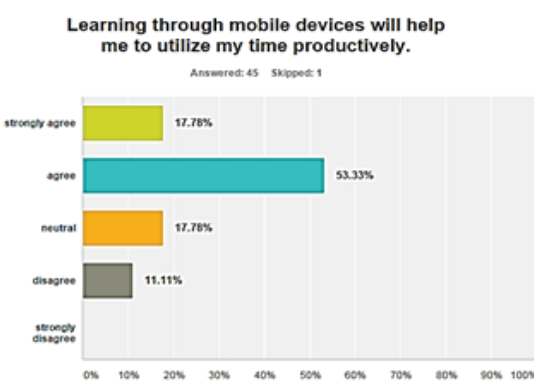

Figure 13: *Respondents' opinions about utilizing time productively*

An equal number of the respondents had a neutral (17.78%) and strongly agreeing (17.78%) position towards the idea. In contrast, the highest number of the students (53.33%) agreed with it, again supporting the importance of mobile learning. Only 11.11% disagreed with the statement and nobody (0.00%) disagreed strongly.

Question 14: I think I can improve my speaking skills through a mobile phone.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

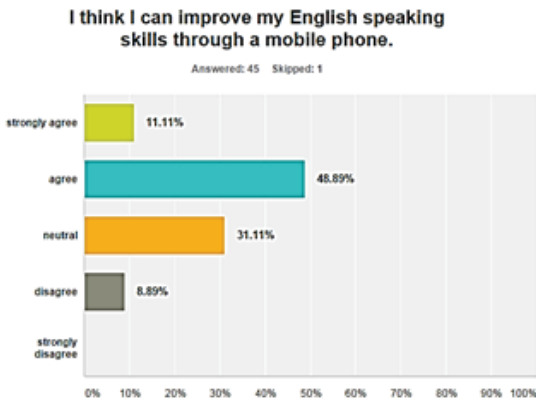

Figure 14: *Respondents' opinions about improving speaking skills through mobile phone*

When asked question 8 about the language skill the respondents wanted to improve, the majority (75%) preferred it to be the speaking skill. Consequently, in the given question the majority of the respondents (48.89%) agreed with the given idea. 31.11% had a neutral position, 11.11% strongly agreed and 8.89% disagreed with it. None of the respondents disagreed strongly with the idea that they could improve their English speaking skills through a mobile phone.

Question 15: I believe mobile learning will not provide any advantages for me.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

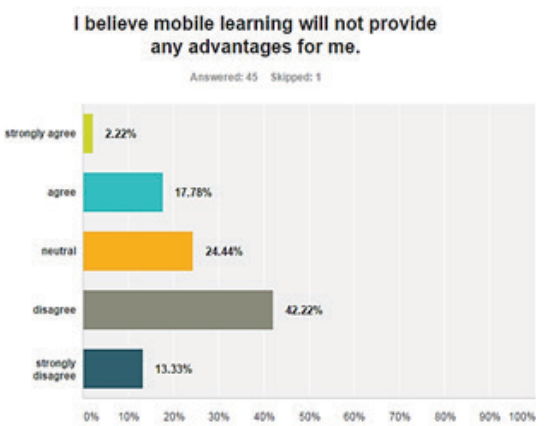

Figure 15: *Respondents' opinions about improving speaking skills through mobile phone*

Responses to the statement that mobile learning will not provide any advantages for the learners were as follows: 42.22 % strongly disagrees with the statement, 13.33% disagreed, 24.44% had neutral positions, 17.78% agreed and only 2.22% agreed strongly. It is clear that the majority of learners are sure that mobile learning will provide advantages for them.

Conclusions

This paper attempted to identify the learners' preferences for mobile language learning in Georgia, although the research was a small-scale one. The analysis of the results revealed that most of the students were aware and had positive attitudes towards mobile learning believing that mobile phones could be used to enhance English language proficienc . The results showed that learners had a great desire to enhance it via mobile phones.

The conducted research has limitations (the number of participants), but it does reveal the general tendency and can be used as a basis for the future research.

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