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Using What Students Have at Their Fingertips: Utilising Mobile Phones for Circular Writing

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Abstract

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Introduction

In the rapidly changing world, sweeping advances in various forms of information and communication technologies have brought numerous opportunities for fundamental changes in education as well as various fields such as business, entertainment, social relations education, to list just a few. Among these information and communication technologies, computers, either online or offline, have been at the peak of interest. However, equally well-documented technology incorporation into teaching is mobile phones as they are the most widespread communication equipment people use today thanks to their various technologies such as interactive Web 2.0 technologies including blogs, wikis, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, MySpace (Park, 2011), Short Message Service (SMS), Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS), WAP, General Packet Radio Service (GPRS), Bluetooth, 3G and 4G, Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), MP3, CAM as video cameras (Hashemi, Azizinezhad, Najafi, & Nesari, 2011; Trindler, 2005), Flash movies, Java, and Brew applications (Collins, 2005). What is more, the potential to add colour to education in general and language teaching and learning in particular has gained space in the related scholarly discussions.

There is a myriad of theoretical commentaries and empirical studies on the use of mobile phones for vocabulary teaching as well as listening comprehension, grammar learning, pronunciation, and reading comprehension (e.g., Kert, 2011; Miangah & Nezarat, 2012; Saran, Seferoğlu & Çağıltay, 2009); however, less attention and effort have been expended on the integration of mobile phones into written language practice. The discussions have received

comparatively little attention due to lack of uniform empirical support for its application in language teaching and restricted studies focusing on mostly their integration into vocabulary and pronunciation teaching. On the other hand, writing is regarded as a complex skill that requires the mastery of a foreign language, the production of a text, and the necessity to know the features of the discourse community for which it is being written (Polio & Williams, 2009), and most students do not like writing for a number of reasons such as its lack of fun and negative teacher feedback (Reinders, 2010). The mastery of this complex and demanding skill, which most of students associate merely with school context, and thereby get easily bored and develop negative attitudes as well as learned helplessness towards writing skills, could be turned into an enjoyable process via mobile phones. Therefore, the present study aimed at throwing light on the merits and demerits of the use of mobile phones for practising written language by investigating students' attitudes towards the use of mobile phones for practising language via extended writing activities outside the classroom borders and whole-class feedback conferencing in classroom.

Relevant Background

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

The fascinating array of options offered by technologies and especially computers have made educators develop a kind of teaching pedagogy referred as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL; Levy, 1997). Although the focal concern of CALL is centred on the use of computers to enhance students' learning experiences, it embraces a wide range of mobile technologies such as interactive white boards, mobile phones, handheld computers, MP3 players, notebooks, etc. The shift in computer-assisted learning is called m-learning (or M-learning), which Park (2011) defines as "the use of mobile or wireless devices for the purpose of learning while on the move" (p. 79). According to Liu, Han, and Li (2010), the most salient feature of this pedagogy is that mobile devices enable learners to reach information everywhere. Particularly, the use of mobile devices for language teaching and learning has become popular as a subset of CALL and m-learning and has been entitled as Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). Kukulska-Hulme (2009) sees m-learning in general and MALL as its subset different from CALL, in the sense that the formers emphasize learners more than teachers. Although teacher guidance is important, m-learning and MALL are much more personal and self-directed. From yet another complementary angle, Çavuş and İbrahim (2009) associate m-learning with informal and constructive learning as students take the control of their own learning and build their knowledge on their past learning experiences wherever and whenever they are.

Why Integrate Mobile Phones into Teaching?

A wide spectrum of mobile technologies, including wireless laptop computers, IPods, MP3 players, PDAs, and electronic dictionaries reflect the exact nature of m-learning; however, mobile phones are the most commonly referred devices in this area and attract the attention of a great number of educators and learners (Hashemi & Ghasemi, 2011; Stockwell, 2010). The existing literature suggests the following hallmarks for their popularity: interactivity enabled by SMS or e-mail, and the chance to reach updated information via Internet connection (Hashemi & Ghasemi, 2011), their low cost, their power, the habits of children working with them, easy access as they require no special software provided by institution or teacher, and the small screen size making the content manageable (Reinders, 2010; Stockwell, 2010), filling the gap between formal and informal education settings (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009), liberating

students physically and increasing learner mobility (Kukulska-Hulme, 2005), compactness and portability (Chinnery, 2006; Rainger, 2005), and effective use of leisure time (Shih, 2005). Via mobile devices (e.g., mobile phones), teachers can reach her/his students and utilize their time together. It is also worth noting that teachers can establish a bond without a computer or Internet connection. In Shih's (2005) own words, the teacher can "seize a teachable moment" (p. 90).

More specifically, Reinders (2010) lists the two commonly voiced pedagogical reasons for MALL. First, they can serve well to prevent the gap between classroom and outside learning by increasing access to language content. Students can use them for real aims in authentic situations such as finding the meaning of vocabulary while opening an account at a bank, checking movie reviews, communicating with English speaking friends, and so forth. Lave and Wenger (1991, as cited in Reinders, 2010, p. 21) refer to this kind of learning as "situated learning, which states that learning is more likely to take place when information is contextually relevant and can be put immediate use." Second, mobile phones may increase learner autonomy, which Richards and Schmidt (2002) describe as "the principle that learners should be encouraged to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for what they learn and how they learn it" (p. 297). In other words, mobile phones may enable students to take control of their own learning.

In addition to theoretical discussions at a pedagogical level, a number of field studies were conducted at a wide spectrum of contexts around the world, which provide additional support for the incorporation of mobile phones into education. For example, SMS support was found to increase the academic achievement scores of students and enhance learning outside the classroom (Kert, 2011). Similarly, the quasi-experimental study of Başoğlu and Akdemir (2010) with 60 undergraduate compulsory preparatory program university students in Turkey found out that a text-based vocabulary learning program entitled as ECTACO Flash Cards executing on mobile phones increased both students' academic achievement and enhanced their motivation when compared with the traditional use of flash cards.

Aware of the importance of vocabulary learning in the Cyprus context, Çavuş and İbrahim (2008) devised a system/material in order to turn the process of learning technical words into a manageable task, which they labelled as Mobile Learning Tool (MOLT). Later in 2009, when Çavuş and İbrahim (2009) tested this model with 45 first-year undergraduate students at Near East University on Cyprus, they found that the success of the participants statistically increased, and they developed positive attitudes towards its use in education.

Another study on m-learning carried out in the Turkish context belongs to Saran et al. (2009), who supported the positive effects of multimedia messages in teaching pronunciation. Furthermore, the study of Levy and Kennedy (2005) emphasized the roles of mobile phones in the continuity of learning outside the classroom, repetition helping vocabulary learning, and enjoyable learning.

A Paradoxical Picture: The Possible Drawbacks of Mobile Phones

Another equally-documented aspect of MALL is the potential problems associated with mobile phones which discourage educators to welcome them in indoor and outdoor settings. In the realms of classrooms, Hashemi et al. (2011) warns readers about seven possible disadvantages: small screens limiting the amount and type of information, storage capacity limits, regular charge of batteries, being less healthy than desktops, the difficulty of using moving graphics, the possibility to become out of date quickly, the breakdown of bandwidth when many users using wireless networks at the same time, and printing difficulties when a mobile phone is not connected to a network. They are echoed by Megal-Royo, Montanana, Gimenez-Lopez, and Alcade (2010), who create three constrain categories as visual (limited

screen, possible problems with colour levels, etc.), technological (limited memory capacity, compatibility problem of some models, etc.), and social (cost, access to mobile phones, reasonable use, etc.). Another argument against mobile phones comes from Suki and Suki (2011), who warn teachers about the fact that they may distract students with ringing during class or attracting their attention towards off-task activities such as sending message to friends. Based on their quasi-experimental study, Zhang, Song, and Burston (2011) additionally warn the readers about unclear phonetic symbols, the difficulty to recheck and locate the content of some previous messages and the risk of forgetting words learned with a mono-learning strategy as stored in short-term rather than long-term memory.

Taking the issue from a teacher perspective, Reinders (2010) adds another possible drawback to the list, noting that it may increase teachers' workload as they are supposed to keep up with the new technology and deal with all the staff sent by students. Peters (2007) echoes him, emphasising that the age and abilities of teachers are serious limitations of m-learning. However, as a solution, Reinders (2010) advises teachers to set clear boundaries about their convenient time and amount of staff. In addition, programs such as Notepage (www.notepage.net) enables teachers to send and respond a number of messages at the same time.

Methodology

This current case study aimed to find out university students' attitudes towards mobile phone-integrated collaborative writing outside the school borders and getting whole-class feedback in the classroom. To this end, we formulated the following research questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards mobile phone-integrated collaborative writing?
    1.1. Did the integration enhance their writing proficiency?
    1.2. Did they face any challenges during the treatment?
    1.3. What are their attitudes towards getting whole-class feedback after the activities?
    1.4. Do they vote for the use of mobile phones for writing practice in the future?

Setting and Participants

The English language and literature department of a large-size university in the northeast part of Turkey was chosen as the setting of the current study. The students are accepted to the department with two high-stake tests. Then they have to sit for a proficiency exam that will determine whether they will have a one-year preparatory programme or go on with BA courses. If the newcomers cannot take at least 70 out of 100 from this exam, they are put in pre-intermediate classes and have to attend the one-year intensive English education programme in the department in which they take courses on writing, reading, listening, grammar, speaking, and coursebook (i.e., General English). We chose the participants of the current study among these preparatory programme students.

We chose the participants of the study via convenience sampling as the most common non-probability sampling strategy in second language research (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). This accidental, availability, or haphazard sampling (Neuman, 2014) was opted for as the researchers were working in the institution, and proximity, availability, and accessibility were the important parameters for this choice (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Besides, this sampling strategy serves well for case studies which do not aim at generalizing findings about wider

populations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). 26 English majoring students (Female=20, Male=6) attending preparatory programme at the Department of Western Languages and Literature at a large-size public university in the northeast of Turkey served as the participants of the study. They were the students of one of the researchers as she was teaching applied grammar and pronunciation to them in the programme. The number of the female participants was much higher than their male counterparts as in Turkey female students tend to choose English Language Teaching or English Language and Literature Departments more than the males (Çakır, 2015).

The Role of the Researchers

All the duties related to the current study were divided between us (i.e., the two authors of the present paper). One of us, the first author, who is an expert in Applied Linguistics took part in both planning the process, analysing the data, and reporting the findings. His expertise in Computer Assisted Learning and Mobile Assisted Learning served well to analyse and synthesise the existing body of literature and design the study. Furthermore, his field experience both as a research educator and an active researcher helped the researchers give the right methodological decisions and analyse, interpret, and present the data in a reader-friendly manner. I (the second researcher), on the other hand, took an active practitioner role in the study based on my readings during my PhD study on MALL and my observations during my teaching career. I decided to add colour to my writing classes and proposed the study to my academic supervisor (i.e., the first author). I believe that engagement in research could improve my practice, deepen my scholarship, and serve the needs of external audiences: the teachers, materials designers, and policy developers. In other words, I believe that this synergy between theory and practice could help both academicians and practitioners in that researching my own professional practice could help add to the theoretical commentaries in the MALL camp, provide suggestions, and inspire the concerned to add colour to their writing classes. Adopting the role of the active practitioner researcher, I designed the activities, implemented them, gathered the data, and followed the whole process from the beginning to the end.

The Research Design and Procedure

The current study involves several key elements of qualitative research traditions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Dörnyei, 2007; Snape & Spencer, 2003). First, it is naturalistic in that I as the practitioner researcher spent time and effort in the classroom as the lecturer and collected naturalistic data. I was not distant nor impersonal during the procedure. Second, qualitative research generally uses purposively selected small samples, and here we investigated the attitudes of 26 participants attending a preparatory programme. Also, as describing not reducing the richness of data with numbers was the ultimate aim, we qualitatively represented and interpreted the data, and enriched our report with some excerpts taken from what the participants said. We attempted to reach insider meaning by exploring the feelings and experiences of 26 students with a questionnaire and focus-group interview.

To that end, we planned a seven-week SMS-based writing procedure. The first week was for organising the participants, adding their names to my contact list, and training them about how the study circles would go on. In addition, we conducted one trial application including composing stories collaboratively and responding to them in the classroom with the sentences provided in Table 1 (Week 1). We used the following narrative sentences shown in the table adapted from various reading sources as starters:

Table 1. Initial sentences sent to groups as starters

Week	Initial Sentences
1	"The man was strong both physically and mentally/ The young woman was crying on her own at the park/ The weather was as cold as a dog's nose/ The first victim of the vampire was a white and well-dressed woman/ The man suddenly realised the dancing woman on the stage/ The man fell in love with her at first glance/ Everyone in the family was shocked by the news" (Week 1: trial week with different sentences)
2	"One September night, a family had gathered round their kitchen table"
3	"The receiver of the phone was still cold in my hand"
4	"I put my feet up on the desk and picked up the morning paper"
5	"Ouch" he said, "What is the matter with you, dude?"
6	"I attempted to escape from China to Hong Kong"

We divided the classroom into six groups of four and five students. We organised a "circular writing activity" for writing collaborative stories, in which I (as the practitioner researcher) sent a sentence to the first student of each group. The first student was supposed to add a grammatically correct and logical sentence to the story using necessary transitions and forward the text message to the next student predetermined by us in the first week. In the end, the last student in each group sent the last version of the text to me. Each group may have more than one circle depending on the creativity of the group and the nature of their collaborative product, and group members might make necessary modifications before sending the final version to me. I reflected them on a Power Point Slide without editing and brought them to the classroom. All of us together conducted collaborative whole class conferencing to respond to all six pieces of written products. Each activity lasted four days and each week only one hour was spent to give feedback regarding form, coherence, and cohesion to the collective products of the groups. In the end, they all voted together for the best story of the week. The following table summarizes the research procedure:

Table 2. A summary of the research procedure

Week	Research Step
1	**Preparation:** • organising the students • adding their names to the contact list of the researcher • training them about how the study circles would go on • conducting one trial implementation including composing stories collaboratively and responding to them in the classroom
2	**Implementation 1:** • conducting a circular writing activity outside the classroom borders • conducting collaborative whole-class conferencing to respond to the stories in the classroom • voting for the best collective story of the week

3	*Implementation 2:*
	• the same process
4	*Implementation 3:*
	• the same process
5	*Implementation 4:*
	• the same process
6	*Implementation 5:*
	• the same process
7	*Data gathering:*
	• conducting the questionnaires
	• conducting the focus-group interviews

Data Gathering and Analysis

We opted for a case study research design in that case studies serve well to develop deeper understanding and description of single instances with careful analysis in unique contexts rather than numerical generalizations (Cohen et al., 2007). This design served well to analyse and portray the perceptions of the participants in my real-life context (i.e., the practitioner researcher who was integral to the class) as I taught two courses: applied grammar and phonetics to the participants.

We gathered the qualitative data with a questionnaire consisting of five open-ended questionnaire prompts in the form of self-report as "the space provided for an open-ended response is a window opportunity for the respondent to shed light on an issue or course" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 331). Before gathering the data, we conducted a piloting with two experts and eight students from a parallel class that did not participate in the study for prompt clarity check and ambiguity elimination. In the last week of the study, all the participants completed the self-administered questionnaires without my presence at their homes as I wanted to make room for privacy and comfort and enable enough time for detailed answers. I gave the questionnaires with a cover letter at the very beginning that indicated the aim of the study, encouraged freedom to reply, and ensured confidentiality.

To triangulate the self-administered questionnaire, we conducted a focus group interview with eight students chosen randomly. Focus-group interview "is based on the collective experience of group brainstorming, that is, participants thinking together, inspiring and challenging each other, and reacting to the emergent issues and points" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 144). This joint attempt was valued as we wanted "to get at what people really think about an issue or issues in a social context where the participants can hear the views of others and consider their own views accordingly" (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2006, p. 461). We believe this group discussion with its interaction among the participants rather than the one-way interaction with interviewer and the interviewee could help the generation of rich data on attitudes by encouraging the interviewees to complement each other (Cohen et al., 2007; Robson, 2002). Therefore, we utilised focus group interview as an adjunct to the open-ended questionnaire. Before starting, I as the practitioner researcher created a relaxed atmosphere with refreshments in my office where the participants sat in a circle around a round table at the center of which I put the recorder. I adopted the role of a moderator in that I set the scene, asked the questions, guided the discussion, did not allow any participant to be dominant, and encouraged the hesitant participants to speak more. At the end of the sessions, I asked them to summarise their view and thanked them.

We analysed the content of the self-administered questionnaires and focus group interviews both qualitatively and quantitatively. Content analysis is "an approach to the

analysis of documents and texts that seek to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories in a systematic and replicable manner" (Bryman, 2004, p. 183). Before reducing the data (i.e., coded), we edited the questionnaires, checking whether the questionnaires were complete and that the questions were answered accurately. We also transcribed the forty seven-minute focus-group interview. Later, we analysed the data, determined the codes, categories and percentages of answers, tabulated the results, and made explanations and interpretations. We included representative excerpts for the sake of the flavour of the original data and associated the findings with earlier related works (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

We supplemented and reinterpreted the findings gathered by the analysis of open-ended questionnaires with the analysis of focus-group interviews. We went deeper and through spoken (their remarks) and visual channels (their gestures). We clarified the meanings of the benefits and challenges having been stated in the questionnaires and extended them further. Focus groups helped us elaborate on underdeveloped points that might be left in the questionnaires.

To ensure the trustworthiness of our data, we (the researchers) used different methods to gather our data (i.e., triangulation). We also used some tactics to ensure that the participants answered honestly, such as indicating that there are no correct answers to our questions, reminding them that they had the right to withdraw whenever they want, and reminding them that the findings would do nothing good or bad to the researchers. Besides, we used several probes to get detailed data and asked rephrased questions to see whether their answers were consistent. Also, we conducted debriefing meetings in which the first author superior to me expanded my horizon about my interpretations. Furthermore, because I (the second author) was a PhD candidate then, I used peer scrutiny and got feedback from them.

Ethical Considerations

We took ethical-moral issues into consideration. First, we were extremely careful not to do any physical, psychological, or legal harm to the participants (Neuman, 2014). My friendly teacher attitude and my emphasis on voluntarism in data gathering benefitted my position as practitioner researcher. Before starting, we received participants' consent and adopted a transparent, open approach about why we were conducting such a study, how the process would proceed, what the participants were supposed to do, and whether they would gain any benefits (Creswell, 2007). In another word, we avoided deception that should be understood as the attempts "to limit participants' understanding of what the research is about so that they respond more naturally to the experimental treatment" (Bryman, 2004, p. 514). Besides, we assured a full anonymity (i.e., nameless participants) and confidentiality by not asking them to put their names on their papers and ensuring that the data would be presented in such a way that identities and findings would not be associated. Furthermore, while analysing the data and writing the research report, we avoided research fraud and plagiarism (Neuman, 2014). We honestly presented the data as it is, for "[f]abricating data or distorting data is the ultimate sin of a scientist" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 50), and credited all ideas and sources that belong to others.

Our local context did not require a third-party approval, yet we ensured ethical research practice to protect our participants' safety, privacy, and confidentiality. I conducted the treatment in the classroom, asked them to fill in the questionnaires at their homes, and conducted the focus-groups in the classroom, which are all physically safe places. In addition, I avoided anxiety and discomfort by providing a relaxing and motivating classroom atmosphere with my friendly teacher attitude, food incentives, and emphasis on voluntarism.

Findings and Discussion

Twenty-five participants returned their self-administered questionnaires. The involvement percentage in the research was 96%. The highness of the response rate can be attributed to the fact that the researcher has been instructing two courses to the classroom, and she has developed a close relationship with the participants as she is their classroom supervisor. The analysis of the transcription of 40 seven-minute-focus-group interview supports the findings of the open-ended questionnaires. The findings gathered from the questionnaire and focus-group interviews were narrated category by category below (i.e., benefits, challenges, and overall attitudes).

The Benefits of Integrating Mobile Phones into Writing

The analysis of the qualitative data indicated several benefits of this MALL-oriented classroom practice. First, the participants found mobile-phone integrated writing activities beneficial for the development of a wide variety of language competences. This first category, which we entitled as competence/achievement, covers several language competences: learning new words (n=11), improving writing (n=9), practising English/chance to use language (n=7), learning new chunks/sayings/idioms (n=7), improving thinking skills (n=4), adding to their existing form related information (n=3), teaching them coherence and cohesion (n=3), improving creative imagination (n=3), helping them realize mistakes easily (n=2), applying what has learned to other skills (n=2), improving translation (n=1), enhancing reading (n=1), improving spelling (n=1), and producing new things (n=1).

The following excerpt is taken from the self-administered questionnaires and exemplifies how mobile phones helped the participants practise English and develop language competence:

> It certainly contributes to the improvement of writing in English. I couldn't understand the aim of this activity early on. However, later I understood it as I wrote. Thanks to this activity, I learned how to do brainstorming, how to be much more creative, and how to use my grammar knowledge. Also, I learned new words and new sentence/chunk structures by looking at what my friends had written. [Participant 9]

As is seen in the excerpt, what the participant said represents the competence/achievement quality. She reported several competences in the excerpt, noting that these mobile phone-oriented activities enhanced her writing proficiency, for she learned how to apply the steps of process writing (i.e., brainstorming as one of the pre-writing strategies to generate ideas). She also highlighted how this practice offered her a chance to practice the form they learned in their grammar courses. Besides these competences, she noted that the written products created by her group members showed her how new English forms could be correctly used in written mode. The results suggesting that the participants found mobile phones useful especially for lexicology development support the results of the previous studies such as Levy and Kennedy (2005) and Çavuş and İbrahim (2009), who documented the advantages of mobile phones for vocabulary learning. The participants also found mobile phones useful for the improvement of creative imagination, adding to their existing knowledge, learning coherence and cohesion in writing, applying whatever they have learned to other skills and courses, the development of translation, reading and spelling, and also producing new things.

As a support to the benefits stated in open-ended questionnaires, the interviewees touched upon the role of mobile phones in the development of learner enhancement about English spelling and mistake realisation. Interviewee 1 can express this point as follows:

> To be honest, I benefited from it (mobile phone) in that way: normally I write quite fast in English, that is I do not pay attention to the words I write. However, while writing on the phone, I realised that there are a lot of words that I have written with wrong spelling. However, while writing on the phone, you pay attention to the letters. For example, it may be a simple word: "even though." I had been writing it wrong for years. I realised this while writing text messages. [Interviewee 1]

Another benefit category we created in our data analysis is related to affective factors such as motivation and engagement. Several related codes were identified while analysing the data from the self-administered questionnaires as follows: creating a competitive and enjoyable environment (n=2), encouraging them to use sources such as a mobile dictionary (n=2), enjoying themselves in the process (n=1), adding colour to traditional pen and pencil writing (n=1), collaboration (n=1), motivating them to get responsibilities (n=1), and learning permanently and amusingly thanks to peer feedback (n=1). In the focus-group interviews in addition to these advantages, learning mobility, which is a well-documented benefit of m-learning in general and MALL in particular, was found as one of the engagement-related benefits of mobile phone integration into language teaching in the present study. The excerpt taken from the second interviewee can show how mobile phones increased the participants' motivation and engaged them into the process via enhanced learning mobility and convenience (learning anytime anywhere):

> Does it have benefits? Of course it has. You are writing a text message in English while you are going to the loo, eating, and when you are on the bus. At least you are practising in English. Anything that comes to your mind at that moment. That depends on you. You think as if you would lead the story development and everything was in your hand. You are thinking it in a different world. [Interviewee 2]

As the excerpt above clearly shows, the participant highlighted his constant language engagement as mobile phones enabled them to collaborate to complete their story line wherever and whenever they want (situated learning). This easiness in turn increases learners' motivation to go on learning outside the classroom borders. Mobile-phone integrated writing activities encouraged the participants to make use of mobile sources such as online dictionaries. They also found them useful for the creation of a competitive, enjoyable, colourful, and collaborative atmosphere. These results regarding the effective strengths of mobile phones are in line with the findings of previous MALL-based studies: enjoyable and collaborative environment (Özdamlı & Çavuş, 2011); enhancing motivation when compared traditional activities and serving well as enjoyable extra-curricular language learning activities (Başoğlu & Akdemir, 2010); and encouraging students to learn further and enhancing learning outside the class borders (Kert, 2011).

In addition to these two benefits categories (i.e., competence and engagement), the participants listed several other benefits that we categorised under the title "Others" in the self-administered questionnaires. The participants also stated that mobile phone-integrated, circular writing activities were beneficial as they were exposed to language outside the school borders; they felt that they kept pace with technology, and they got to know their friends better. The

analysis of the focus-group interviews also indicated several benefits that we categorised as "Others": the enhancement of interdependency/cooperation among peers (n=4), knowing each other better (n=2), having the habit of writing in English on the phone and speaking English outside (n=1), learning how to give feedback (n=1), getting aware of the difference between the writer' intention and the reader's comprehension/audience development (n=1), respecting each other (n=1), and realising their mistakes (n=1).

The Drawbacks of Mobile Phones for Writing in English

Although several codes were identified as the benefits of this implementation, there are also some drawbacks. We created three categories of the codes about drawbacks as technical problems, communication related barriers, and other challenges. First, we found that the participants openly indicated their unhappiness due to technical problems in the self-administered questionnaires. These were credit problems/financial problems (n=7), storage capacity limit (n=6), and the difficulty of writing on the phone (n=1). As outlined above, credit problem was the most serious drawback in the process. However, one of the participants commented that the students exaggerated this situation and she suggested the following solution:

> I know that some of the students will claim that they had to reply the messages when they did not have credit. I do not know whether it is logical to show this as an excuse in this technology era, but they could have written their sentences on a paper and given them to their group members in the circular writing story activities lasting 2-3 days. They did not always need text messages. Of course, it is not my mandate to criticize this, because then I am regarded as "disorganiser." [Participant 3]

We got the same observation in the focus-group interviews. Although credit problems were frequently voiced in the questionnaires, some think that this technical problem could be eliminated if they could solve their communication problems and had a sense of group responsibility. One male participant voted against listing this as a problem saying that this issue did not result from the nature of mobile phones. Rather, they experienced these problems because of their personality, communication problems, lack of responsibility, and selfishness. In the following extract, he explains how they managed to solve this commonly stated so-called problem:

> For example, when I was in Metin's (pseudonym) group, we communicated via Facebook when we did not have enough credit or we had the problem of different telephone operators. We made brainstorming. I do not know, if this is a group work, you should do something, ignore some problems, or assume a humble attitude. [Interviewee 4]

As summarised above, most of the problems were related to the technical features of mobile phones. No matter whether the problem resulted from individual reasons, the most frequently voiced drawback was that they did not have enough credits to complete their stories. They commented that this had been sometimes resulted from the fact that sending text messages between incompatible (different) mobile phone lines is expensive in Turkey. In addition, the fact that they had to return their stories in more than one part which resulted in stories with missing parts made them feel anxious because they feared to be regarded irresponsible by their teacher. One of the participants also stated that he had experienced difficulties in writing and

then checking the content on the mobile phone screen. These finding related to technical problems are the most frequently documented weaknesses of MALL (Hashemi et al., 2011; Megal-Royo et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2011).

Another problem category is communication. Inability to agree on a plot (n=3), communication problems with peers (n=2), and the necessity to write a story with people whom one does not know well (n=1). The participants stated that they had experienced communication problems with their peers as they did not know their group members well and they could not agree on a logical plot. The other problems are that they sometimes had text messages when they were not available, that is, had some other things to do, and disconnected stories resulting from technical problems and disagreement on the plot made both them and their teachers unhappy, and they had a number of structural and spelling mistakes as they had to quickly reply to the text-messages. The following excerpt summarizes the most frequently voiced drawbacks:

> As the activity was in a technological environment, we sometimes had communication problems with our friends. Sometimes we could not return our messages. Or we had storage capacity limit. There occurred some disconnections in our stories. As a result, we had a bad story. [Participant 5]

In addition to these technical and communication problems, they listed some others in the self-administered questionnaires: receiving SMS at inconvenient times (n=3), disconnections in the stories (n=2), and the necessity to be fast, resulting in grammar mistakes (n=1). We also identified some more challenges in the interviews: irresponsible group members (n=4), lack of group work spirit/accusing each other for the mistakes/lack of ownership of the common product, and not respecting each other (n=3), credit problems (n=2), dominating peers (n=2), the use of difficult idioms (n=1), technical problems/incomplete messages (n=1), lack of experience in studying under such a condition before (n=1), preference for face-to-face teaching (n=1), and inability to ask immediate/face-to-face questions (n=1). Although the problems regarding group work, irresponsible peers, and credit were frequently stated, one interviewee was against her friends, saying that these were not resulted from the nature of mobile phones. Rather, they experienced these annoying moments because of their personality, problems, and selfishness:

> At least, this is a group work. If a person is doing something wrong, the others must help that person rather than accuse him or her. The other group members rather than the irresponsible one have responsibility for this group problem. For example, if one of your group members sent you the message late or did not send it, he or she forgot to send it, the next day you should think about possible solutions rather than accuse that person (...). I do not know, if this is a group work, you should do something, ignore some problems, or assume a humble attitude. You say that you had problems among group members. You also had responsibility for these problems. You should criticise yourself also. I think emotions frequently played role in these groups. The actual aim of the activity was forgotten. What was dominant was the problems of the friends, I do not know, our selfishness, the desire to be the dominant one. [Interviewee 4]

As the interviewee clearly expressed, problems are indispensable to every classroom implementation, and this mobile phone-oriented one is no exception. However, as he highlighted if communication problems are solved among group members and a positive

relationship is fostered, interdependent students with different abilities could go beyond group work and collaborate to learn with and from each other, socialise, and feel less anxious.

Attitudes towards Whole-Class Feedback Sessions in Classroom

When the comments of the participants about the whole-class feedback sessions on their circular stories written outside of the classroom were analysed, two categories, namely benefits and drawbacks, were figured out. The analysis indicates that feedback sessions were the most enjoyable step of the activity. The following was coded as the benefits of the application: realizing both their own and peers' mistakes (n=16), encouraging/motivating them to write better (n=10), learning new things from the others (words, idioms, etc.) (n=6), enjoyable (n=5), learning about different perspectives (n=2), respecting each other (n=1), relaxing extra-curricular activity (n=1), applying what has learnt to other classes (n=1), and learning how to give feedback (n=1). Although most of the participants stated that they enjoyed the second step of this blended learning, some expressed their uneasiness, complaining about subjective/unfair peer comments (n=3), peers' hurting feedbacks (n=2), feeling bored when peers tried to fix their mistakes (n=1), feeling anxious about the mistakes they made in their parts (n=1), and quick feedback sessions because of time constraints (n=1). The following excerpt exemplifies the general attitude towards whole-class feedback sessions:

> The best part for me was that one. I learned both whether my sentence managed to express what I had wanted to express and realised whether the new words suited well for the sentence. Choosing the best story was the biggest incentive for us (...) Moreover, I enjoyed myself a lot while criticising the stories. It is a good extra-curricular relaxation means. [Participant 16]

As is seen above, the participants enjoyed the whole-class feedback sessions, for they had chance to learn from each other, socialize, and learn in a stress-free language learning environment.

The Use of Mobile Phones in the Future

We also asked the participants whether they would prefer the use of mobile phones for educational purposes in the future, and for which skills they would employ them. The quantitative analysis showed that out of 25 participants, 14 stated that they would prefer the use of them for educational purposes in the future while 7 wrote that they did not prefer them. The remaining 3 had no answer for the question, and 1 participant was neutral. The ones who voted for mobile-phone integrated courses suggested that they would be useful for writing and speaking skills (n=5 for each), vocabulary learning (n=3), listening (n=2), grammar and pronunciation (n=1 for each), and lastly increasing general knowledge (n=1). The ones who did not approve their future use justified their answer because of their preference for real face-to-face environment, technical problems, and the limitations of group work.

In addition to their preferences for the use of mobile phones as a student, the participants were asked whether they would use them for writing activities if they were a language teacher. While 14 students stated that they would use them as teachers, seven rejected their use, and four said that they had no comment. Although the use of mobile phones for writing circular stories was found creative and enjoyable, the following suggestions were made for alternative uses: individual writing activities, spending more time on error correction, using them not always yet sometimes, asking them to write their daily problems to their teacher, pairs sending

text messages to each other on a weekly basis, and learning sayings, idioms, and various chunks.

At the end of the self-administered questionnaire, we asked the participants to grade the effectiveness of the mobile phone-integrated circular writing activity out of 10. The mean rate of the participant answers was found to be 7.6. The most frequent reasons for decreasing the grade of the activity were the difficulties experienced because of irresponsible students, technical problems, subjective comments from the peers, and the difficulty in understanding the stories because of difficult idioms and structures.

Suggestions and Conclusion

The present case study aimed at investigating students' attitudes towards the integration of mobile phones into writing as a means of language practice. The analysis of both open-ended questionnaires and focus-group interview show that the integration of mobile phones into language classrooms has several benefits such as learner engagement/motivation, competence in language skills, socialization and effective leisure time as having been supported by various academic figures in the field (Başoğlu & Akemir, 2010; Çavuş & İbrahim, 2008; Özdamlı & Çavuş, 2011; Saran et al., 2009; Shih, 2005). Although the participants listed more benefits, they also voiced their uneasiness regarding technical problems, communication breakdowns, and the nature of group work (Hashemi et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2011).

These inherent technical problems related to mobile phone features and the collaborative nature of group works require some suggestions for successful applications of similar activities. Based on the experience of the practitioner researcher and the suggestions of the participants, it could be suggested that the teacher should clearly express the aims, the rules, requirements, expected gains, and deadlines at the very beginning of mobile phone integration into classes so as to encourage students to manage their time and have a holistic picture of this integration in their mind. In addition, heterogeneous rather than homogeneous groups in terms of accomplishment, gender, and personality should be formed as this differentiation could help peers know each other better and develop collaboration skills. Furthermore, if problems occur in groups, the teacher should not tend to change group members as this may be an easy way to avoid problem. Rather, the teacher should encourage the group members to develop group work ownership, respect each other, and solve their problems. Moreover, incentives such as small gifts, grades could play important roles in increasing student participation and efficient use of mobile phones in education contexts where students are not accustomed to their use for educational uses. In addition, the teacher should be tolerant about problems resulted from technical features as students have nothing to do about them.

Credit problems were found as one of the drawbacks of the implementation. As everybody did not have a smart phone, SMS was chosen as a common mean in the activity in the study. However, now almost every student has a smart phone with free applications such as Whatsapp©, which could help them write longer, clearer, and free messages.

Above all, mindset is the most serious inhibiting factor in the integration of mobile phones into language instruction. This mindset does nothing but commit learners of the postmodern world to "darkness," which Prensky (2008, pp. 41-42) rightly expresses as follows:

> But we've chosen something else. Somehow, schools have decided that all the light that surrounds kids—that is, their electronic connections to the world—is somehow detrimental to their education. So systematically, as kids enter our school buildings, we make them shut off all their connections. No cell phones. No music players. No game machines. No open Internet. When kids come to school, they leave behind the intellectual light of their everyday lives and walk

> into the darkness of the old-fashioned classroom. What are they allowed to use? Basal readers. Cursive handwriting. Old textbooks. Outdated equipment. "Whenever I go to school," says one student I know, "I have to power down." He's not just talking about his devices—he's talking about his brain. Schools, despite our best intentions, are leading kids away from the light.

Therefore, as Begum (2011) suggests, teachers' tendency to see mobile phones as distracters rather than educational asset could be changed with proper teacher training. Here universities could help their staff discover the new, potential, and creative functions of mobile phones that can turn education into a sphere of interaction, motivation, and fun.

In a nutshell, based on the aforementioned benefits and drawbacks, it can be concluded that blended learning combining mobile phone advantages with traditional teaching could yield efficient results when tolerant teachers convince students with clear goals, explicit procedural steps, and expected results. It is hard not to agree with what Richardson (2008) concludes:

> Our students must be nomadic, flexible, mobile learners who depend not so much on what they can recall as on their ability to connect with people and resources and edit content on their desktops, or, even more likely, on pocket-size devices they carry around with them. Our teachers have to be colearners in this process, modeling their own use of connections and networks and understanding the practical pedagogical implications of these technologies and online social learning spaces. (p. 18).

Inevitably, however, the present study has some limitations such as small sampling size, the use of merely qualitative research design, short time span, and the investigation of only attitudes. However, the aim was to understand the richness of the issue and perceptions in a single case rather than generalise to larger populations (Bryman, 2004). Further, these limitations can pave the way for inspirations for further research that validate the results via various styles of educational research, extended research period, and larger sample sizes.

Overall, if the question "Which benefits can be gathered from the joint work of traditional pen and pencil language instruction and mobile phone integration?" is asked rather than the question "Which is worth more: traditional or mobile?" enviable results could follow.

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