U-LEARNING in TURKISH EFL CONTEXT: SAMPLE APPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

U-Learning (ubiquitous learning) is the ultimate step of e-learning and mobile learning situations in the current technology based teaching-learning environments. It was first introduced by Weiser (1980) and then it has appeared as a tool for learning by doing and spread into many areas and applications at the beginning of the twentieth century (Chiou et al. 2010). The continuity, accessibility, instantaneity, adaptivity and interaction are the characteristic features of U-learning environments (Boyinbode & Akintola, 2009). U-learning designed learning situation can provide the maximum benefit to the learner from many perspectives. It also covers the applications of CALL, Web-based learning and Mobile learning (Cheng et al. 2005). As Bomsdorf (2005) mentioned U-learning has the advantage of grounded learning situations in daily life. It conveys new ways of learning and by this way it can open new paradigms and technics in learning. This research paper aims to define the history and applications in Turkish EFL context, in short and to present sample application areas related to EFL teaching- learning contexts. It also aims to define the awareness of the EFL learners and teachers towards ubiquitous learning using CULES questionnaire adapted by Bayram (2014). The research paper used both quantitative and qualitative research design. The study aims to answer the reasons to use u-learning environments and the ways to apply it in EFL contexts in the lights of current applications both in national and international scale. The research paper also aims to define the awareness of the participants towards u-learning tools, their interaction and access frequency with u-learning tools. The statistical analysis are carried via SPSS21.

INTRODUCTION

Technology is not only in visible and physical world it is also grounded in many areas and although its invisible it is easy to feel the presence of it in daily life of anyone having a smart device and web connection. The learning has evolved like many technological devices. It has changed not only for people it has also changed in the preferred devices, learning places etc. At first the school is the place to be preferred for learning and teaching but now in the 20th century it has been in any place. There is no need to be in a special place and that is why it is as widespread as any technological device. These devices makes learning a subconscious process via technological developments. People can reach and download any content they need in anywhere and anytime. This easy access makes u-learning an inevitable and the most preferred tool in learning lately.

At this point the process is explained by Cheng et al. (2005) explained the u-learning environment as an inclusive of the mobile technologies, web-based learning and computer assisted learning also. Each one of them is not separate but one step ahead and more developed as in itself also. They all help learning to take its place like a tailor-made learning experience for each one of the learners himself. This support the idea that learners have different motivations, learning styles, background, information, learning experiences and different personalities (Arkün & Aşkar, 2010).

The term u-learning has been introduced by Weiser (2017) as ubiquitous computing systems. Weiser (1991) defines the term as the method of combining the computers with many other computers in physically but also making them effective to the user. U-learning environment is used for the experience which learners become completely engaged with learning process (Jones & Jo, 2004). While it is so common and in every step of our lives u-learning is not a new term in Turkish context also. In this study, the Turkish contexts of u-learning

applications will be examined along with the analysis of the application of CULES questionnaire.

The General Outline of the U-Learning Applications

U-learning has been in the rapid development since 90s and as a consequence there are numerous researches and studies in this area. There are agreed characteristics of a u-learning applications (Jung, 2014). The first one is "omnipresence", it means that learning is carried via electronic and virtual resources which are portable. This carries the learning environment out of borders and learner can acquire the knowledge in real and surrounding physical world (Kinshuk & Graf, 2012). The second one is being able to "customize the context". The learning is a continuous process for sure but it is also changing so fast. There learner needs a matching context and learning environment and u-learning has that feature. The inseparable part of a u-learning environment is its "interactivity". It is different from the interaction with humans actually in this concept it is an interaction with the technological tools and environment. It is possible to use every object in real context and in technological context also and learner can adapt them as the way he wants according to his learning speed and interest etc. This gives us the final feature of u-learning that is "self-directed learning". Learners know their own performance and they create their own time for learning process. They take the responsibility to learn and acquire the knowledge they need.

There are obvious outcomes of the u-learning environments and Hwang (2006) explain the advantages of the technic in four items. One of these is the system in u-learning can recognize the factors and parameters in the environment by this way it can be said that the learning situation is aware of the context. The other advantage is the personalized interaction between the user and the system. It means system can present the aid needed by the user. The learning takes place in relation with the real world, the users can observe and interact the real world elements while learning also. The learner can learn the target subject without having any breaks in the process. The learning can take place in any time and at anywhere that's why the learner does not need to give a break, the learning guidance can continue as the learner continue his own life routine.

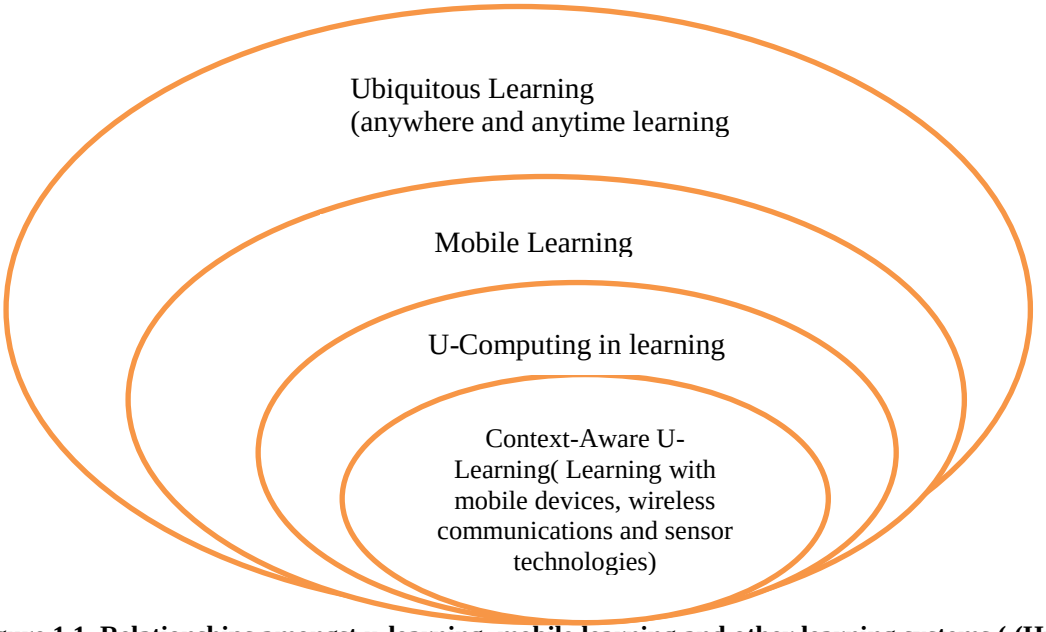

Figure 1.1. Relationships amongst u-learning, mobile learning and other learning systems ((Hwang, Tsai, & Yang, 2008)

The figure formed by Hwang (2008) showed that u-learning process is an umbrella term for all the other mobile and context –aware learning situations. U-learning applications can be beneficial in setting required instructions for learners. They can detect the learner behaviors and compare the requirements of each correspondence along with providing personal support (Cheng, Sun, Kansen, Huang, & He, 2005).

There are numerous methods for applying a u-learning environments in learning activities; such as the learner can learn with online guidance or support in real world. It can be applied by an online assessment technique, as well as an observation of a real life object. The learner can use u-learning tools in order to collect data via observations or sensors. Identification of a real-world object, cooperative data collecting an problem solving are also among the types of u-learning applications (Cheng et al., 2005).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sample of u-learning environments in Turkey

The term U-Learning is seen as a developing interest area among the academicians although there is not many there are some of related studies. The studies are generally master or phd thesis. The scan was made in order to find the related ones and it was found that there are four records on ubiquitous learning and only two of them is on the field of education. One of the example of this is an experimental research study carried by Erdoğdu and Şahin in 2016 (2016, p. 285-290). The participants were volunteer and the experiment lasted for four weeks under the Human Computer Interaction Course which they registered. The study results show that the academic achievement and motivation has increased in the u-learning group. They prepared sample u-learning units for the group which defined as experimental group.

There are seven steps of the application. The instructor prepared the context for u-learning, the QR codes are grounded into the related object in the units, and students scan the code and click on the link that is in the system. Students can interact with each other with the help of the system and the instructor of the language can also check and evaluate the work of the students. The system is observed as successful one at the end of the study.

The other one is carried by Özen (2013), aiming to have an effective learning and teaching process in English vocabulary. The study was applied in elementary school students via QR codes. Some objects in the school were labeled and the students scan the objects and able to learn the English equivalents of them. The study revealed that the system had a positive effect on learning the new words inspite of some disadvantages. Another study was conducted by Bayram (2014) on 130 participants from Bahçeşehir University. The participants were applied a questionnaire prepared by the researcher himself. The study aimed to means, place and the frequency of the access of participants to ubiquitous learning environments. The descriptive showed that most of the participants use smart phones, the average time is found as four years or more and people mostly use this context at home.

METHODOLOGY

In this study the current applications of the u-learning was scanned and presented. The technic used for this method is trend scanning model and along with this model a questionnaire was applied to the English language teachers via online systems. The questionnaire was prepared by Bayram (2014) and this questionnaire includes eight indicators. These are: easy application, continuity, appropriateness, adaptive content, multiple resources, guidance in time, learner interaction, questioning learning. The origin of the questionnaire composes of 40 items but

Bayram et al readapt the scale themselves in 12 questions. Each question measure one indicator and the relationship between these indicators and the items were analyzed using SPSS programs ANOVA, the descriptive analysis are also applied.

Table 1. Sample items of the questionnaire

1. I prefer……..while using the u-learning environments
a.having a good wireless web connection
b.having a friendly context related devices
c.having practic and easy usage while learning
d.having user friendly mobile devices
2. I prefer u-learning environments……
a. to be able to record the learning portfolio in order to support my learning process
b. to have a function that recording the learning
c. To provide tools helping to continue learning process
d. to be able to keep the redords of the learning
3. I prefer u-learning enviroments which …….
a. Presenting the appropriate knowledge
b. ıncluding the knowledge in relation with the learning
c.having a realistic mission-homework connection
d. showing the real world complications

FINDINGS

The collected date was analyzed in SPSS program in terms of frequency and percentages. The questionnaire was applied to the 35 participants in an online environment between the dates August 11 and September 14. The participants are volunteers and the distribution of the participants can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Gender and Occupation

		Frequency	**Percentage**
Gender	Female	21	60
	Male	14	40
Occupation	Student	8	22.9
	Teacher	19	54.3
	Academician	8	22.9
Total		35	100

The participants are mostly teachers (%54.3) and it is followed by students and academicians equally (%22.9 for each of them). Majority of the participants do not hear the u-learning application before (%60, 21 participants) while %40 percent (14 of the participants) have heard the term earlier. The distribution of the u-learning experience between the participants is as follows: the ones who have heard or experienced a u-learning environment among students are two (%25); among teachers are eight (%42.1) and among academicians are four (%50). The participants chose smart phones as the most commonly used u-learning device (%65.7; 23 participants).

Students prefer u-learning environments in order to follow the lectures in university (% 75), teachers also use u-learning environment for the same purpose (%47.4) while the academicians mostly use it in order to learn a new language (% 37.5). Collected data were divided in as the ones have experienced or used u-learning environment (aka: YUL-Yes to U-Learning) and the ones who do not have any experience related to the u-learning environments (aka: NUL- No to U-Learning). In YUL group people answered the questionnaire in accordance with their experience and in NUL group people answer the questionnaire in accordance with their ideas about what a u-learning experience should be for them.

The data show at three items the two group have same answers and in five of them they have separate choices. In item related to the continuity of the u-learning environment (ıtem number 2), both of the groups prefer u-learning which is being able to provide the tools to continue learning process (YUL= %64.3; NUL=%42.9). The other item is related with the guidance in time and the two group again give the same option having prior importance which is having a supportive feedback in right time and place (YUL= %50; NUL=%38.1). Another item is related with the interaction of the students and the distribution of this item seems equal for both groups in two options. They both chose being able to talk (YUL= %37.5; NUL=%38.1) and discuss the subject with other students (YUL= %37.5; NUL=%38.1). The last item is on the easiness of the usage: YUL group prefer u-learning environment being easy to use in a short time in %50 and the NUL group signed the same option in %52.4.

The distribution on other items are as follows: the appropriateness of the u-learning environment the YUL group thought that it should present the target knowledge (% 42.9) and the NUL group thought it should include the related and meaningful context (%47.6). YUL group said that u-learning should present different kind of knowledge for learner to choose (%35.9) while the NUL group said it should have pictures, recordings and documents that learner need (%38.1) in terms of having an adaptive context. The groups have seen different tendencies related with the multiple source usage of the u-learning environments. YUL group mentioned that the environment present the target subject in different methods (%50) but the NUL group preferred an environment presenting the sources of the knowledge on the target subject (%47.6). At the final item the participants in YUL group said u-learning tools and environment had better being able to make new researches and finding answers (%35. 7) ; for the NUL group, they chose to be able to search new subjects for new questions emerged while learning (%38.1).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The aim of the study was to define the u-learning applications in Turkey and the awareness of the students and teachers in the area. The researcher used a questionnaire to measure the awareness levels of the participants. The questionnaire includes the features of the u-learning environment in terms of having related context, being user-friendly, presenting the related knowledge etc. The data collected in an online environment in one month and the frequency and descriptive analysis were applied and the results showed that among the thirty-five (21= female; 14= male) participants. The population of the participants consists of teachers, students and academicians (student=8; academician=8; teacher=19).

It is seemed that the participants do not hear or know about the applications in u-learning environment and most of the participants having an experience in u-learning environment are consist of academicians. They chose the u-learning environment in order to learn a new language. The participants generally gave same answers in items related with the tools helping them to continue learning process. This means participants want to spend their time in u-learning environments without any interruptions. The other item that participants are mostly agree on is that u-learning environments should have a supportive feedback in right time and right place. The feedback is important at every step of learning and teaching and it is also important in u-

learning environments. The learning process take any place and any time and the feedback should be at the same time and speed. The relevant feedback should be given to foster the learning process. U-learning environments give the feedback while the learning taking place at the same time. Both of the groups prefers an easy usage of u-learning environments. Learning a new subject is already a hard mission and people don't have enough time for everything they want these days. They want to achieve their goals while they continue their daily life. The u-learning technologies helps people to make this happen and it is understandable that people prefer an easy use of these technological tools.

While the participants agree at some items there are also other items that have different opinions. For example, the ones who have experiences in u-learning environments mentioned that u-learning environments should present the target knowledge while the others who do not have any experience in u-learning environment prefer different sources of knowledge for the participants to choose the related one among them. The findings also show that the participants in YUL group mentioned that u-learning environments should use different methods while the NUL group says ıt should present an environment. The rapid and fast changes in the technology leads participants to choose the applications that enables them to learn fast and smooth. They also ask for varied exercies because it is easy for them to adapt into new technics.

It can be concluded from the results that the participants generally have a positive attitude towards using the u-learning environments but among the participants it is not the majority of them is aware of u-learning environments. They know the mobile learning or web connected learning tools but the u-learning is a new term for them especially when it is used for the pupose other than language learning. The studies show that there are positive effects of u-learning environments in learning-teaching process an done of them is carried by Ekinci & Ekinci (2017, s. 175-193) showing that mobile applications makes the participants more efficient and motivated. It is a concrete fact that technology is everywhere and at anytime. It is a very sincere tool for anybody who wants to learn. When this is the stiuation the u-learning environment enables the people to reach for knowledge and source at anytime. This study reveals that ıt is needed to make more studies and it takes some more time to help people to gain awareness on the subject. The study is carried at online environment and the time is relatively short. These can be count as limitations of the study.

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