

# Students' Readiness in Using Mobile Technology to Learn Communicative English in a Polytechnic Amidst Pandemic

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## Abstract

*The integration of technology in teaching has been on the rise as it enables increased engagement and enjoyment whilst learning. As such, mobile technology offers a possible alternative learning experience in adapting with the learner's needs in the current pandemic crisis. The main objectives of this study are to measure students' readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English and to investigate the relationship between students' readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English and their understanding of subject content. Furthermore, the researchers also seek to identify the relationship between gender and students' readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English. The participants were 60 Semester 1 (ONE) students of Muadzam Shah Polytechnic who took Communicative English 1. A questionnaire was employed to elicit student's demographic details and readiness. Student's understanding of subject content is measured by their test scores. The data were analysed and reported using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 24. Findings suggest that the students are ready both physically and psychologically to use smartphones to learn Communicative English. However, female students are found to be more prepared than male students in terms of their physical and psychological readiness and there is a strong correlation between students' readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English and their understanding of subject content. The researchers concluded that the students are ready to learn Communicative English in the new norm and some recommendations have been proposed so that the use of smartphones can be better integrated in language learning contexts.*

**Keywords:** Student Readiness; Mobile Technology; Understanding; Communicative English

## INTRODUCTION

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Following the spike in Covid-19 cases, Malaysia had implemented a Movement Control Order (MCO) for the first time on 18th March 2020 to flatten the curve of Covid-19 spread. As a result, teaching and learning activities in most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were forced to be carried out online after the enforcement of MCO, which in turn had seriously affected educators and students in a number of HEIs. This had also impacted students in Polytechnics since the switch to online learning came along with unprecedented challenges such as insufficient infrastructure and resources to support online learning. The accessibility of resources

such as stable internet connection and proper devices are vital for successful online learning (Abdullah et al., 2020).

The Management of Operations of Polytechnics and Community Colleges (2020) has declared the implementation of Online Teaching and Learning for polytechnics and college communities, or better known as *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Dalam Talian* (PdPDT), during and after the Movement Control Order (MCO). The modes of PdPDT are divided into two spheres: namely Synchronous (Sync - Realtime) and Asynchronous (Async - Non-Real time). All lectures, tutorials, group works, presentations and assessments are executed virtually. During the beginning of PdPDT implementation, students seemed to be unprepared due to the abrupt change from face-to-face classes to virtual classes. The level of students' readiness and motivation was at a moderate level (Mastor et al., 2021).

The transition to online learning had compelled the students to be equipped with headphones, laptops, and tablets for learning purposes which led to unplanned financial stress (Abdullah et al., 2020). Therefore, online learning, particularly Communicative English online class, should be more convenient when conducted via smartphone. It is easier for students living in low internet coverage areas to be reached via low data-consuming application such as WhatsApp, Telegram or Messenger applications (Mastor et al., 2021). Many lecturers also prefer these applications since they are user-friendly and free (Chung et al., 2020), and these applications serve its function well as they are readily accessible. Furthermore, utilising mobile technology such as smartphone is not something new and research on mobile learning in Malaysia has begun since 2010 (Masrom et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, the study on mobile-assisted language learning in Malaysia is still limited and it is best to explore and exploit the expediency of mobile technology for Communicative English classes amidst this pandemic and make it as a common practice in this new norm. Therefore, the objectives of the current study are to measure students' readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English and to investigate the relationship between students' readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English and their understanding of subject content. Apart from that, this study also aims to identify the relationship between gender and students' readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English thus seeking answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of students' readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English?
2. How does student's readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English affect their understanding of subject content?
3. How does gender play out in this area?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past few years, a surge in the use of mobile devices as educational tools has led to an increased number of educational institutions to explore the possibilities of using these ubiquitous devices by their students. Cigdem and Ozturk (2016) found students with a high level of readiness for mobile learning was proven to have a better understanding of the course. Students tend to experience greater satisfaction when study materials are accessible and notes are easily available. Decent accessibility to and familiarity with the device would have its impact on the success of mobile learning (Martin et al., 2020). However, it is also revealed that the respondents were dissatisfied with the cost they needed to pay for the sake of communication with the tutor and other students in online courses. Doraisamy (2021) indicated that students need the technology as well as internet connection at an affordable price to ensure the success of mobile learning.

In Malaysia, there has been a noteworthy increase in the number of researchers focussing on mobile learning within the last decade (Masrom et al., 2016). This is due to the mobile technologies' ability to proffer an immense prospective to deal with the emergent need within the education sector owing to its extensive ownership and usage among teenagers in Malaysia. Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC, 2018) reported that Malaysians are a mobile-oriented society where smartphones are used as the most popular means for internet accessibility. This report further strengthens the potential of smartphones as means to increase opportunities for education among the students in Malaysia.

In terms of English language learning, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is favoured because of its function that can promote communication skills. To support the premise that MALL promotes such communication skills, Darmi and Albion (2017) investigated the use of mobile phones for basic functions such as verbal communication skills course in a Malaysian tertiary level institution and found positive results. However, MALL can do more than just enhancing listening and speaking skills. It has the potential in improving academic writing as well, but it is not as preferable as the other skills (Arlina & Melor, 2018). They found that pre-service teachers prefer mobile learning to be integrated with skills like listening, speaking, and reading. In

other words, MALL actually allows the English language to be learnt in a more meaningful and authentic environment integrating all four language skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing (Harwati et al., 2018), as well as grammar (Rozina et al., 2017). Based on past research, it seems that Malaysia is ready to fully utilise MALL if more exposure is given to the educators as well as to students.

However, there is a lack of literature that studies demographic factors as determinants that affect students' intentions to practice mobile learning, such as differences between and among gender, ethnicities, and socio-economic status (SES). Most past studies reported that there was no significant difference based on gender (Tang et al, 2021; Chung et al, 2020). However, it would be a great idea to explore the relationship between gender and students' readiness as Rafique et al. (2021) revealed a significant difference between gender on online learning readiness.

## METHODOLOGY

The target population are Semester 1 students of Muadzam Shah Polytechnic and simple random sampling was done to get the sample size of 60 respondents. The demographic details of the respondents are as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Demographic Details*

Item	Variable	N	%
Gender	Male	3	50
	Female	3	50
Department	Commerce Department	2	35
	Design & Visual Communication Department	13	21.7
	Mechanical Engineering Department	1	20
	Tourism & Hospitality Department	7	11.7
Test Score	51 – 60	2	3.3
	61 – 70	14	23.3
	71 – 80	22	36.7
	81 – 90	22	36.7

The research design of this study is quantitative and a survey questionnaire was used as the instrument. The questionnaire was distributed online as it saved cost, eased the process of reaching the respondents, and automatically recorded the responses (Vasanth & Harinarayana, 2016). The data was calculated and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 24.

## Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into four sections; namely Section A, B, C and D. Section A questions on demographic details consisted of two items which are gender and departments. Section B consists of 5 items which aimed to measure the use of smartphones among the respondents. The rationale of asking these types of questions is to provide insights of the respondents' basic physical readiness. The basic physical readiness will be determined through smartphones' ownership, internet accessibility, internet subscription budget, time spent using smartphones and common activities done by using smartphones. Section C consists of 6 items mainly to study the students' psychological readiness to use smartphones for language learning. The last section, Section D, also consists of 6 items. This section attempts to measure students' level of understanding of the subject content. Section C and D were five-point Likert scales ranging from "Strongly Disagree" = 1 to "Strongly Agree" = 5 and Section C was adapted from Student Online Learning Readiness (SOLR) instrument by Yu (2014).

## Reliability

Reliability test was run to check the internal consistency of the items using Cronbach's Alpha. The results of the reliability test are as follows.

### *Reliability Test for Section C*

SPSS output in Table 2 shows the overall internal consistency value among the items is above 0.5 at 0.859 for the six items in Section C. In reference to Table 3, the value of Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted for each item is not higher than 0.859. It indicates that the internal consistency will not improve if any of the item is deleted. Therefore, no amendment made for this section.

Table 2: *Reliability Statistics for Section C*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.859	6

Table 3: *Item-Total Statistics for Section C*

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Item 1	20.87	10.257	.637	.839
Item 2	20.97	9.895	.742	.817
Item 3	20.47	10.878	.589	.847
Item 4	20.93	10.547	.622	.841
Item 5	20.23	11.289	.635	.839
Item 6	20.70	10.976	.701	.829

*Reliability Test for section D*

SPSS output in Table 4 shows the overall internal consistency value among the items is high at 0.954 for the six items in Section D. It can be seen in Table 5, the value of Cronbach’s Alpha if item deleted for each item is below 0.954. It signifies that the internal consistency will not improve if any of the item is deleted. Therefore, no amendment done for this section.

Table 4: *Reliability Statistics for Section D*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.954	6

Table 5: *Item-Total Statistics for Section D*

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Item 1	19.33	16.092	.853	.945
Item 2	19.30	16.424	.863	.944
Item 3	19.30	16.769	.909	.940
Item 4	19.57	16.185	.829	.948
Item 5	19.37	16.930	.834	.947
Item 6	19.47	16.189	.860	.944

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *What is the Level of Students' Readiness to use Smartphones to Learn Communicative English?*

Students' readiness was observed in two aspects which are physical readiness and psychological readiness. Physical readiness was measured by smartphone ownership, internet accessibility, internet subscription budget, time spent with smartphone and common activities on smartphone. As suggested by Doraisamy (2021), students need the technology as well as internet connection at an affordable price to ensure the success of online learning program. It is also important for students to have the skills and comfort to use the device.

Looking at students' physical readiness as shown in Table 6, the students are ready to learn Communicative English through smartphones. All respondents (n=60) have smartphones with internet accessibility. The respondents are also very familiar with smartphones as 85% of them spend more than 4 hours with their smartphones and 86.7% of them have been using smartphones for online class. Even though 86.6% of the respondents wish to spend less than RM60 per month for internet subscription, they can still get sufficient mobile data at that price. Furthermore, the Prime Minister announced the extension of Special Data Package SPM/STPM 2021 to students of higher learning institutions below 22 years of age under the 'Perlindungan Ekonomi & Rakyat Malaysia' (PERMAI) assistance package on 18th January 2021 (MCMC, 2021). This qualifies the students to grab an exclusive Internet Plan with 15GB of data quota valid for 30 days, priced at an affordable RM20.

Table 6: *Physical Readiness*

Item	Variable	N	%
Smartphone Ownership	Yes	60	100
Internet Accessibility	Yes	60	100
Internet Subscription Budget	Less than RM30	17	28.3
	RM31 - RM60	35	58.3
	RM61 - RM90	4	6.7
	More than RM90	4	6.7
Time Spent with Smartphone	Less than 2 hours	1	1.7
	2 - 4 hours	8	13.3
	4 - 6 hours	21	35.0
	More than 6 hours	30	50.0
Common Activities on Smartphone	Playing games	30	50.0
	Listening to music	44	73.3

Phone calling	38	65.0
Reading news	23	38.3
Searching for educational information	42	70.0
Sending and receiving e-mail	22	36.7
Online class	52	86.7
Social networking	49	81.7
Streaming movies/videos	36	60.0
Taking notes	24	40.0
Taking pictures	46	76.7
Other	2	3.3

Likewise, the students' psychological readiness is at a relatively high level. As presented in Table 7, the mean scores ranged between 4.13 to 4.60, which is above the moderate level at 3.00. The findings suggest that Communicative English class can be done through smartphones as the students manifest the highest level of readiness when they are confident in using the applications for that purpose. It corresponds to a study by Martin et al. (2020) which discovered the students are more ready for online learning when they have the technical competencies. They have demonstrated that they are the 21st century citizens: 1) have access to an abundance of information, 2) cope with rapid changes in technology tools, and 3) have the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions on an unprecedented scale. In other words, they are considered as digital natives who are comfortable working and learning in an environment that embraces 21st century learning skills (Hall, 2018). Looking at Item 6, students are comfortable to express themselves when learning via smartphones thus eliminating the issue of poor participation in Communicative English class activities (Rashidah & Mohamed Amin, 2018).

Table 7: *Mean for Items in Section C*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
1. I am proficient in using the smartphone for online language learning.	4.15	.880
2. I feel comfortable using the smartphone for online language learning.	4.13	.833
3. I would download educational application in my smartphone	4.37	.823
4. I would re-watch lecture videos through my smartphone for revision.	4.13	.833
5. I feel confident in using applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Google Meet and MS Teams to communicate with my lecturers and friends.	4.60	.718



6. I feel comfortable expressing my thoughts through online text messages/ posting comments in WhatsApp/ Telegram etc.	4.27	.710
Overall	4.28	.607

*Does Student’s Readiness to use Smartphones to Learn Communicative English Affect Their Understanding of Subject Content?*

Table 8 shows there is a strong correlation ( $r=0.695$ ) between students’ readiness to use smartphones to learn Communicative English and their understanding of subject content. It indicates that 48.3% ( $r^2=0.483$ ) of students’ understanding of subject content can be explained by their readiness to use smartphones for Communicative English class. The relation between students’ readiness and understanding of subject content was further explored using the test score. As shown in Table 9, there is a very strong correlation ( $r=0.857$ ) between the two variables. It suggests that 73.4% ( $r^2=0.734$ ) of students’ test score can be explained through their readiness. This finding is supported by Cigdem and Ozturk (2016) whose study revealed that students’ online learning readiness can significantly contribute to students’ understanding which was measured by the course grades.

*Table 8: Correlation between Students’ Readiness and Understanding of Subject Content*

	Students’ Readiness	Understanding of Subject Content
Students’ Readiness	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.695**
	N	60

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Table 9: Correlation between Students’ Readiness and Test Score*

	Students’ Readiness	Test Score
Students’ Readiness	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.857**
	N	60

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*How does Gender Play Out in this Area?*

Table 10 shows the comparison of students’ readiness between gender and the results show that females had higher mean scores than males. Most past studies reported

that there was no significant difference based on gender (Tang et al, 2021; Chung et al, 2020). Further testing using independent-sample t-test was done for this study and it is found there is a significant difference in students’ readiness between male and female students. As depicted in Table 11, female students were more ready for Communicative English class via smartphones as compared to male students,  $t(60) = -3.621$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . This finding is supported by a study done by Rafique et al. (2021) where a significant difference was observed on online learning readiness based on respondents’ gender.

Table 10: Mean Score of Students’ Readiness

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Students’ Readiness	Male	30	4.0167	.66140	.12075
	Female	30	4.5333	.41615	.07598

Table 11: Independent T-Test of Students’ Readiness

		Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Students’ Readiness	Equal variances assumed	8.545	.005	-3.621	58	.001	-.51667	.14267	-.80225	-.23108
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.621	48.850	.001	-.51667	.14267	-.80339	-.22994

## CONCLUSION

Several conclusions have been drawn based on the objectives of this study. First, Semester 1 students of Muadzam Shah Polytechnic are ready physically and psychologically to use smartphones to learn Communicative English. Second, students’ readiness does influence the understanding of subject content and students’ test score can be predicted from their level of readiness. Third, female students are more ready than male students to learn Communicative English via smartphones but perhaps more studies should be carried out to confirm these findings.

These findings are expected to be the catalyst for HEIs educators to enhance online teaching and learning thus producing graduates who could tackle Industrial Revolution 4.0. It is important for educators to explore and promote the use of smartphones for Communicative English class during this pandemic. This would be the best opportunity to align the education system with Education 4.0 where teaching and learning process are to be digitalised. Training and technical supports should be provided by E-learning and Instructional Division to enhance educators' skills and strategies to fully utilise smartphones.

Future studies could compare the readiness of students based on their level of education. It is also worth looking at the long-term effects of online learning via smartphones on cognitive and effective constructs of the students. The world today has opted for online learning and students are required to use electronic devices on a regular basis in which it may ease the overall learning process as well as becoming the greatest distraction for study. Therefore, it is also important to design or integrate interactive activities in Communicative English lessons to engage with the students and assist them in remaining engaged and focused.

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