

LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH MOBILE- AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

It is an age of globalisation and in this globalised era many trends are putting new pressures on the conventional education system and, as a result, education has grown from physical classroom to electronic or virtual classroom and from hardware to software. While e-learning is still being used as a supplementary tool to the conventional forms of learning, a new method of knowledge addition called mobile or m-learning has emerged in the global scenario. Mobile or m-learning is an extension of e-learning emphasises on 'anywhere, anytime' learning and m-learning. There are at least five basic parameters for production and development of m-learning e.g. Portability, Connectivity, Social interaction, sensitive to the context, customised. English is treated as a subject. As a result students become communicatively less competent. In classrooms the language skills of the students are not properly evaluated. Only memory power of the students is evaluated. Mobile phone is a useful tool for English language teaching and assessment. There are several pedagogical reasons to consider using mobile phones in the English classroom. Most importantly, phones are social tools that facilitate authentic and relevant communication and collaboration among learners. This makes them an ideal tool to support situated-learning theory. Use of mobile phone as a learning tool makes a meaningful input as an innovative technique to help learn and teach a language effectively, including English, as a second language. For example, second language learners can use mobile technology to access relevant vocabulary and expressions while at a bank opening an account, to look up movie reviews while at the theatre, or to discuss week-end plans with an English speaking friend. The present paper is an attempt to explore mobile phone technology that be incorporated in learning English language.

Keywords: Mobile, M-Learning, Technology, Teaching, Learning, Language

In the 21st century, competencies in education are seen more in line with Information and Communication Technology (ICT). According to Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, the whole purpose of education in a country is to develop and enhance the potential of human resources and progressively transform it into a knowledge society. Every nation wants to produce students who ultimately become the knowledge workers in their own economy to be global citizens. There is a need for change in each and every sphere of the society in tune ICT. The popular acceptance of the Internet in the 1990s advanced the development of computer-mediated communication.

It is an age of globalisation and in this globalised era many trends are putting new pressures on the conventional education system and, as a result, education has grown from physical classroom to electronic or virtual classroom and from hardware to software. Due to the ever-increasing and diversified needs of the students, technological advancements are taking place in the field of education every day. Learning has just acquired a new nimbler form. While e-learning is still being used as a supplementary tool to the conventional forms of learning, a new method of knowledge addition called mobile or m-learning has emerged in the global scenario. Educators and technologists alike are keenly interested in how wireless and mobile technology can enhance the way people learn and interact with one another. It is obvious that m-learning technologies, that is, e-learning using mobile devices and wireless transmission can potentially provide significant opportunities for learning and collaborative interaction. These numbers are indeed astonishing. In the last ten years, the development of mobile technology had been unbelievably swift : from analog to digital, and from plain and simple cell phone to the current 3G smart phone which can serve as a mini computer, telephone or camera and transfer data so well as video and audio files.

- **Mobile learning vs. e-learning**

Mobile or m-learning is an extension of e-learning emphasises on ‘anywhere, anytime’ learning and m-learning. Learning with mobile devices promises continued extension towards such learning; m-learning adds the element of feathers to mobility and immediately, whenever ready to learn. Mobile learning enables learning experiences that are more collaborative, more richly contextualized and continuously accessible; m-learning puts the elements of e-learning, i.e. hardware, software and connectivity into the shell of portability.

Objectives of M-Learning

- to enhance student motivation through the use of familiar technology.
- to increase student use of the four skills- reading, writing, speaking and listening- in English language.
- to enable students to become more competent in English language.

Characteristics of Mobile Learning

From a pedagogical perspective, mobile learning supports a new dimension in the educational process. The following are some of the characteristics of mobile learning.

- Urgency of the learning need
- Initiative of knowledge acquisition
- Mobility of learning setting
- Interactivity of the learning processes
- Situational aspects of instructional activities
- Integration of instructional activities

These characteristics make mobile learning quite different compared with traditional classroom learning environment where all the educational activities are carried out at a designated time and place.

Parametres for m- learning

There are at least five basic parameters for production and development of m-learning. They are:

- **Portable:** If we are using a mobile phone , then it is easier to carry it along with us everywhere including the restroom. This makes information access through this platform easy and fast.
- **Connectivity:** With the help of a strong connectivity network, we can connect to data collection devices, other phones and to a common network.
- **Social interaction:** The data can be sent to our friends, colleagues and others via short messages. We can exchange data with other people and gain considerable knowledge.
- **Sensitive to the context:** This has the capability of gathering data unique to the current location , environment and time, including both types of data – real and simulated .

- **Customised:** The most unique capability is to be able to offer customised learning information.

Mobile – assisted Language Learning

Recent interest in the potential of mobile phones and other portable devices to support learning and teaching has been driven by the fact that mobile phones are relatively cheap and increasingly powerful (Chinnery 2006; Kukulska-Hulme AND Traxler 2005). Another benefit is that learners are used to working with them, often more so, than with computers. Thornton and Houser (2003) report that young Japanese learners prefer to use mobile phones for many activities, from e-mailing to reading books. Research on the use of mobile phones for the delivery of vocabulary materials to English learners in Taiwan shows that students enjoy using their phones because of easy access to materials and the ability to practice anytime and anywhere ; in addition , some students like the screen size limitations, which make the amount of content more manageable than that of other teaching materials (CHEN, Hseigh, and Kinshuk 2008).

There are several pedagogical reasons to consider using mobile phones in the second language classroom. Most importantly, phones are social tools that facilitate authentic and relevant communication and collaboration among learners. This makes them an ideal tool to support situated-learning theory , which states that learning is more likely to take place when information is contextually relevant and can be put to immediate use(Lave and Wenger 1991). For example, second language learners can use mobile technology to access relevant vocabulary and expressions while at a bank opening an account , to look up movie reviews while at the theatre, or to discuss weekend plans with an English speaking friend. Since mobile phones are part of students' everyday routine, they help minimize the separation between students' access to the language. Use of mobile phone as a learning tool makes a meaningful input as an innovative technique to help learn and teach a language effectively, including English , as a second language.

Mobile-assisted English Learning

The use of telephones in distance language learning is becoming quite popular. In 1996, instructors at Brigham Young University Hawaii , taught a distance learning English course from Hawaii to Tonga via telephone and computer as well as teleconferencing.

- **Using Mobile Phones in the Language Classroom- A few tips**

There are some practical ways to use mobile phones to support second language learning, both inside and outside the classroom. Before asking students to pull out their cell phones in the class, you need to have a plan. As with any other teaching activity, ask yourself what you are trying to achieve. Are you focusing on speaking, listening, reading, writing? Or do you simply want students to reflect on their language use outside the classroom? Start by identifying a specific teaching objective and then structure a mobile phone activity around that. Some of the following ideas may work which I tried most in my own teaching.

- **Practical ideas for using mobile phones in the language classroom**

Using mobile phones for second language learning generally involves focusing on developing the four basic language skills and in many cases integrate speaking with listening and reading with writing. The material and activities can be modified to conform to different syllabi and are easily adaptable for different age groups, learning levels and interests.

- **Feature to collect everyday language**

Most mobile phones have a feature that allows them to take notes. Ask students to use this feature to take notes on the English they read or hear outside of school and either present the notes to the class or send them to you as a text message. Instead of giving regular homework, you can ask students to hunt for specific language forms (e.g., common nouns, the past perfect tense, formulaic expressions), and the student who collects the largest number of correct samples wins.

- **Camera feature to take picture of text**

One of the easiest ways to use a mobile phone for learning is to record samples of the target language by taking pictures. Students can take pictures of English text by using the camera feature on their mobile phone. They can then make the collage of the images or upload the pictures to a shared Flickr account (www.flickr.com). If students do not have a data connection, they can transfer the pictures to a computer and upload them from there.

- **Free programmes to organise language samples**

Use free programmes to upload notes and pictures to your account which can be accessed from any computer. Students can use this programme to organise personal notes on their account and share it with a group or the whole class. Different accounts can be exchanged, compared and discussed in the class and could be transferred from the mobile phone to the computer for uploading.

- **Voice Memo Recorder feature to record language from media outlets and conversations outside the classroom**

Most phones include a memo recording feature that can collect language samples from TV or radio. The students' collected samples give an opportunity to analyse the language, discuss where they were collected and provide feedback. Students can play the interviews and conversations in class for feedback and discussion.

- **Text messaging feature to reinforce vocabulary learning and circular writing**

You could text the words covered in class to encourage students to review them outside the school context. One such activity is circular writing where students create a story together by contributing one text message at a time. Each student writes a sentence or two and then sends this on to the next student who adds another message and so on, until the story is incomplete. The teacher has a record of the story as it emerges. You can experiment with different text types, etc. narratives or shorter forms such as news reports, instructions, warnings

- **Flashcards for mobile phones**

There are several companies that produce flashcard software that runs on mobile phones, such as www.Flashmybrain.com. You or your students can create vocabulary flashcards that can be retrieved, shared and practised anywhere.

- **Use the text messaging feature for tandem learning**

Interactive writing can be encouraged through tandem learning. In this activity two students who wish to learn each other's native language pair up and exchange text messages.

- **Mobile phone to keep a blog**

A more advanced form of using the mobile phone for writing tasks is keeping a blog. This does require a phone with a connection to the Internet. Students use the text messaging and camera features to add messages and post pictures to their personal blogs. Teachers can read these blogs and provide feedback, request more information or ask students to comment on each other's work.

- **Mobile phone for microblogging on twitter**

You can use twitter for a wide variety of assignments such as asking students to report on their daily activities. To focus on specific aspects of language, you could ask

students to write down each idiom they find in a book they are reading or to report when they hear someone use a negative adverb such as seldom or hardly.

- **Mobile phone for language exchange**

Using phone for speaking may not seem like an original idea but one way to encourage reluctant students to start speaking is to establish a language exchange. In this activity two students who want to learn each other's native language talk in that target language. This activity may be expensive unless students can use Skype on their mobile phones.

- **Mobile phone for social networking**

Some teachers actively use such sites to keep in touch with students or to organise activities online. The sites can be accessed through mobile phone and it could be fun to ask students to post on each other's pages in relation to a topic just discussed in the class.

- **Mobile phone for phlogging**

To encourage students to practice individual speaking, they could start phlogging, a recent form of blogging that entails calling a number and leaving a message on a website. Some programmes like the currently free www.ipadio.com will even automatically transcribe the recording. This is an excellent task-based learning tool for students to update oral and written reports about a given project.

- **Mobile phone memory to distribute reading material**

You could download reading materials for your students. There are numerous sites with reading material, including Project Gutenberg (www.Gutenberg.org), which also has many audio books available. As an exercise, you can ask students to use the voice recorder to take notes about the book while they are reading. The book, along with students' reflections, can then be discussed during the next class.

- **Mobile phone to play games**

Many of the free games for mobile phones such as Scrabble and Crossword puzzles involve a focus on language. Once students determine that their phones have the capability to play games, they must download and install the programmes.

- **Voice memo recorder and calendar features to keep a portfolio**

Most learning takes place outside the classroom. Ask students to document their

learning progress by using the Notes and Voice Memo Recorder feature. Ask students to document their use of the language outside the classroom. You could encourage students to use the Calendar feature or other productivity tool available on most phones to set goals, deadlines for assignments and reminders to rehearse material covered in the class.

- **Use the mobile phone to check students comprehension and get feedback**

Mobile phone can also help in teaching. One way is to add an element of interactivity to your classes through audience participation. Polleverywhere (www.pollevery.com) is a free program that allows the teacher to pose survey questions to students. Students respond by texting their responses and the results show up immediately in a PowerPoint presentation or on a website. This is very useful for checking students' comprehension and to get their opinions. This tool is particularly useful in larger classes where it is not easy to get feedback from all students.

Merits of m-learning

- It offers an interactive learning experience where learners can interact with one another.
- It increases student use of for skills e.g. listening, speaking. Reading and writing
- It provides freedom in learning by providing ubiquitous learning ,i.e., learn anywhere, anytime and on the move.
- It is easier to accommodate several mobile devices in a classroom than several desktop computers.
- Helps students become more competent in English.
- It provides a personalized learning experience.
- Promotes the use of English for communicating.
- Mobile learning helps learners to remain more focused for longer periods.
- It can be used to encourage both independent and collaborative learning experiences. It provides immediate learning, i.e., learning when ready to learn.
- M-devices engage learners through mobile phones, gadgets and games such as Game Boys.
- This technology may contribute to combating the digital divide, as mobile devices are generally cheaper than desktop computers.

Young people of today are extremely competent in the use of mobile devices. They regard them as friendly, personal possessions, even fashion statements, in a way that no other technology is viewed.

Limitations

- Small screen size
- Limited memory size
- Small keyboards
- Limited battery life
- High costs
- Possibility for mobile devices to be misplaced or stolen or corrupted
- Difficulty to use mobile devices in noisy environment.
- Communication failure due to poor network connectivity.

Conclusion

Every technology has its own good and bad effects. We need to recognise them and tap them for good ends. Mobile phone also has its own good and bad effects. If we brilliantly plan, we shall use them for learning and evaluating the language skills. Proper plan and judicious use of the mobile phone will definitely bring about desirable learning outcomes.

Role of teachers is very imperative in integrating and implementing technology such as adopting mobile phones in English teaching. With Mobile Phones, students can easily access language learning materials and communicate to their teachers in spending no time. Mobile phones are the most powerful, popular and fast medium of communication. Teachers of English can take advantage of all the great features and capabilities of mobile phones and students can learn English in an easier and more effective way.

M-learning allows you to offer increased opportunities for language learning by taking advantage of a tool that students are intimately familiar with and carry around at all times. Dealing with the challenges of using mobile phones may seem daunting, but add a welcome addition to their language teaching methods. This is the new world and everything is changing-the market, the need, the people's-Learning is the future.

