USE OF MOBILE ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) IN TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT:
Mobile learning is undergoing rapid evolution. Mobile phones can support many kinds of learning, including language learning. Mobile technologies offer numerous practical uses in language learning. A computer is better than a mobile phone for handling various types of information such as visual, sound and textual information, but mobile phone is superior to a computer in portability. They can be just as easily utilized outside of the classroom as they can in it; learners can study or practice manageable chunks of information in any place on their own time, thereby taking advantage of their convenience. This article discuss the use of Mobile for learning a language.

INTRODUCTION:
As the rate of technological advancement continues to accelerate, the exponential growth and rapid dissemination of new knowledge now makes many traditional academic courses of study out-of-date almost as soon as they reach completion. As such, lifelong learning can no longer be considered the recreation of an exceptional few who happen to possess the necessary resources and disposition, but an absolute imperative for all who wish to be gainfully employed for the duration of their working years. For lifelong learning to be successful, however, learners need to possess a high degree of autonomy, in other words, the capacity to take control of their own learning (Benson, 2011, p. 58). This capacity includes determining learning objectives, defining scope and sequence, selecting methods and techniques, setting locations and schedules, and evaluating outcomes (Holec, 1981).

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This invention and spread of internet-capable mobile devices such as Smartphone and tablet computers has certainly opened up new possibilities in terms of learner autonomy by providing not only a potential means of learning anytime and anywhere, but also access to a virtually endless variety of rich, multimodal content. However, a means in itself is insufficient. At a minimum, it also requires the ability to use it. Consequently, countless learner training programs have now been put in place, and many of these include mobile technologies as a key component.

Possession of mobile learning devices and demonstrated ability to create and successfully complete individualized learning plans entailing their use outside of class notwithstanding, learners often fail to exhibit similar levels of autonomy inside the classroom. For instance, in an activity where a simple image might help them either understand or express an essential concept during a class discussion, they inexplicably choose instead to flounder. The purpose of this paper is to suggest a plausible reason for the inconsistent display of autonomous behavior between formal and informal contexts and to propose an approach to rectifying this apparent discrepancy.

NEED OF MOBILE ASSISTED LEARNING:

Mobile phones are already becoming much more than devices for transforming the human voice wirelessly. Mobile phones already support a variety of data and multimedia features, most notably.

- Short messages and photography.
- Video photography and audio for playback of ringtones and music.
- Individuals and interactive games and access to information (such as driving directions, travel information, and email).

Users can access information on fine wines, submit samples of music to find out the name of the song, artist, and record label, and submit pictures of famous buildings to access guidebook content. More traditional academic learning content is also being developed using these same capabilities.

Definition:

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) describes an approach to language learning that is assisted or enhanced through the use of handheld mobile device. MALL is a subset of both mobile learning (m-learning) and Computer-assisted language learning (CALL). MALL is language learning using mobile devices such as:

- Cell (mobile) phones (including the iPhone or iPad).
• MP3 or MP4 players (e.g. iPods).
• Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) (e.g. Palm Pilot, Blackberry, etc)

With MALL, students are able to access language learning materials and to communicate with their teachers and peers at anytime, anywhere.

MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL):

When in 1973, the mobile devices were invented for the first time, no one ever thought some day they would become an important part of routine life. As soon as the mobile phones became a crucial part of our lives, their felt a need for using them in language learning tasks.

These days mobile devices such as PDAs, phones, and other handheld devices, are used everywhere for doing everything ranging from voice calling to making short message, video chat, listening to audio (MP3, MP4, Mpeg), web surfing, shopping, and the like. Apart from these benefits, mobile devices have increasingly grown toward becoming tools for education and language learning, and all its users from teachers or students are getting used to this environment to make education as ubiquitous as possible. Moreover, the emerging of internet made open and distance learning a means of receiving education from all parts of the world. In a short period, the attractiveness of distance learning led to the realization that various mobile devices provide a very effective resource for education. This way, many researchers tried to make mobile devices a rich resource for teaching and learning. It was, in fact, a challenging affair to cover learning tasks by a mobile phone.

There are many researchers and developments towards the use wireless technology for different aspects of language learning. In the following lines it has been tried to demonstrate the benefits of using mobile phones in learning English as a second language. Areas of mobile-based language learning are diverse among which the most common ones are vocabulary, listening, grammar, phonetics, reading, comprehension etc.

LEARNING VOCABULARY:

The type of activities focusing on vocabulary learning via mobile phone differs from one research project to another, depending on the level of language proficiency of the learners. Sending e-mail or SMS to students is a common way of learning new vocabulary based on the lessons covered in the classroom. In a study Kennedy and Levy gave the learners the option to receive messages covering known words in new contexts through SMS to their mobile phones amounting nine or ten messages per week. The results indicated that the messages were very
helpful for learning vocabulary.

Learning vocabulary can also be accompanied by the pictorial annotation shown on learners' mobile devices for better understanding of new words. In a study conduct by Chen, et al., learners were provided with verbal as well as pictorial annotation for learning English vocabulary. Results of a post-test showed that the pictorial annotation assisted learners with lower verbal and higher visual ability to retain vocabulary.

LISTENING COMPREHENSION:

Listening exercises may be considered the first stage in learning a second language. With the advent of the second generation of mobile phones, it is now possible to design a mobile multimedia system for learning listening skills through listening exercises.

Hung and Sun designed a system composing of two subsystems. A multimedia materials website that uploaded and maintained video materials, and a set of multimedia English listening exercise on mobile phone for the learners to repeat exercises in English listening in a ubiquitous learning environment. They attempted to implement the mobile multimedia English listening practice system based on capabilities of the mobile technology providing learners download multimedia sound contents from mobile devices, register the learning website, order mobile learning courses and activate reception of learning courses.

LEARNING GRAMMAR:

Grammatical points can be learnt through a specifically designed program installed on mobile devices, in which grammatical rules are taught, followed by multiple-choice activities where learners select the correct answer from the given alternatives. Grammatical exercises can be in the form of 'true-false' or 'fill-in the blanks' which are to be responded by the learners. Grammatical explanations may also be presented to learners via vocal service or short message service.

PRONUNCIATION:

The second generation of mobile devices enable their uses to access multimedia functions including listening and speaking ones. A good m-learning service should consist of speech facilities for transmitting voice. Having such facilities, the learners may download dictionaries on the PDA with sound functions so that they can learn the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar
or new words to be able to fulfill learning needs. Mobile devices with multimedia function give
the learners the opportunity to record their own voice. Then, teachers are able to make a better
assessment of the students' weakness in pronunciation. This way, by enhancing various functions
of the system like providing a dictionary for looking up unfamiliar words and their correct
phonetic form, the pronunciation as well as speaking skills of the learners can be well improved.

The speech aspect of mobile learning is as significant as textual aspect of it, since it enables
learners to comfortably speak with a system recording their voice and allowing them to listen
back to themselves. Then they can compare their voice with an ideal pronunciation and make an
improvement in this skill.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT:

The rising speed of mobile technology is increasing and penetrating all aspects of the
lives so that this technology plays a vital role in learning different dimensions of knowledge.
Today, a clear shift from teacher-led to student-led learning that m-learning allowed causes the
students feel using the technology more effective and interesting than before.

Though many researchers have been carried out towards MALL technology as a growing field of
study in learning language, there are still so many works left to be done and a large amount of
information to be uncovered. Moreover, the methods with the help of which mobile device
technology can be used to provide a more robust learning environment have to be further
improved. The ways through which the barriers of CALL have been removed can help the
MALL technology to grow with less effort and cost.

Some language skills such as speaking and listening skills as mobile-based activities need some
further improvements due to the hardware weakness. Mobile-based learning or m-learning faces
many challenges, but it has grown in exponentially in spite of all its problems to provide a better
environment for language learning.

Further research and experiments on MALL-based techniques should be carried out for different
languages having different properties. Arabic and Persian languages, for example, are written
from right to left and Chinese language is written both from right to left and from left to right. As
a result, mobile devices need to be devised to be more compatible with such languages with
different orientations, making the scope of these devices usage greater than before.
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