

Mobile Learning: An Modern Era Approach To Mobilize More Learners

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ABSTRACT: Learning implies acquisition of knowledge and skills on one hand. According to Skinner, learning is not acquiring knowledge or skills by mere mechanical representations; it is a process in which the learner organizes different elements and experiences to reach a particular goal. M-learning is convenient in that it is accessible from virtually anywhere. M-Learning, like other forms of E-learning, is also collaborative; sharing is almost instantaneous among everyone using the same content, which leads to the reception of instant feedback and tips. M-Learning also brings strong portability by replacing books and notes with small RAMs, filled with tailored learning contents. In addition, it is simple to utilize mobile learning for a more effective and entertaining experience.

Over the past ten years mobile learning has grown from a minor research interest to a set of significant projects in schools, workplaces, museums, cities and rural areas around the world. The M - Learning community is still fragmented, with different national perspectives, differences between academia and industry, and between the school, higher education and lifelong learning sectors. Today, any number of portable devices can quickly and easily deliver and support these functions. Cell or smart phones, multi-game devices, personal media players, personal digital assistants , or wireless single-purpose devices can help deliver coaching and mentoring, conduct assessments and evaluations, provide on-the-job support and access to information, education and references, and deliver pod casts, update alerts, forms and checklists. In these ways, mobile learning can enhance and support more traditional learning modes, making it more portable and accessible. Mobile devices can also serve as powerful data collection tools and facilitate the capture of user created content. The kind of penetration that mobile phones have reached is astounding and no other device can come any closer, not even computers. No demography is immune from the mobile phone and it has slowly become associated with the youth in a bigger way. The mobile revolution is finally here in the form of M-learning, which is a natural extension of e-learning. This extends the scope of the educational world.

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning occupies a very important place in our life. Most of our behaviour is mainly influenced by what we learn and how we learn it. It is a life long process that involves constant change. M - Learning or Mobile Learning is any sort of learning that takes advantage of learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies. In other words, mobile learning decreases limitation of learning location through the mobility of portable devices. M - learning is convenient in the sense that it is accessible from virtually anywhere, which provides access to all different learning materials available. It is also collaborative, sharing is almost instantaneous among everyone using the same content, which leads to the reception of instant feedback and tips. M - Learning also brings strong portability by replacing books and notes with portable devices filled with tailored learning content. While there are some great advantages afforded by mobile learning, there can be problems when M - learning is not designed well. As mobile devices become more and more powerful it will become easier to design effective mobile learning.

According to MoLeNET, "The exploitation of ubiquitous handheld technologies, together with wireless and mobile phone networks, to facilitate, support, enhance and extend the reach of teaching and learning". Traxler (2005) defined it as "Any educational provision where the sole or dominant technologies are handheld and palmtop devices". Most researchers and educators probably view mobile learning as the immediate descendent of e - learning. In other word we can say that m - learning provides the potential to provide the right information to right people at any time and any places using portable learning devices. Thus the M - learning can be summarized in a single statement - "deliverance of education or any learning via portable devices".

International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology

(An ISO 3297: 2007 Certified Organization)

Website: www.ijirset.com

Vol. 6, Issue 4, April 2017

II. MOBILE LEARNING

Mobile learning (M - learning) aims at making the learning process more flexible, accessories and personalized. M - learning is the acquisition of any knowledge and skills using mobile technology, anywhere, anytime that results in an alternation of behaviour. It can be defined as “learning that happens across locations or that takes advantages of learning opportunities offered by portable technologies” (Wikipedia, 2007). The term covers mobility of the learner, interacting with portable or fixed technology, learning in a mobile society, etc.

M - Learning facilitates performance support at the point of operation and enables workers to learn what they want, where they want and when they want. M - learning improves access to information, that people can update their knowledge continuously to satisfy the demands, which want to improve cultural experiences of life. People in Asia and Europe are finding that their connectivity and computing needs can be met through mobile phone (Wagner, 2005). The learners used to share photos and news with classmates and teachers via the mobile phones. M- Learning provides an opportunity to get touch with the group of hard to reach learners. Every student participates in mobile learning has equal opportunity to make quality presentations, communicate with faculty and access course materials without waiting for the campus computers(Quinn,2006).

Mobile phones use the wireless internet to exchange voice messages, e-mail and web pages at anywhere and any time. Since many students already carry mobile phones, most classes are already equipped. Portability, connectivity, simplicity, and low cost make them valuable educational tools and running cost and text input speed restricts its usage. Mobile phone e-mail produced learning as superior to desktop e-mail mobile and paper(Houser,2002).In Singapore, courses already offered through mobile phones, due to the peoples experience, they were planning to offer an entire distance education course through mobile phones even with limitations of tiny size of phones, less memory and screen(Ring,2001).

CHARACTERISTICS OF M - LEARNING

M - Learning is the idea that a student can learn from any place at any time using portable learning devices. Polsani (2003) defines “mobile learning as a form of education whose site of production, circulation and consumption is the network”. The characteristics of M - Learning are:

- *Accessibility*: The information is always available whenever the learners need to use it.
- *Immediacy*: The information can be retrieved immediately by the learners.
- *Interactivity*: The learners can interact with peers, teachers and experts efficiently and effectively through different media.
- *Context - Awareness*: The environment can adapt to the learners real situation to provide adequate information for the learners.
- *Permanency*: The information remains unless the learners purposely remove it.

ADVANTAGES OF M - LEARNING

M - Learning was first called internet based training than web based training and then e - learning. Today we find these terms being used along with variation of M - learning. Many terms have been used to define M - learning in the past - web based training, computer based training, web based learning, online - learning and e - learning. M - Learning has some great advantages. These are listed below:

- One can access to lessons, video clips and audio libraries from anywhere, including public places and moving buses and trains.
- Interaction with fellow students and instructor will be great help. It is an accepted fact that learning is made easier when information is shared and question answered through a sort of combined study. This helps several students to work together assignments even while remaining at far - flung location.
- Portability is a very big plus, as PDA is compact and very light weight and enables a student to take notes or enter all types of data directly into the device.
- There is a psychological factor, owning handheld devices increases student motivation and deepens the commitment for using the learning with them. Further the present generation of students has fascination with handhelds like PDAs, mobile phones and similar carry around device.

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Vol. 6, Issue 4, April 2017

- The learning material is mostly colourful and inviting which may prompt students to go back and forth and practice more.
- It is a fact that most handheld devices are more affordable in prices than larger system and already a major percentage of the population to own them.
- Flexible hours of learning are indeed a great boon as students can access the system any time and from any location. What is more, teacher support can now be expected even outside classrooms and other learning environments.
- Each student can learn at his or her own pace - some students may be slower learners. The students who pick up things fast need not waste time going repeatedly through basic lessons.
- Yet another blessing is a huge saving in the cost of learning materials and also community expenses.

DISADVANTAGES OF M - LEARNING

It is fair to say that M - learning may appear as a challenging proposition, but most of perceived disadvantages of M - learning gradually disappear as technology improves. M - Learning involves learning anywhere with no need to physically connect to an outlet. There is also a focus with the latest technology of e - learning being delivered with “just in time”, “just enough” and “just for me” concepts.

- There is no denying that the storage capacities of PDA are limited.
- Anyone who has a mobile gadget knows that the short battery life and frequent changes of batteries is a great nuisance.
- Devices may become outdated quickly and students have to keep compacting obsolescence.
- In the M - learning venue, students are incapable of printing, simply because it required a network connection. This is obvious not feasible in a real life situation.
- M - learning is become more popular through the development of new and unique mobile devices. Blackberry, I - phones, I - pads and other such devices have made learning on the go much easier for the person. Just because it is easier does not mean it is necessarily better. There are disadvantage to M - learning that you should be aware of before joining.
- The buttons on the keypad or styles pens are small and can be trickily for some people to manipulate. There are attachable keyboards available for some devices but these are also small, can be different to use to cost money.

CHALLENGES TO M - LEARNING

The main technical challenges to the mobile learning are connectivity, battery life, interacting with small devices, displaying useful content in small screen devices, continuing expansion of broadband wireless networks, low resolution of displays, diversity of operating system. The other challenges are to develop an appropriate theory of learning for the mobile age, design if technology to support a life time learning, tracking of results, proper use of this information, how to access learning outside the classroom, how to support learning across many contexts (Wikipedia, 2007).

The training of M - learning has challenges like widely dispersed staff / student base, constant mobile workers, rapid deployment of training, pull stop from their jobs to the classrooms. Wireless access in the classroom will encourage or enable cheating is a question mark (Wagner, 2005). Mobile devices are often disconnected because of the lack of access in certain places but also because of the high prices in most of the cases, challenges to the security of the device and its data.

FUTURE OF M - LEARNING

Despite the drawbacks, it will be more useful in collaborative projects and field work, in a classroom alternative to books or computers, where learners are widely dispersed, engage with learners who in the past have felt excluded. More access to specific information, easy access at anytime, anywhere, non - work hour training, learning at outdoors, etc., will make the M - learning as a significant role to be played in education at all levels. It will allow the collaboration to happen regardless of physical location, in real time and to include text and rich media as well as voice. When the existing course material converted into new ones for delivering on mobile technology the learning efficiency will be high (Rekkedal, 2002).

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Vol. 6, Issue 4, April 2017

The characteristics of mobile devices like ubiquity, access, richness, efficiency, flexibility, security, reliability, interactivity have to be improved to reach the high efficiency of mobile learning for the future generations (Wagner, 2005). Thus the M - learning facilities became an unavoidable source in the process of learning without which the future learning may not be possible. Let us move towards mobile learning for mobilizing more learners and more learning.

III. CONCLUSION

The development of mobile wireless technologies has generated a considerable amount of excitement among practitioners and academics because it results in shifting the academic environment from traditional setting of mobile learning settings. We have been active in mobile empowerment and learning since 2001, working to widen opportunities for learning through the use of mobile technologies. We work with local government, central government, schools, colleges, universities and international organizations to incorporate and embed mobile learning into all areas of education and training. Regardless of existing till now disadvantages the M - learning will become more and more popular with the progress of information and communication technologies. Its common use with the traditional education will correspond to the need of educational quality improve. The educational process will become more flexible and will fulfill to the needs of life long learning. M - Learning also can assure good educational opportunities for the disabled persons.

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