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NEW TRENDS IN ELEARNING - MOBILE DAYS

Radu CATALIN
Carol I National defence University
E-mail: kradu@gmail.com

The literature on mLearning points to a variety of benefits that mobile phones could have on the educational sector. For heuristic purposes, the impacts of mobile phones on educational outcomes that are identified in the mLearning literature can be classified into two broad categories. On the one hand, mobiles supposedly impact educational outcomes by improving access to education while maintaining the quality of education delivered. On the other hand, mobiles purportedly impact educational outcomes by facilitating alternative learning processes and instructional methods collectively known as new learning.

I. THE ROLE OF MOBILES IN IMPROVING ACCESS TO EDUCATION

In the initial ideas about mlearning theory, mLearning increases access for those who are mobile or cannot physically attend learning institutions– those who would not otherwise be able to follow courses in a traditional educational setting due to the *constraints of work, household activities, or other competing demands on their time*. It is now generaly accepted that all comunities of learners inserted mobile phones in the educational process. mLearning makes education more accessible in that it enables learners to pursue their studies according to their own schedule. The portability of mobile technology means that mLearning is not bound by fixed class times; mLearning enables learning at all times and in all places, during breaks, before or after shifts, at home, or on the go. Interestingly, however, while mLearning is portable, it is not necessarily associated with physical movement. According to a study conducted by Vavoula[1], few people actually utilize the time spent in transit to learn.

mLearning, as Visser and West (2005)[2] suggest, can also increase access in those situations where cost representsa significant barrier to learning. Was even thought that for the individual learner, mobile technology is much less cost-prohibitive than other technologies like personal computers and broadband connections that are necessary for eLearning. The ubiquity of mobile phones, moreover, means that educational services can be delivered with learners' existing resources. In as much as mobile technology presents a less cost-prohibitive medium for learning, It represents an important avenue by which to reduce the gap between the haves and the have-nots in contemporary society where access to knowledge and information is increasingly important[3].

In regards to cost, the benefit of increased access afforded by mLearning is particularly relevant in the developing without huge budget context. Thus, mLearning provides a potential way forward for the expansion of education programs to larger segments of the population rather than via the eLearning model that has been adopted in much of the developed world. MLearning allows a method of educational delivery that could be more cost-effective than eLearning methods, not to mention that the ubiquity of mobile phones means that many people are already familiar with mobile phone applications[4].

In so much as mLearning exerts an impact on educational outcomes by increasing access, mLearning represents a continuation and improvement of distance learning through increased utility and applicability.

II. THE ROLE OF SMARTPHONES IN PROMOTING NEW LEARNING

Others suggest that the benefits of mobile phones are not merely limited to increased access to educational services. mLearning, they indicate, can also facilitate changes in the character of learning modalities that in turn impact educational outcomes. In this regard, mLearning represents more than a mere extension of traditional forms of education; mLearning facilitates alternative learning processes and instructional methods that the theories of new learning identify as effective for learning.

According to proponents of new learning, smartphones facilitate designs for personalized learning in that they are responsive to difference and diversity in the way learning occurs. They facilitate designs for situated learning by providing learning during the course of the activity – in the field for a botany student, in the classroom for a teacher trainee, or in the workshop for an engineer. In this sense, mLearning also facilitates designs for authentic learning, meaning learning that targets real-world problems and involves projects of relevance and interest to the learner[5].

The supposed value of smartphones also arises from the manner in which they facilitate lifelong learning. Smartphones can support the great amount of learning that occurs during the many activities of everyday life, learning that occurs spontaneously in impromptu settings outside of the classroom and outside of the usual environment of home and office. They enable learning that occurs across time and place as learners apply what they learn in one environment to developments in another[6].

Smartphones theoretically make learner-centred learning possible by enabling students to customize the transfer of and access to information in order to build on their skills and knowledge and to meet their own educational goals.[i] MLearning thus exerts a democratizing effect on the learning experience as learners take a greater responsibility for the learning process instead of being passively fed information by an instructor. Whereas in traditional models of education the goal is the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, mLearning empowers students to actively participate in the learning process to make it a process of construction and not mere instruction[7]. MLearning thus represents learning that is not 'just-in-case,' education for the sake of producing a bank of knowledge, but rather represents learning that is 'just-in-time,' 'just enough,' or 'just-for-me'[8]. As a facilitator of new learning, mLearning goes beyond an emphasis on the possession of information to enabling learners to find, identify, manipulate, and evaluate existing information .

Smartphones can also supposedly facilitate knowledge-centred learning by providing efficient and inventive methods by which students can learn with understanding – meaning that they deepen their understanding of a specific subject matter rather than merely memorizing large amounts of information – and then use this knowledge as a basis for new learning through integration and interconnection. Mobile devices make possible assessment-centred learning as well by enabling the provision of continual feedback throughout the learning process, presenting learners with diagnosis and formative guidance as to what might be improved or what might be learned next. Moreover, in providing prompt feedback, mLearning maintains the appeal of learning and provides a motivating factor that can at times be lacking in traditional modes of education[9]. Smartphones also facilitate community-centred learning, meaning learning that the learner deems valuable because of its relevance to the surrounding social context; mLearning facilitates learning that can be used to achieve socio-economic goals that respond to problems, such as problems related to health or family care confronting the surrounding community .

Given that social interaction is central to effective learning, as indicated by theories of new learning, smartphones should also impact educational outcomes by facilitating communication. Smartphones permit collaborative learning and continued conversation despite physical location and thus advance the process of coming to know, which occurs through conversations across contexts and among various people. Via mobile technology, learners engage in conversation whereby they resolve differences, understand the experiences of others, and create common interpretations and shared understanding of the world[10].

In promoting educational modalities that accord with the theories of new learning, mLearning should offer an appeal aspect that also impacts educational outcomes. mLearning can be particularly appealing for those who have not succeeded in traditional learning environments; it can attract those not enamoured by traditional learning approaches that are generalized and decontextualized in nature.

mLearning is also beneficial in that it can provide immediate feedback and thus provide continued motivation for those who are not motivated by traditional educational settings. Moreover, mLearning presents an appeal simply because the use of mobile technology in and of itself presents something new and exciting for a great array of learners .

Smartphones , therefore, should impact educational outcomes by altering the character of education and learning because the nature of mobile technology converges with and facilitates new learning. The new learning is personalized, learner-centred, situated, collaborative, ubiquitous, and lifelong. Likewise, mobile technology is increasingly personal, user-centred, mobile, networked, ubiquitous, and durable[11] . The literature indicates that the benefits afforded by this convergence should exert a positive impact on educational outcomes.

III. CONCLUSION

While education systems have focused on the use of mobile phones to communicate information for administration (e.g., attendance, homework, security alerts, communication with parents) as well as support for student learning (e.g., surveys, audio recording, video recording, web browsing, testing), less attention has been paid to the professional development of teachers. But, the ever-presence of mobile phones, does not necessarily mean that teachers are willing or capable of integrating such technologies into their classroom practice. Even if education systems ensured that teachers were as proficient as their students in using new technologies such as mobile phones, there is still no guarantee that teachers will want to integrate mobile phones into classroom practice as in many cases the technology does not enhance what they already do and only adds an extra layer of complexity.

Most teachers do not belong to the generation of young people who Prensky calls the ‘digital natives’ generation . The ‘digitial natives’ generation was brought up with this technology, and their teachers either struggle to keep up or just give up in the race to understand and use the latest technology. Often the ‘digital natives’ concept is offered as an explanation or excuse for the disappointment expressed by education administrators when the latest technological innovation fails to fulfil its promise in the classroom. Therefore, it may be more productive to consider how educators can take steps to meet the challenge of these new technologies within their educational context as ‘there is no evidence of widespread or universal disaffection’ with schooling as is often claimed in the popular press . Rather, there is a need to integrate appropriate technologies into existing education systems. Teachers who were keen to develop and sustain meaningful connections with their students felt motivated to acquire the necessary technological skills. They argued that professional development programs need to focus not only on the technology, skills and knowledge required to implement mlearning strategies, but also on the skills and knowledge needed to support a blended learning environment that makes appropriate and targeted use of technologies that support the overall learning goals.

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