

## Mobile Phones:

### Just a Phone or a Language Learning Device?

#### LE TÉLÉPHONIE MOBILE:

#### JUSTE UN TÉLÉPHONE OU UN APPAREIL D'APPRENTISSAGE DES LANGUES?

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**Abstract:** Today, mobile assisted language learning (MALL) is growing very fast. In the same line, mobile phone technology is dominating the world so fast that everybody including language learners has at least one which can be used all the time and everywhere. Considering this issue, the present paper attempts to shed more light on the pre-existed pedagogical value of using the emerging technologies such as mobile phones for language learning in informal language learning setting. The present paper holds the view that everybody can learn the very amount of English language which he/she needs even if he/she cannot go to any language classes. Accordingly, this paper reviews the literature addressing opportunities for learning English language with mobile learning technology and various language education projects involving mobile phones. Moreover, it suggests technology-based design considerations for reading skill to meet the learning needs of those who want to learn the language in informal setting by themselves.

**Key words:** Mobile Technology; Pedagogical; Learning; Informal Setting

**Resumé** Aujourd'hui, l'apprentissage des langues assisté mobile (ALAM) est en croissance très rapide. Dans le même domaine, la technologie du téléphone mobile est en train de dominer le monde si vite que tout le monde y compris les apprenants de langue a au moins un téléphone mobile qui peut être utilisé tout le temps et partout. En prenant en considération cette question, le présent article tente d'éclairer la valeur pédagogique préexistée de l'utilisation des technologies émergentes telles que les téléphones mobiles pour l'apprentissage des langues dans un cadre de l'apprentissage des langues informel. Le présent document est d'avis que tout le monde peut apprendre la langue anglaise dont il/elle en a besoin, même s'il/elle ne peut pas aller à un cours de langue. Par conséquent, cet article passe en revue les possibilités d'apprentissage de la langue anglaise avec la technologie d'apprentissage mobile et de divers projets d'éducation de langue impliquant le téléphone mobile. En outre, il suggère des conceptions basées sur la technologie pour que les compétences de lecture puissent répondre aux besoins de l'apprentissage de ceux qui veulent apprendre la langue par eux-mêmes dans un cadre informel.

**Mots-clés:** Technologie Mobile; Pédagogique; Apprentissage; Cadre Informel

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In this digitally dominated age characterized by the rapid and extensive development of information and communication technologies such as mobile phones, everybody should be able to learn as much English language as he/she wants at ease even without having to attend any English classes. This may be somehow difficult but is not impossible to achieve.

This can be supported by informal learning which was first introduced by Knowes (1950) followed by many studies regarding informal language learning which emphasized that informal language learning is unstructured, occurs out of class environment, and language learners are in charge of their own learning (Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Lightbown and Spada, 2001; Rogers, 2004).

In this relation, this research believes that recent developments in mobile technology offer promising opportunities for language learning in informal setting outside the classroom borders.

Considering the use of different technologies that can provide quick access to authentic language input in informal language learning setting, mobile learning devices such as mobile phones now have the emerging potential to achieve a large scale impact because of their portability, versatile features, and low cost (Roschelle, 2003). Rapid advancements in information and communication technology have together made this potential of mobile phones to a great extent possible. Moreover, the increase in processing power, storage memory, and connectivity through the internet or the Bluetooth technology have resulted in an extensive growth in media richness that can provide access to highly personalized learning environment for everyone in informal setting (Pea & Maldonado, 2006). As the matter of fact, the conventional mobile phone is more than just a device to make a call. It can store and deliver a vast amount of information, including many language learning programs and authentic audio/visual language learning materials (Attewell, 2004).

In the same line, it can be mentioned that learning is an experience deeply interwoven in our daily lives made up of number of tasks and stimulants we encounter. When we are faced with problems in various contexts, we often try to understand and respond with the cognitive and physical resources available within and around ourselves. Mobile phones can provide the learner with frequent engagement opportunities to language problems all the time increasing the learning chances by allowing the learner to use many sources of authentic audio/visual and print materials once motivated (Beaudin et al. 2006). At a rapid speed, the practice of mobile phone-based language learning is expected to increase among language learners of all ages, class, or gender (Oloruntoba, 2006).

A mobile learning device can be used for language learning even without current ability to connect to the internet. For example, a mobile device with 8 giga bytes of memory equipped with MP3 player, movie player, and sound recorder allows for over 800 textbooks in PDF with 200 minute educational videos in the mobile video format.

Accordingly, the present paper argues that mobile assisted language learning can play a significant role in addressing the learning needs of those who cannot attend language classes or want to learn the language just to survive in an English speaking country.

## **1. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The development of emerging technologies such as mobile phones and other wireless technologies has opened up a huge array of possibilities for the domain of language learning (Joseph & Uther, 2006).

In recent years, there have been many studies and projects using the relevant mobile technologies such as mobile phones or ipods for both formal and informal language learning (Chinnery, 2006; Kadyte, 2003; Kiernan & Aizawa, 2004; Levy & Kennedy, 2005; Norbrook & Scott, 2003; Paredes et al., 2005; Thornton & House, 2005; Ogata & Yano, 2004).

According to the most of the above researches, current use of mobile devices in language learning ranges from vocabulary or grammar learning to story reading and pronunciation practices. Accordingly, this can be achieved through developing some programs which require repetition and drills.

Nevertheless, there is no formal theory of mobile language learning developed to date (Joseph & Uther, 2006), but still emerging mobile technologies increasingly suggest potential language learning solutions and environments that will be highly interactive, ubiquitous, and convenient.

Regarding the above mentioned studies, it should be mentioned that the majority of them have focused on the pedagogical aspects of mobile phones in improving language proficiency of different proficiency level language learners without setting a model for those who want to design authentic audio/visual or print materials to be used for language learning based on mobile phone technology. Accordingly, the present paper tries to fill the existing gap by providing a mobile phone-based material design.

## **2. MOBILE PHONE-BASED MATERIAL DESIGN**

A mobile learning model that is appropriate for language learning in informal setting requires a deep understanding of the learners, their learning conditions, and their learning needs. Moreover, relevant environmental, cultural, and political dimensions should be considered. Perhaps, addressing and overcoming all the challenges in the design is a naive thought. Nevertheless, a few realistic considerations must be taken into consideration if the learning design aims to be useful and successful.

Emerging technologies such as mobile phones need to be fully interpreted and applied according to the environment in which they will operate, being well aware of its limitations and challenges, bearing in mind their potential impact on transforming current cultures and practices (Cobcroft et al. 2006).

Mobile learning solutions cannot be formulated according to pre-existing learning design principles without considering the practical problems specific to the location and situation of the language learners. Murphy (2006) also emphasizes the need to consider cultural and social factors when designing mobile learning activities.

Accordingly, learning should be fun, satisfying, and rewarding to be effective. These factors are considered to be essential in developing any technology based (Parson & Ryu, 2006). Moreover, the content for mobile phone language learning requires repetitive testing to check what scheme would maximize readability while maintaining appealing aesthetics of the content.

In short, no matter how sophisticated and appealing a mobile learning device or its content may be, the learner uses mobile learning only if it meets his/her individual learning needs (Parsons and Ryu, 2006).

## **3. MOBILE PHONES AND READING COMPREHENSION**

In this part, some important aspects regarding developing authentic reading materials to improve reading comprehension of the language learners through mobile phones in informal setting will be discussed. To develop effective reading materials, the prior knowledge of the target group needs to be studied.

Researchers in the field of reading development have unveiled some of the mysteries of how beginner language learners learn to read and offer designers significant guidance for successful reading programs. It is this knowledge that we turn to in order to create reading content that is pedagogically effective and culturally appropriate to be used by mobile phones.

According to Pressley (2002), reading is about constructing meaning from a text so that the goal of reading goes beyond decoding and recognizing words. Also, reading is purposeful only when a learner can build meaning from a text and connect it to his or her everyday life. A lack of comprehension leads to negative attitudes and a loss of motivation (Graves et al., 2003).

Bearing all the above-mentioned criteria in mind, one of the most important and basic understandings regarding developing effective reading materials to be used through mobile phones is that a printed word carries meaning. Language learners acquire this knowledge through frequent exposure to print. A mobile learning device that displays and reads words out loud would provide language learners ample opportunities reach this understanding.

Other vital insights for learning to read are phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle (Juel, 1991; Adams, 1990). It is purely an auditory ability but fundamental to mapping speech to print. Because of their large capacity to store content, mobile phones can store hundreds of multimedia-based words, songs, and related audio/visual materials which could be replayed again and again, exposing the language learner in informal setting to the kind of language s/he needs to hear to develop phonemic awareness.

The alphabetic principle is another factor which refers to the correspondence between sounds phonemes and letters. This knowledge is a prerequisite for the identification of words as we read (Juel, 1991) and can be taught through a mobile device. However, it requires that the language learners first have knowledge of the alphabet and the individual letters. Content to learn the alphabet can be easily programmed into a device, preparing the language learner to receive phonics instruction. Simple multimedia scenarios that feature the letter-sound association of only a few letters can also be developed.

Fluency is the last but not the least important component language learners need to become successful readers. It is the ability to read through a text quickly and efficiently without conscious effort, freeing up their mental capacities to attend to the meaning of the text (Graves et al, 2003). Fluency requires the automatic recognition of words, a feat that can be achieved only by repeated readings and recurrent practices. Predictable texts and repeated readings of a book previously memorized also foster fluency. Vocabulary is another indispensable competency linked to comprehension.

## CONCLUSION

Today, technology is growing so fast that no one can ignore its direct effect not only on our personal lives but also on our education. Accordingly, the present paper tried to shed more light on the pedagogical values of using new technologies such as mobile phones by explaining how mobile phones can be used as for language learning. Accordingly, it tried to provide some criteria for designing authentic audio/visual and print language materials to be incorporated in mobile phones for language learning in informal language learning setting at ease.

Mobile phone-based language learning technology, thanks to its portability, low production cost, versatile features, and significant memory space has the outstanding potential to provide everybody with authentic audio/visual language learning materials that could possibly teach them to speak and read.

As discussed, many considerations such as situation specificity, cultural sensitivity, practical usability, and theoretical applicability along with various learning needs of the language learners should be taken into account to develop a useable and effective personal language learning space. However, it should be mentioned that this paper merely scratched the surface of this essential issue. I hope it generates constructive discussion on the topic and challenges educators to think of innovative ways to use advanced technologies in their classes to serve those who need its help the most.

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