

Propagating the Creative Use of Mobile Phone in ESL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The past two decades have shown vast improvement in technology innovations and their applications in various fields. The digital technology has been lending support to classroom instructions in language classes across the world. Technology integration in teaching has been made possible with the use of PCs, Laptops, audio and video facilities via internet and Television sets in the language labs. Hence, if digital technology and mobile technology are considered different, the former has surely been the predecessor of today's mobile technology. Digital technology and mobile technology, though operate on more or less from the same platform the latter seems to have callous impact on the young and old alike because of its sleek and light-weight hand held devices for their social connectivity. The smart phones which are advanced version of mobile phones can be used for learning because their adaptability pervades time, location – inside and outside classroom while seamlessly merging with traditional teacher centred as well as learner centred autonomous learning environments, work places and while both the teacher and learner are moving around. This article wishes to discuss the exploitation of the ubiquitous mobile technology along with its hand held devices to facilitate English as Second Language teaching and learning in the communicative classrooms of the institutes of Higher Learning.

Keywords: Digital technology, mobile technology, social connectivity, Higher Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The innovations in technology and their applications in various fields have opened the gates for myriad opportunities for creative thinking people. Mobile phones which are handheld, portable electronic and wireless communication devices, basically used for communication among people, have been exploited in learning and hence the term mobile learning. However, the mobile learning instruments are not simple mobile phones but their advanced versions called smartphones with their novel mobile apps. Mobile learning which is considered as 'New Learning' has good many advantages in the field of education that it assists teaching and learning by its ability to promote substantial learning procedures and teaching approaches (Vack, et al. 2010) [1]. To be precise, mobile learning provides a platform for e learning and teacher assisted learning wherein the teacher interacts with her students and supports their learning through prepared notes and texts either down loaded or uploaded via wireless networks, mobile

phone networks, or both and linking to personal and institutional systems operating on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in virtual learning environments and management information systems (MIS).

2. DIGITAL DEVICES AND DIGITAL COMPETENCE

The Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) require a good amount of digital literacy and digital competence on the part of learners and teachers to operate the digital devices like mobile phones, smartphones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), portable music players like MP3/ MP4 players Ipods, Ipads, tablets, laptops, handheld gaming devices like Sony PSP, Nintendo DS, Ultramobile Personal Computers (UMPCs), mini notebooks or netbooks, handheld GPS or voting devices etc., (Masoud Hashemi, et al., 2011)[2]. Digital literacy is the ability to work on digital devices and digital competence is the proficiency or the speed in operating digital devices. As digital literacy is necessary for mobile learning, it has attracted a lot of scholars to conduct various studies including the evaluation of students' digital literacy (Zhang & Zhu,

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2016)[3] as well as the utilization of digital tools in classroom setting (Hobbs, 2013) [4]. Digital competence, being very important for teachers and students in higher education, the present article deliberates on Mobile Assisted Language Learning and its place in building language learners' motivation for effective language learning to happen in the portals of higher learning.

Mobile learning is synonymous of learners' mobility and the mobile technology used in learning. But scholars like Traxler (2009) [5] opine mobility needs to be understood in terms of spatial movement and the ways in which such movements may enable time shifting and boundary-crossing in learning a language which involves interactions with fixed technologies and mobile devices. The pedagogical interaction that develops around them becomes focus of attention (Kukulska- Hulme, 2009) [6]. The techno-centric perspective in the mobile usage looks at the ability of the devices to support learning. Certain devices have good battery back up and certain others have good storage and memory. Apart from these, certain devices are good for gaming options, as such they are suitable for playing language games.

3. MOBILE LEARNING APPS

Mobile learning is defined as a learning that happens when the students are mobile or a learning that is informal, self-directed and spontaneous using mobile technologies. Smart phones with their various apps are helpful in carrying information through SMS, Whats app, email, and e documents through Microsoft office apps. Masoud Hashemi et al (2011) [7] cites Smidts, Hordijk & Huizenga (2008) who have highlighted the potential for playful and creative use of Global Positioning System (GPS) and mobile technology in education. They find a relevance between the GPS functioning via satellites and the positioning of the pupils in making the learners realise the connectivity between the real and virtual world.

Google Play Store has umpteen number of apps on every skill and element of the target language; one has to open the window and choose the app one wants to install. Once installed, the user necessarily decides the app's application with its technical arrangement. For example, a vocabulary building app helps the

learners learn the correct pronunciation of the words, spell them correctly, read the sentences made with them and do practice tests with them; at the end the feedback is flashed quantitatively. The techniques involved are easy to remember.

The mobiles are fruitfully used in the classrooms for vocabulary developments through on line dictionaries which help to find the meanings/ synonyms and antonyms of the words in a given passage and spell checks for correcting and learning spellings. Madhuri Gokhale (2011) [8] gives a detailed account of how her students learnt vocabulary and language through collaborative learning with the help of cell phones using on line apps.

Ramya and Madhumitha (2017) [9] have 'reviewed the use of Mobile Apps in Language Use' for primary, secondary and tertiary learners (college students and adults group of learners). They have enlisted the available free and paid apps for language learning. They are as follows:

Articulation/ Pronunciation: Sounds Right, Speech Tutor, Voxy and English Listening & Speaking
Vocabulary: World Book XL- English Dictionary & Thesaurus, Learn English with busuu.com! Exam Word Builder and Vocabulary Builder
Grammar/ structuring sentences: Sentence Builder for iPod, Learn English with busuu.com!
Listening and speaking: English Podcast for learners
English Listening & Speaking
Video lessons: Learn English, Speak English
Conversation Course with Free Video Lessons- Speaking Pal

Ramya and Madhumitha report that with the accelerated development of Apps about learning English and the popularization of mobile devices among college students, students have become increasingly interested in the learning benefits that apps on mobile devices bring. According to relevant researches, the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) can not only enhance students' English language ability but also increase students' learning motivation. Kim's (2013) [10] research proves Mobile assisted language learning improves the listening skill of students. Surely, it is helpful and effective for college students using mobile devices to learn English by themselves (Liu & Xuan He, 2014)

[11]. The rapid growth of app technologies and their application in different fields of knowledge, has made these English learning apps have the capability to integrate different media; for example, text, picture, animation, audio and video can be integrated in order to create a multimedia instructional material, as well as prompt students' interest in studying.

4. MOBILE LEARNING FOR ORAL PRACTICE

The digital practices are not necessarily be supported by mobile apps all the time. The ESL teachers who are creative and innovative in their teaching approaches have done their mite in the field of language teaching and learning across the world. The author wishes to narrate one such successful mobile learning practice incorporated in the teaching learning pedagogy at Dr. M.G.R. Educational and Research Institute in Chennai where she works as a teacher. Mark Hancock has written a book on 'English Pronunciation in Use' (available with four CDs offering oral pronunciation material from elementary (single words) to advanced level (sentences). The book exemplifies the language use with all its pronunciation and sound codes in neatly arranged listening exercises for input and requesting learners to listen and write to assess their comprehensible output. The teachers initially started teaching pronunciation with the material uploaded in the PCs but with the learners' comfort ability with mobile learning the students were allowed to upload the content in their mobiles, which they can listen to and learn even when they were mobile.

The feedback was overwhelming in the sense, the arrangement helped the learners to learn the nuances of pronunciation in their leisure time without the constraints of time and space imposed in a formal lab and more specifically it made them willing learners engaged in effective learning on their own. The written output was their assignments submitted. This practice aligns with the 'Situating Learning Theory' which makes use of contextually relevant information for immediate purpose (Lave and Wenger, 1991) [12]. It also reiterates the belief that not only Apps can accompany the learners 24/7 like an expert teacher on the target language but teacher created or uploaded material also can.

Apart from their ability to pose as a ready reckoner- language resource mobile phones also help in audio- video recording during the role play performance, giving scope for retrospective self and peer assessment for enhancing communicative skills with repeat performance. The author reports that she carried on her research in the Technical English classroom to enhance the oral communication skills of engineering students through role plays. Role plays are considered to be effective communication enhancement tools in ESL classrooms. The efficacy of role plays in teaching the nuances of interpersonal communication and academic language function was under study. So scripted and situational role plays were administered to students. Despite the teacher's elaborate introduction and explanation the students were quite hesitant to participate in the role plays. But when a CD modelling interpersonal communication (available with Dutt, et al, A Course in Communication Skills, 2008) was played in the lab, the students volunteered in pairs to take roles in the role plays. Thus their Basic Interpersonal Communication skills and Academic Language Functions skills were encouraged and groomed for better placement prospects. Their language inhibition and anxiety were under control because of audio modelling. Then their role play performance was video recorded in their smart phones. This kind of exercise gave them insight into their performance to identify their verbal and nonverbal behaviour. In retrospective reflection, they could indulge in self-analysis and peer correction for improvement in communication (Chandrasena and Kannan, 2015)[13]. Recording and listening to their role play performance definitely motivated the students to learn to speak English without inhibition.

The mobile learning and digital learning are combined in the formal classroom setting when teachers email their notes to the students and instruct them to have a print copy of the same. But the 'digital natives' (Grau, 2002) [14] download the notes in the mobile phones for use when they are off the net. Role play activities are recorded and sent to teachers for evaluation (Chandrasena, 2017) [15]. Communication regarding class changes, events organisations, assignment details and deadlines for submissions is passed on through smart phones. The students remain individuals when each one is addressed individually and members of a group when a group identity is

created for communicating to them in WhatsApp. Student to student interactions happen. But not all the teachers are able to do this on their own. Some take the assistance of the students for sending messages and notes through WhatsApp. The university has introduced smart rooms for each and every discipline available in the university. It has also introduced Google classes for outside class learning. These apart, there are Moodle classes, Edmodo classes and various other professional e content and learning providers. The teachers need to coordinate with these digital tools for effective learning to happen in the students.

5. IDEAS FOR USING MOBILE PHONES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Hayo Reinders (2010) [16] has given 'Twenty Ideas for using mobile phones in the language classroom'. He considers them as 'practical ways' to facilitate language learning because students are adept in using mobile phones. As Kreshen and Brown (2007) [17] suggest more exposure to target language and more practice or 'time on task' will lead to the language acquisition, more the time the mobile phones are held by the learners for language learning they minimise the separation between the classroom and outside world that their fluency in the language gets improved. The use of mobile phones give students control over their own learning. Students control the medium while teachers, by elaborating how best to use the medium provide a blueprint for autonomous learning, especially during the wide range of daily social activities where mobile phones are most likely to be used. Since not all the students possess smart phones, Reinders says he made the class into different groups based on the availability of smart phones with required mobile apps for in class learning.

His practical ways to mobile learning make sense because many ideas are already followed in the learning process in schools and colleges. He suggests note taking as a good idea while listening to mobile for learning and texting it to the teachers via phone to the teachers for correction. Instead of giving regular homework the teacher can ask the students to find specific language forms like common nouns, past perfect tense, formulaic expressions etc., the student who gives more of the specific forms would win. Students can take picture of the texts by using the

camera features of their mobile phones and can upload them either in the Flickr account or transfer in a computer and upload them from there.

The teacher may use the voice record memo features to record language from media outlets. This gives the teacher an opportunity to analyse the language, discuss where they were collected and provide feedback. The voice record memo features may be used to record conversations outside the classroom. It gives the opportunity to use the language as much as possible. Using the text message servicing to reinforce vocabulary learning and retaining is another advantage. This text messaging can also be used for circular writing. Tandem learning through text messaging is another novel idea. This will help the learners with different mother tongue to learn each other's language. Reinders further wishes the mobile phone to be used for blogging and microblogging on Twitter. The use the mobile phone for social networking, using the sites such as Twitter, Face book and My Space could give ample opportunity for language exchange.

Reinders adds the use the mobile phone for 'phlogging', which is a new innovation that encourages individual speaking by calling a number and leaving a message at the website. Some programs like www.ipadio.com automatically transcribe the recording. This proves to be a kind of task based learning to improve students' communication skills. The university teachers can make this task based mobile learning a research project in ESL classes in Indian universities to assess the mobile impact on language learning. Mobile phones can be used to distribute listening and reading materials - which is a practice in our institute as well. The voice memo recorder, notes, calendar features can be used to keep a portfolio, record communication break downs and misunderstandings. This will help the learners to reflect on their use of language and have control over their language learning. The students' comprehension can be assessed and feedback can be given. Advanced learners can collect research data on their mobile phones. Further, for better understanding of mobile phone use in ESL contexts of India, the teachers need to read articles like that of Reinders and those of many other researchers from China and Taiwan; equipping themselves for effective mobile assisted

language teaching apart, they can monitor young learners' mobile learning with confidence.

6. CONCLUSION

The teachers have many complaints against the use of mobile phones in classrooms as economically weaker students lack access to mobile phones and many cannot afford to have smart phones and paid apps because of their cost and the monthly recurring expenses on wireless services. Noise and disruption in class and privacy considerations and increased teacher work load are some other reasons for viewing mobile use negatively. However, the utility and the students' interest in the devices and apps make the mobile use quite rewarding in terms of fun filled environment inside and outside classroom that offers a stress free environment for the learner to take control of his learning autonomously and enthusiastically. The positive indications in the use of technology are a sure motivation for the teachers and learners to include them in the second language learning. Thus integration of technology in the communicative language class offers live language presentations which bring in an element of proximal environment in the classroom; it ensures consistency and perseverance in the instructional procedure.

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