"Mobile Phones in the Classroom"

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ABSTRACT

The very first thing that teachers, say on the first day of class is "turn off your mobile phones". Mobile devices have been banned as a disruptive technology in the classroom (LTS, 2007). Recent investigations show however that mobile phones are a potential technology in the students' pocket. For instance, Lynn (2006) outlines how this small machine can be used as a learning tool. This paper looks into this newly developing view on mobile phoning in the classroom, present reasons as to why it can not be underestimated, as well as discuss the risks involved.

Keywords: mobile technology, PDA's, pod casting, m-learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The arrival of each new education technology daunts educators, teachers, and educational institutes as to its relevance and application to the classroom? When iPods were released in the market a few years ago, a similar battle was raged. ".. [it] sucks time, energy, and resources like a black hole: And now, with cell phones, although the stakes seem much higher, the fundamental argument is the same: disruptive, time consuming and at times,
a necessary evil (Pogue, 2008). A great deal of research, alongside numerous discussions, debates and forums have been conducted on several complex issues surrounding mobile phones and young people. On one end of the spectrum are evidences pointing to the positive impact of mobile technology on the life of the youth; on the other end are those that focus on the myriad forms of mobile phone misuse and ""Mobile Disruption." (Funk, 2004). All things considered, personal mobile technology has changed the educational systems in Europe, in the US and in most parts of the world.

This paper reviews studies that justify the usefulness of mobile phones in the large scale of the educational setting, the school, as well as in the classroom environment. It also aims to examine the
functions of mobile technology in the language classroom and the problems involved.

2. WHAT'S MOBILE LEARNING?

Keegan (2006) defines mobile learning as the provision of education and training using mobile devices such as Personal Digital

Assistants (PDAs), smart phones and mobile phones. The justification of mobile learning comes from the concept of distance education; "… It is not technologies with inherent pedagogical qualities that are successful in distance education, but technologies that are generally available to citizens". Distance education, if we recall, is the provision of education and training at a distance by open universities or institutions in a non-conventional way. It is conducted through a different set of courseware, which includes multi-media packages: print. CD Roms, audio, video and the internet. As a type of distance learning, mobile learning is an off-shoot of, but different from its predecessor, e-learning, which is defined as the provision of education and training electronically through the WWW outside the classroom walls. Thus, while e-learning is based on functionality, m- learning is based on mobility, a characteristic that uses devices that are small, friendly, handy as well as cheap, and which people from different walks of life can constantly and easily use.

3. LEARNING CONSEQUENCES

(1) Mobile devices in educational settings

Mobile technology has been used as educational aid in various forms.

① Full learning course modules

Educational and research projects by the European Commission have played an important role in the spread and success of mobile education in various countries. For example, majority of university students enrolled in distance education in South Africa who had neither a computer nor e-mail, and therefore could not avail of e-learning were able to enroll and get a degree using mobile phones.

② Academic support

Universities and colleges were able to reduce the number of drop out rates by sending messages to students who were at risk of dropping out. Personalized messages seemed more effective than timely and costly counseling methods. Similarly, other universities in Europe could significantly reduce the number of dropouts through a teaching and staff support system using the SMS. Students were immediately informed about changes in schedule, room locations, test dates and venues, and many important events. An even more advanced method of mobile learning was done at another university, where videopodcasting was used to send lectures which students missed, to the students' mobile phones.

③ Administrative tool

Mobile learning has been justified by the thousands of messages sent out by universities throughout the world to the mobile phone of students. Messages can be both administrative as well as for academic support. Time-consuming tasks and repetitive announcements and notices are delegated to students' mobile phones. In most universities in Japan, as well as in other countries in Asia, (Katz, 2005) students use

mobile phones to check attendance, enter libraries, buy food, prove identity, and seek support for academic as well as personal life problems.

④ Connectivity

Research has also shown that aside from school administrative uses, mobile phones connect students with teachers and other students in and outside of the classroom, in terms of dealing with class assignment issues, retrieving class schedule and arranging or re-arranging meetings. Furthermore, mobile phones were found to be effective not only in terms of time and cost management; it also increased teachers' feeling of security of teachers of children with visual disabilities. (Trotter, 2002).

(2). In-class Uses of Mobile Phones

The advantages and successes of mobile devices as a learning tool have been significant. Some of them will be discussed here.

① TV Remote Framework

BAR, Tews and Robling (2005) introduced the TV remote framework and mobile phone client which offer teacher-student and student -student interaction during large lecture classes. Interaction and feedback, which are necessary components of learning, have posed a serious problem in large lecture classes in the universities. It has been approached in different ways but had hardly been solved. With the mobile phone client system in the classroom, students are directed to different types of interaction, such as questions, comments, joining in

quizzes or polls offered by the teacher. These interaction types are shown on the students' mobile screen, and are planned and controlled by the teacher. This software can be downloaded on students' mobile phones. For a concrete prototype for mobile phone-based interaction, readers are directed to the authors' work on "Improving Feedback and Classroom Interaction Using Mobile Phones." Other interaction systems like the ClassInHand (2003), which allows students to answer quiz questions and send text messages to the teacher, EduClick (Liu et al, 2003) which is based on a set of infrared receiver and remote controller for each student and Classroom Presenter System (Simon et al, 2004) which is said to facilitate active learning in the classroom. The success of these approaches however, depends on the availability of a number of devices, and is clearly not possible for most teachers.

② Course modules on PDA'S

Keegan (2006) reports the development of a 5-6 mobile learning as a system of academic support. Academic summaries and difficult parts of a course, and other materials for test preparations are sent to students' mobile phones. Similarly, NKI, a Norwegian institution, has been successful in developing course materials for PDA's, using Microsoft Reader Works.

③ Podcasting

The principle of pod casting allows one to listen to radio programs or events whenever and wherever he chooses, through

the use of a mobile device. A pod cast is a series of digital-media files which are distributed over the Internet using syndication feeds for playback on. Pod casting has become increasingly popular in education. Podcasts enable students and teachers to share information. Initially, podcasts attracted people's attention because it allows people to distribute their own radio-style on the web.

Pod casting has become increasingly popular in education, primarily because it allows students and teachers to share information quickly and more efficiently. In the language classroom, podcasts have been argued as an efficient way to allow listening to a new language to take place anywhere. The teacher can create pod cast activities using an MP3 file, from where students listen by clicking online, or have them delivered automatically to play on their PC's, or PDA's.

Pod casts allow for learning a new vocabulary or grammar, or unit of work. The teacher records for students, some listening or comprehension tasks they can do at home. The students can practice transactional dialogues with the teacher with as many times as they need, outside class. Inversely, students can record a section or summary of a lesson, or even create their own course / material in the classroom.

Pod casts have also been used in speaking classes such as Presentation classes as well as speaking assessment. The Learning and Teaching Scotland homepage introduces a lot of modern languages blogs and MFLE pod casts. It contains audio downloadable audio file archives and provides several useful hints on the use of mobile technology. (MFLE- How to pod cast)

④ Mobile phones in the LL class

One well-known experiment in the language classroom was conducted by Lynn is called the verbcast. Lynn recorded exercises on irregular verbs on the computer for students to learn. Students, who were invited to participate, recorded themselves chanting the verbs on their mobile phones. The results showed that the method helped students' pronunciation and test scores. In another class, Lynne asked students to use their phones to record speaking test. It was found that those who had listened to the recordings benefited from the experience. This project however was limited to a small area and was accessible only to a few students.

⑤ Other basic mobile phone uses

Other features of mobile phones which could be explored for their potential use in the classroom include the following. Basic uses of the mobile phone diary allows disorganized students to note down the deadline of their tasks

For timed exercises, the teacher can get one person in each group to keep time on a task

by using their stopwatch or countdown.

The dictionary is one of the most common functions that can be of immediate help to students during EL classes. Although limited, the amount of dictionary materials contained in mobile phones can substitute for expensive high tech electronic dictionary.

⑥ As a supplementary teaching aid

The voice recording function of mobile phones can be used to record students' speeches, or to record vocabulary and/or pronunciation exercises. Recorded student speeches, which are given as assignments, can then be sent to the school by transferring data from the phone to the computer. Recorded parts of the lesson can be downloaded on the computer, using fixed line Internet, and then be transferred to the mobile phone. This makes it possible for students to practice and / or do the exercises in the bus, in the train, or anywhere they have the time to.

Mobile phone can be used to send assignments as simple word files. Audio files need extra device and cost much to send from the students' individual phone. Smart phones usually have the internet function which ordinary mobile phones do not.

(3) The mobile as a disruptive device

Although the internet generated positive speculation about its potential effects on education, the mobile phone was identified as a source of disruption, delinquency, and even crime. Lynn (2006) however stresses that there are no health and safety or child protection issues in using mobile phones in class. The teacher should be aware of risks and set firm guidelines as to the amount and extent of classroom use. Mobile phones are just technology that can be used with. Using it in the classroom for a purpose is teaching children to use technology responsibly. To avoid misuse, it behooves the teacher to establish clear rules as to when the phones should be turned on and off.

Mobile phones are a power in the students' pockets. The potentials in mobiles are difficult to ignore, they could make a difference in language learning.

4. CONCLUSION

The mobile phone in itself has limited functions that will allow for its maximum use in the classroom. While there is huge amount of technical research and business investments in wireless and mobile technology, the body of empirical studies on mobile phones as a teaching-learning tool is lacking. The trend in focus is on other devices that can be used wirelessly such as PDA's, smart phones, tablet computers and wireless game terminals, and the like.

There are several reasons to this, some of which include the following. Foremost is the cost it will entail on the part of students to download and transmit data via their

individual mobile phones, without a corresponding system of support from the schools. The present system allows the schools to directly send messages to students' phones, but the cost for individuals to access to the school is a serious one. Making mobile learning for all will deal with funding inadequacies, as well as technical problems with files and applications, transfer systems and system availability and compatibility, software and machine availability, and network.

On top of this all, there is the problem of teacher willingness and readiness to use this machine as an aid to learning. So far, the results of classroom research as well as current experiments are, however, promising.

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