

Research Paper

The Use of Mobile Phones in the English Language Classroom.

Prof. S.J. Ghotekar.
K.T.H.M. College, Nashik,
Maharashtra.

ABSTRACT

ICT (Information and Communication Technology) is used worldwide to increase access to, and improve the relevance and quality of education. The traditional classroom, teacher, textbooks, blackboard can no longer satisfy the needs of generations of students used to handle technological tools since their childhood. One of the most recent and innovative technological device is the mobile phone which represents a revolution in education. It gives the opportunity to learn "in motion", making the learning process more appealing, interesting and motivating. It can be applied to different learning methodologies and be used to help disengaged students and students and students with disabilities.

This study reveals how a teacher of English can use mobile phones in the second language classroom. There is an interesting literature and experiences about the use of mobile phones in education.

Introduction:

One of the most notable changes during the past few decades relates to the way English has become increasingly global. With the growing popularity of the English Language, achieving mastery over English has become a need of our students. English has become a passport for success in today's world.

These days it seems mobile phones are used everywhere by everyone, which leads to the obvious question: How can mobile phone technology support learning in the second language classroom? The answer is "in a number of ways" because mobile phones come with ever-increasing functions that most students are adept at using.

There is an interesting literature and experiences about the use of mobile phones in education. Among the e-learning tools, m-learning can represent a peculiar way of doing, learning according to Keegard (1); can represent a sort of revolution of e-learning, a natural process from distance learning and e-learning. M-learning can enhance learning by putting students in a real context and make the process of learning more interesting and motivating. Students may maximize their acquisition of skills, competencies, may optimize their time of studying. They learn really and immediately, everywhere, in any time. Most of the activities will work with most mobile phones and do not require special knowledge or additional software or hardware.

Mobile- assisted Language Learning:

Recent interest in the potential for mobile phones and other portable devices to support learning and teaching has been driven by the fact that mobile phones are relatively cheap and increasingly powerful. Another benefit is that learners are used to working with them, often more so than with computers. Thornton Houser (2003) report that young Japanese learners prefer to use mobile phones for many activities, from e-mailing to reading books. Research on the

use of mobile phones for the delivery of vocabulary materials to English learners in Taiwan shows that students enjoy using their phones because of easy access to materials and the ability to practice any time and anywhere; in addition, some students like the screen size limitations, which make the amount of content more manageable than that of other teaching materials.

There are several pedagogical reasons to consider using mobile phones in the second language classroom. Most importantly, phones are social tools that facilitate authentic and relevant communication and collaboration among learners. This makes them an ideal tool to support. Situated learning theory, which states that learning, is more likely to take place when information is contextually relevant and can be put to immediate use. For example, second language learners can use mobile technology to access relevant vocabulary and expressions while at a bank opening an account, to look up movie reviews while at the theater, or to discuss weekend plans with an English speaking friend. Since mobile phones are part of students' everyday routines; they help minimize the separation between the classroom and the outside world. Any tool that can increase students' access to the language will contribute greatly to their progress. Another compelling argument for using mobile phones in the classroom is that they give students control over their own learning. Students control the medium, and 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.

The powerful features and functions of mobile devices can offer teachers great potential and feasibility for educational use. Prensky (2004) rightly comments, "Cell phones are not just communication devices sparking new modalities of interaction between people, but like all communication and computing devices, cell phones can be used to learn" (P.5).

The two psychologists, Beverly Plester and Clare Wood have observed that the younger the age at which the kids receive the mobile phones, the better is their ability to read words and identify patterns of sound in speech. Stanford University has been using integrated mobile phones in a

Please cite this Article as : Prof. S.J. Ghotekar , The Use of Mobile Phones in the English Language Classroom : Golden Research Thoughts (March ; 2012)

Spanish learning programme. Duke University encourages students to record their voice on the cell phone and later on teachers provide feedbacks on their pronunciation and intonation. Applied linguists agree on little when it comes to theories for explaining language learning, but one thing seems clear more exposure to the target language and more practice, or time on task, explains most of the variation in students' success.

Mobile Technology:

M-learning represents a challenge for students and teachers. The possibility of using mobiles in education has rapidly grown since the last decades along with other technological tools such as employee, businessmen, students are using mobile phones, so this kind of technology can modify the way of doing education.

It is sort of revolution because it could change the relationship between students and the technological object, create new learning environments and be synchronous and ubiquitous.

The Characteristics of Using these Tools in details :

•Mobile Phones –

One can bring them everywhere, they are ubiquitous, one can register everything, write, see videos and so on.

•Bluetooth –

A wireless tool enabling a range of e-devices to connect and communicate simultaneously in proximity (from 10-100 meters). It is used to exchange data, voice transmissions, print and fax, synchronize PDA, laptops.

•Smartphones –

Mobile phones with the some functions as a personal computer by which users can keep everything organized, views, edit documents and synchronize documents with laptops, Pcs.

Examples of M-learning:

Application of M-learning in the teaching of foreign languages.

An interesting application of m-learning has been carried out by the Stanford Learning Lab for the teaching of the English Language. Students were given quizzes, glossaries, interactive audio-files, to improve their pronunciation and language competencies, skills.

Beside this, it is relevant to cite two mobile language learning experiences that were developed by Thornton and Houser in 2003 for the acquisition of English vocabulary and idioms on mobile phones and PDAs.

M-learning for disengaged students.

M-learning has been used to help those students who are outside formal education, who have abandoned their studies, teenagers no longer motivated by traditional curricula and to prevent the risk of leaving school. A project carried out in UK, Italy and Sweden shows students using mobile phones and Smartphones to send text messages, keep in touch with friends, play computer games, and learn by doing.

M-learning for disabled students

M-learning can also offer educational opportunities to impaired students in order to overcome some of the barriers encountered in a traditional learning. Motor impaired students may access to PDA's and mobile phones more easily because they are light and easy to handle.

Visual impaired learners can use PDAs with text to speech software installed.

Deaf learners can take advantages of the rich visual content of PDAs such as photos, images.

Preparation:

Before asking students to pull out their cell phones in class; you need to have a plan. As with any other teaching activity, ask yourself what you are trying to achieve. Are you focusing on speaking, listening, reading, writing or some combination of the four skills and start by identifying a specific teaching objective and then structure a mobile phone activity around that. In my own teaching I have sometimes asked students work together in small groups and share one phone that had the required capabilities.

The following ideas for using mobile phones for second language learning generally focus on developing the four skills and in many cases integrate speaking with listening and reading with writing. The material and activities can be modified to conform to different syllabi and are easily adaptable for different ages, learning levels, and interests.

One of the main challenges for the teacher who seeks to help build the learners' word stock for both receptive and productive purposes is to discover and put to good use the many different ideas and devices to help build a 'web of associations' of different kinds. Enriching vocabulary is an important element of language teaching. The teacher can encourage students to use sites like 'mytoday.com' or 'english.mandir.com'. The students can receive five words everyday on their mobile, where their meaning and usage is given. The teacher can motivate students to frame sentences using these words. Today dictionaries and thesaurus are also available on the cell phones and students should be encouraged to make use of them.

A study by Thornton and Houser (2003) shows that Short Message Service (SMS) text messages can be used to send out vocabulary items at spaced intervals, thus increasing students retention. For example, you could text the words covered in class to encourage students to review them outside the college context. By sending out the words multiple times, you increase the chances that students will remember them.

It is always said that it is important to be a good listener in order to be a good speaker. Students can record interviews to conversations they engage in outside the classroom. Obviously students will have to consider privacy issues and impress upon learners the importance of obtaining their interlocutors' permission before they do interviews, either with each other or native speakers. Students can play the interviews and conversations in class for feedback and discussion. Although we used iPods with a microphone, the same task is now easily accomplished with mobile phones.

One of the easiest ways to use a mobile phone for learning is to record samples of the target language by taking pictures. Students can take pictures of English text by using the Camera feature on their mobile phones. They can then make a collage of the images or upload the pictures to a shared Flickr account (www.flickr.com). If students do not have a data connection, they can transfer the pictures to a computer and upload them from there.

The teaching of grammar has become the most controversial subject in second language teaching. With the help of a mobile phone, a teacher can conduct different games in the class to teach grammar as they can be interesting

and at the same time challenging for students. For example, in case of a smaller group, a teacher can use the text message function of a mobile phone and send one sentence of Past Perfect Tense (for example; He had seen a tiger. The students will use and send a lot of sentences to another students.

The reality is that many students do not like to write. If students are not ready to write essays, letters, they can practice with shorter texts to develop their writing skills. One activity is circular writing, where students create a story together by contributing one text message at a time. Each student writes a sentence or two and then sends this on to the next student, who adds another message and so on until the story is complete. We can experiment with different text types such as narratives or shorter forms such as news reports, instructions and warnings.

Using phones for speaking may not seem like an original idea, but one way to encourage reluctant students to start speaking is to establish a language exchange. In this activity two students who want to learn each others native language talk in that target language for half of the time. This activity may be expensive unless students can use Skype on their mobile phones.

Some programs like the currently free www.ipado.com will even automatically transcribe the recording. This is an excellent task-based learning tool for students to update oral and written reports about a given project.

The teacher could download reading materials for our students. There are numerous sites with free reading material, including material, including project Gutenberg (www.gutenberg.org), which also has many audio books available. Many books are now published in mobile friendly formats. As one exercise, the teacher can ask students to use the voice recorder to take notes about the book while they are reading. The books, along with students' reflections can then be discussed during the next class.

Conclusion:

All the ideas above allow us to offer increased opportunities for language learning by taking advantage of a tool that students are intimately familiar with and carry around at all times. Though mobile phones have their unique features and functions, we need to accept the fact that they also have some problems. Whether we like it or not, we teachers are part of this digital world, and so it is hoped that teachers of English would make an optimum use of mobile phone technology in their language classes. The uses of a mobile are manifold and a mobile can create rich environment for language learning. There are wide varieties of ways that a mobile phone can be used in the classroom. M-learning would be an enjoyable and enriching experience for our students.

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