Mobile Phone – An Advanced Tool for English Language Teaching and Learning In and Outside of the Classroom

Boddepalli Sanyasi Rao
Research Scholar, JNTU Kakinada, East Godavari, Andhra Pradesh

Abstract: The advancement of technology changes every nook and cranny of the human life and existence. Technology (especially Information Technology) entered into the field of language learning and teaching in the form of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) and it caused the establishment of language laboratories in almost all the levels of language teaching - learning process. In the contemporary world, mobile plays a crucial role in learning English language and it has created a new concept of M – learning or MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning). There is no doubt that MALL changes the environment of language teaching and learning experiences and facilitates both the teacher and the learner in the language acquisition as well. Mobile has become an integral part in the students’ life as mobiles are useful in N of ways to the students. This paper would like to flaunt how a mobile can be changed from a communication device to a tool for English language teaching and learning experiences in and out of the Classroom. The noticeable features of mobile phones which facilitate the learners for language learning are talked about.

Keywords: Information technology, Language laboratories, M-learning, communication device, Mobile Assisted Language Learning

Introduction: It is highly appreciated that the method of language learning and teaching is changing because of Information and Communication Technology (ITC) which is overwhelming and is quite present in English language classrooms. Rubin (1975) pointed out that good learners must employ out-of-class learning strategies that help them use the language. These days students are addicted to their mobile devices. Why don’t we make use of this opportunity to teach them English language? Mobile provides the students with a myriad of opportunities for language learning. It is the onus of the teacher to direct the students to use the mobiles for language learning as it enhances both learning and teaching methodologies. Mobile phones with the qualities of mobility, flexibility and availability reach the learners’ hand to be used anytime and anywhere. Ally (2009) describes m-learning as “the process of using a mobile device to access and study learning materials to communicate with fellow students, instructors or institution” (Ally, 2009 Ali & Irvine, 2009). M - Learning consists of smart phones, cell phones, laptops, PCs, tabs and any personal media player. Though there are of a plethora of mobile devices that can be included, we bound our survey to personal mobile devices, especially mobile phones, used for either formal or informal way of English language learning. Peter (2007) states that the mobility of these devices enables ubiquitous learning in formal and informal settings as we don’t need fixed locations for study, and consequently our way of learning becomes different. M – Learning is an additional method, as CALL that can assist and improve the learners’ learning experience as mobiles are fulfilling all the functions done by personal computers.

Literature review:

M – Learning or the use of mobile technologies has been observed as an important realm in the teaching-learning experiences. With advent of smart phones a new domain begins in the language teaching –learning experiences in and out of the classroom. M –Learning, which takes place by using a mobile device has become an important tool for language learning. In 2007, Kratcoski stated “ with the wide spread of mobile technology, learning can occur in anytime and anyplace even if teachers and students are not in the same physical or temporal location” (Swan, Kratcoski et al. 2007, p. 12). Many find M – Learning is useful even to the reluctant learners. It gives a broad scope for the learners to acquire a language. In some cases, learners go for smart phones to learn English language rather than to communicate.

Vavoula and Sharples (2002) clarify that the nature of learning is closely linked to the concept of
mobility in three different ways: “learning is mobile in terms of space, i.e. it happens at the workplace, at home, and at places of leisure; it is mobile between different areas of life, i.e. it may relate to work demands, self-improvement, or leisure and it is mobile with respect to time, i.e. it happens at different times during the day, on working days or on weekends” (p.152). M – Learning gives the learners a space for self-learning and confidence. Levy and Kennedy (2005) use Short Message Service (SMS) for sending vocabulary words and idioms, definitions, and example sentences for Italian learners in Australia. The BBC World Service’s Learning English section creates a similar program and offers English lessons via SMS in Francophone West Africa and China (Godwin-Jones, 2005). There we find some limited information regarding M – Learning in the internet as it is a new dimension to see through. Chen, Hsieh, and Kinshuk (2008) conduct a research on the effects of using mobile phones for the delivery of vocabulary materials on English learners in Taiwan. These studies highlight the importance of phones in language learning and how learners enjoy their learning experiences.

Historical Background:

As matter of fact, in India and some parts of the world, information technology in education begins with radio. At the beginning, lessons were telecasted through radio (Akasvani in Hindi) in India. Later with the advancement of information technology, lessons were telecasted through television (SIET in India). Some state governments in India implemented the tele – lessons in Government schools. In the time being, the televisions were replaced with personal computers. Soon after, it caused the establishment of language labs in schools and colleges (in primary and higher education) irrespective of government and private sectors. In the contemporary world, radios, televisions, personal computers and basic mobiles are trodden by smart phones with their innumerable features. In the recent years, an incredible growth has been tasted in the use of mobile phones. Now it is the era of smart phones and we hardly find students without smart phones.

Twarog and Pereszlenyi-Pinter (1988) used telephones to facilitate distant language learners with feedback and assistance. In 1996, instructors at Brigham Young University-Hawaii taught a distance-learning English course from Hawaii to Tonga via telephone and computer (Green, Collier, & Evans, 2001). And Dickey (2001) organized teleconferencing to teach an English conversation course in South Korea. One of the first projects using mobile phones in language learning was developed by the Stanford Learning Lab, which explored their use in language teaching (Brown, 2001). Thornton and Houser (2002; 2003; 2005) also developed several innovative projects using mobile phones to teach English at a Japanese university. They report that young Japanese learners prefer to use mobile phones for many activities, from emailing to reading books. Another program by and Houser (2003) utilized a classroom polling system, EduCALL (inspired by EduClick), to survey students during class in order to determine vocabulary retention. (MJAL 4:2 Summer 2012 ISSN 0974-874, page 83)

Objectives of M – Learning:

1. To simplify language learning through the use of familiar technology.
2. To familiarize the LSRW skills.
3. To enable learning experience possible anywhere and anytime
4. To foster the use of English language for communication.
5. To facilitate the learning process as students have the possibility to explore, analyze, discover, and choose activities which are real and meaningful.
6. To enhance interaction between real and virtual environments.
7. To promote self-learning and learning by doing & fun.
8. To create learner-centered approach.

English Language Skills:

There are of four language skills – Listening Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW), which are categorized into two i.e. Receptive and Productive skills. Receptive Sills are listening and reading, which provide input to the mind. Productive Skills are speaking and writing, which serves the purpose of output. Based on the need of the learners, smart phones can be used for acquiring any one of the skills mentioned, namely receptive skills and productive skills. Along with these, smart phone provides the learners with facility of learning vocabulary, grammar, verbal ability, etc… which will be useful for international tests like TOEFL, IELTS, etc… There are of many applications which serve the purpose of learning both receptive and productive skills of English language.
Salient Features of M – Learning and its usages in language learning:

**Voice Recorder:** Every smart phone includes the option of ‘Voice Recorder’ which is a very useful for learning a language. Learners can record their classroom lectures and listen to them back at home. It serves the purpose of the very basic skill of listening. It promotes the pronunciation of the learners. For instance, the learners read a paragraph aloud and record it while reading. They listen to their voice back and draw the faults in their pronunciation. It helps them to how they pronounce the words and better them. When they attend guest lectures, they can record and listen to back as and when it requires. It indirectly improves their listening skill.

**SMS (Short Message Service):** It is useful in and out of the classroom to engage learners in language learning experience, when it is prudentially used. It improves the writing skills of the learners. Even students find interesting in messaging among themselves. Moreover it is cheaper than making calls to their peers. It can be sent even to the groups and communicate the message. For example, the teacher of English can request the students to narrate a story in SMS after his oral explanation of it. The students are bifurcated into different groups and instructed to complete the story. The learners message among themselves and complete the story. Grammar can also be taught by the teacher through SMS services. Teacher can send a word with missing letters and students are asked to fill the missing letters of the particular word. Likewise it can be used for silent letters too. Likewise teacher for instance, sends a tense rule and learners are asked to revert with the examples. The BBC Company once launched one program to help learning English via SMS in that “Users in the world's largest single mobile telephone market will receive a daily text message on their mobile containing an English phrase together with the Chinese translation” (British Broadcasting Company [BBC], 2003, n. p.).

But the learners of English language must be careful regarding the language they use. Most of the SMS senders use SMS language to type their text faster. For example instead of goodnight, they write ‘GNT’, for because - BCZ, for morning – MNG and many more. This is not a good practice because it may kill the spelling skills and sometimes it creates ambiguity to the reader.

**MP3/MP4 Players:** it is a staple electronic device to enhance the listening skills. Many audio books are available in the internet for free download. They can listen to them and improve their listening skills in which most of the Indian students lag behind, though it is the primary skill of language learning (Aspiring Minds Survey - 2014). Even in the journeys and free times, they can use this opportunity to better their language skill.

**E – Dictionaries:** The smart phones cater a great many e – dictionaries to the learners from all the reputed companies. Some smart phones have the default e – dictionaries. Wherever and whenever, they have a doubt regarding meaning of the word, they can immediately get it cleared. Some android e – dictionary apps (like Word Learner) have the facility of sending two or more words to the learners at their convenient time in a day. We find apps for language thesaurus, collocation dictionaries, Idioms and phrases, phrasal verbs, etc… It empowers their power of vocabulary. Learners can have quick reference and Audio playback of sounds of words, phrases etc…

**Camera as a tool for language learning:** Every smart phone has the feature of camera, which can be judiciously used for language learning. For instance: the teacher of English has a snap of their town and asks the students to explain where the place is. It is a kind of ABLT (Activity Based Language Teaching), where students find some interest in it. Sometimes teacher can ask the students to have a photo of a building, place or a creative picture, and the rest of the students are asked to describe about it.

**Language Games:** There are of many apps for language games like crossword, puzzle word, etc…. Many students find themselves interested in games but it could be language games, which will increase their language experience.

**Apps for English Language:** We find some ‘Verbal Ability Apps’ for the intra-national and international level like GRE, TOEFL, IELTS, where English play a vital role. Recently some apps are found for the online examination, conducted by the MNCs like TCS. There are of some apps for language learning for example ‘Hello English’.

**Memo:** It is one of the features in mobile that improves the writing and reading skills of the learners. For instance, if the learners have a beautiful idea while they are travelling or at leisure, they can write the same in memo and keep it for further development.

**Internet:** To learn English language, internet is the source of internet of things like Facebook,
WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, News, useful websites and so on with which learners can improve their language skills. Now-a-days, most of the students of English use YouTube to as a source to learn English language. We can find plenty of language learning material and get downloaded too. They follow Facebook every day and comment on their friends. It improves their writing skills. WhatsApp enhances the comprehension skills and writing skills too. But the learners must not suffer from the distractions in language learning.

Advantages and limitations:

Mobile Technology transforms the way we communicate, have our business, our socialization and many more. Mobile devices are very handy, smart, portable and compatible to use. A maximum number of students and teachers have access to mobile phones. Learning happens at any time of the day on working days or weekends and at any place. However, people use mobiles less as a mean of communication more as a tool for the language learning. Following are the advantages and limitations of M-learning as:

Advantages

1. Personalizing learners’ environment.
2. Providing learning experience outside the classroom.
3. Making learning experience enjoyable by recording, organizing over time
4. Provides an informal way of learning.
5. Effect the fear of language learning
7. Comfortable, handy, portable and compatible for learning.
8. Learning can be possible anywhere and anytime.

Limitations

1. Small screen size so eyes are vexed faster.
2. Limited memory size
3. Small and uncomfortable keyboards
4. Battery drains out faster when we use internet.
5. Smart phone costs us most
6. Fear of misplacement, oblivion, stolen or corrupted.
7. Difficulty to use mobile devices in noisy environments.
8. Poor network connectivity.

Conclusion:

M-Learning can be a potential replacement to the PC/laptop which is not always within reach. It shifts the learning experience from the teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. It has given a space for a new domain in language teaching learning i.e. MALL (Mobile Assisted language Learning). It is a proven fact that mobile phones can contribute to the field of learning in various ways. There still a large amount of information to be dug out. MALL is comparatively cheaper and it is within the reach of common man. Though it has innumerable benefits, it faces many shortcomings.

But some experts find mobile phone as a source of irritation, delinquency and even cause of crime. Even some researchers reveal that children should not be entertained with cell phones because “they don’t contribute to learning”. Mobile phones, using in the classroom would cause more distractions and interrupt teaching. Mobile phones could be produced with additional features for students to store information and learning stuff. Experts in mobile technology with the help of teachers and students will explore the alternative solution for the small screen size, uncomfortable keyboard, battery shortage and so on. Mobile phone games for sure are a pleasure for students. With the support and help of language experts’ instructional programs can be converted to games. Games, such as word shooting, cross word puzzling, etc… would be very useful to the learners because they can learn words while playing games. M-Learning has knowingly contributed in the realm of learning. M-Learning empowers students to enhance their literacy skills and to recognize their abilities. It can be used to enhance both self-learning and collaborative learning experiences. M-Learning promotes learners to work upon their hard spots and improve the areas where they lag behind. The judicious and controlled use of mobile phones may create interest among the learners and transform the learning experience as an enjoyable activity. M-Learning helps learners to enhance the learners’ self-esteem and self-confidence.

References:


9. MJAL 4:2 Summer 2012 ISSN 0974-8741 Mobile Phone Technology in English Teaching: Causes & Concerns by Naveen K Mehta Mobile Phone Technology in English Teaching: Causes & Concerns. Naveen K Mehta Reader & Head Communication Skills Department MIT, Ujjain (MP).

