Chapter 44

Mobile Devices as Effective Language Training Tools of Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

Students of this digital era are proficient users of various gadgets, and it is the responsibility of language teachers to tap that expertise for facilitating learning beyond the classroom. Teachers can offer training to enhance students' language skills with the help of mobile devices through which modules could be shared. It helps students to get adequate practice in using the language skills. A short study was conducted recently by the author with a few engineering students who received training in business English through mobile devices. This chapter explores the current study. It must be stated that this study was a continuation of the pilot study conducted, in which students were encouraged to record and share their presentations through mobile devices.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the World Wide Web is noteworthy and has created an awareness of advanced gadgets like mobile devices among youngsters (Cobcroft, Towers, Smith, & Bruns, 2006). Wikipedia in its article, 'Emerging technologies' defines the term as "contemporary advances and innovation in various fields of technology." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_technologies)

Students' awareness of emerging technologies is evident in students' increased ownership of various gadgets. Mobile devices are typically used for storing songs and videos and for social networking. However, it is unclear how many students use them as learning tools. It is the responsibility of target language teachers to create an opportunity to use them and promote language learning. Teachers who handle traditional classrooms need to integrate technology with teaching as it would help students to manage their learning process without being so dependent on the teachers. Considering these points, this article discusses a short study conducted in a tertiary level classroom and highlights the different ways by which language training could be facilitated in a

traditional classroom. It emphasizes a way to train students in language skills beyond the classroom with the help of devices like Smart phones, 3G Mobile phones, laptops and tablets.

BACKGROUND

Mobile learning, a relatively new concept, is becoming popular among teachers and learners. It refers to learning with the help of mobile or hand held devices such as mobile phones, iPods, iPads, Smart phones, mp3 players, PDA systems and notepads (Harriman, 2011). According to Brink (2011), mobile learning is the latest trend in learning. Robson (2003) quotes Quinn (2000) to define mobile learning as "the intersection of mobile computing and e-learning: accessible resources wherever you are, strong search capabilities, rich interaction, powerful support for effective learning, and performance-based assessment. E-Learning is independent of location in time or space" (p.1).

Tracing the evolution of mobile devices that go hand-in-hand with networking systems from 1G to 4G helps to clarify the impact of various devices on learning. Peter (2010), in his series of articles on 'Mobile Phones & Devices,' elaborates on the networking system. Considering the various devices introduced for domestic and commercial usage, it dates back to 1973 when Cooper first used a handheld mobile phone and that led to the launch of the 1G cellular network in Japan. This network helped users to have an 'international roaming' facility. However, in this cellular system microelectronics and advanced integrated circuits were not available. The introduction of 2G Mobile phones promoted the use of 'digital' communication methods, which in turn brought down the cost of the devices. The use of higher radio frequencies and digital connections encouraged more subscribers to use the network with lower radio transmission powers. The short

message service (SMS) was introduced in 1993 and that paved the way for delivering comprehensive data services. However, 2.5G technologies, which were introduced some time later, helped users to send and receive e-mails and surf the Internet. It further helped to deliver 'Wireless Application Protocol' services and multimedia messaging services. It is worthwhile to mention that 2.5G phones were considered to be the first generation of Smart phones, which serve as effective handheld personal computers. With the introduction of 2.5G phones, the first Blackberry was launched in 2002. However, in 2001 the first 3G networks also commenced commercial deployment, which increased the efficiency and speed of data transfer from cellular to other devices.

3G devices included Smart phones, iPhone, Google Android, iPad (a tablet device) and the Blackberry Bold. These devices are being used in large number nowadays by professionals and by students outside the classrooms. One of the unique features of the 3G network is that the data card can be plugged into a laptop computer, which enables it to be used as a mobile device. The network offers support by providing direct connectivity to 3G enabled netbooks too, as they come with a built-in sim card. It is worthwhile to mention that these 3G devices are equipped with powerful processors and have lot of storage capacity attached to them. The high-resolution screen, camera, built-in touch screen, loud speakers and Bluetooth facility are additional features of 3G model devices. In 2008, Google offered support to Smart phones by introducing an Open Source operating system called Android. The system permitted the integration of software with Google Applications, such as Maps, Calendar and Gmail. With the launch of the Apple iPad in 2010, mobile device users have been introduced to wireless industry too. Now finally, the world has seen 4G networks, which have eliminated circuit switched technology. It enhances mobile machine-to-machine communication, regardless

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