Chapter 7

Language Skills Training through Mobile Apps:
Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

With the advancement in technological tools and devices, language teachers can foster learning of communication skills through mobile devices. There is a growing interest among students to use the latest gadgets for getting connected with their peers. It must be admitted that the usage of these devices would bring in a real revolution in the teaching and learning process. It has been widely accepted that mobile learning promotes students' active participation. Teachers also now understand that one of their responsibilities is to create more opportunities to make their students practice language skills. Although numerous researches has been done in the field of English Language Teaching in India, research on mobile assisted language learning is still in an infancy stage. In this chapter, the author discusses the possibility of offering training through mobile apps, based on research she conducted recently.

INTRODUCTION

The use of mobile technology, one of the advanced technological tools is gaining popularity in the education sector. Mobile devices are handheld machines that are portable and easily accessible to the users. In other words, the main features of mobility and connectivity make these devices unique and the availability of wireless

network systems help users access learning materials anytime, anywhere. Teachers have now understood the need for using this emerging technology in their classroom and it is believed that the expertise in usage reflects their professional skill.

The reasons for adapting mobile technology for teaching and learning process could be attributed to the ubiquitous computing technology used in mobile devices. The term "ubiquitous" refers to omni presence or as "pervasive computing," the latter of which indicates the advancement in embedding microprocessors in everyday objects which would facilitate communication of information. According to TechTarget (2015), "Pervasive computing relies on the convergence of wireless technologies, advanced electronics and the Internet" (n. d.). It is believed that when the products are connected to the Internet, the data they generate are easily available to the users. To Jalil and Rahman (2012), ubiquitous computing permits "devices and systems to be integrated and embedded together with computing and communication systems through wireless transmission"(p.75). Evident with the prevalence of smartphones, it is possible to communicate with the pervasive computing technique. According to Chen, Huang and Hsu (2013), "Ubiquitous learning overcomes time and place limitations to allow engagement in reality-based learning applications through which they experience, explore, and develop problem solving skills, thus improving learner motivation" (p.1). Thus, it is believed that learners would show greater commitment to learning by using latest gadgets.

As Cobcroft, Towers, Smith & Burns (2006) stated, "A constant exposure to digital technologies, gadgets, games, and mobile devices has arguably evolved a new breed of student, the 'natives': those learners who think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors"(p.3). Moreover, "through ubiquitous learning, learners can form their own concepts and knowledge and take responsibility for their own behavior through learning methods based on constructionism" (Chen, Huang & Hsu., 2013. p.1). According to Wigmore (2013), a mobile application is "a software application developed specifically for use on small, wireless computing devices, such as smartphone and tablets" (n. d). Wigmore goes on to explain that applications are normally designed to suit the demands of the devices by considering the constraints; they may be categorized either as web-based or as native apps that are designed for a specific platform. Knowing this, Leuva (2014) believes that "mobile apps offer the most innovative ways to make learners engage and study" (p.1).

It is interesting to find that the designers of mobile application these days create educational apps for teachers to deliver learning content to students. According to Shuler, Winters & West (2013), apps would "become an important part of the mobile learning ecosystem" (p.14); they advocate the need for providing "seamless learning" which refers to uninterrupted learning in different environments. In such a scenario, learners understand the potential use of various kinds of technologies, use

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