Chapter 105

Net Generation Features that Enhance Mobile Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the results of research that aims to analyze the characteristics of the youth of the Net Generation that can promote learning when using mobile devices. The study was conducted in two campuses of a Mexican university in order to provide useful information for those who work with Mobile Learning. The results showed that characteristics such as communication, teamwork, decision making, positive attitudes towards technology, self-learning and collaborative work of the young Net are the ones that can be predominantly exploited to promote learning when developing Mobile Learning resources to be fully used by students with wireless mobile devices applications.

INTRODUCTION

At present, technological breakthrough has put multiple helping tools such as wired and/or wireless electronic devices at man's hands, which has gradually become an essential part of everybody's life. This has been going on for fewer than two decades and therefore, those beings born during this historical period have spawned a new generation of young people with very special characteristics and a new way of conceiving the world. These special kids are known as the Net generation and so used to handling technology in an almost innate form, which is in itself one of the many features that make them worth studying. According to Beyers (2009: 220), "the Net Generation is defined as the population of about 90 million young people who have grown up or are growing up in constant contact with digital media and have already been defined by academics as smart but impatient". They are also believed to demand results almost immediately and carry a great deal of electronic devices.

Besides, being technology so important among the Net Generation, the use of electronic devices such as mobile phones and video and audio players can be seen as learning tools, which gives significance to a project called Mobile Learning. Mobile learning "as an educational activity makes sense only when the technology in use is fully mobile and when the users of the technology are also mobile while they learn" (El-Hussein & Cronje, 2010: 14). In that sense, one of the problems found while embarking on this study was to mark off the characteristics of this generation and to investigate whether these features were useful or not to students' academic life, and whether the new communication and entertainment mobile devices and all its resources increased the quality level of students' learning who use them for this purpose.

In order to find possible answers to these concerns, the following research question was asked:

Which predominant characteristics of the Net Generation can be exploited to promote learning when using mobile devices?

This question led to establish the following objectives:

1. To identify the personal, technological, social and didactic characteristics of young undergraduates who belong to the Net Generation, in order to know how those features can be exploited to promote learning.
2. To identify the mobile learning resources that can be used in wireless devices by young students.
3. To link mobile learning resources with life and learning characteristics of the Net Generation, in order to potentiate and enhance the quality of their professional training.

This chapter is divided into seven sections: the first one presents the theoretical framework which firstly discussed about the Net Generation, that is, who and how these generation of young people and/or their relation with technology and their own learning are. Secondly, mobile learning and devices are defined, and finally which their resources are for the Net Generation. In the second section, the methodological approach and a selected sample of population were presented in order to apply the instruments and techniques used in data collection. In the third section, the results obtained by the instruments were briefly and objectively presented. In the fourth section, an analysis of the results was made and their findings are shown. The fifth section provides an answer to the research question and conclusions are reached. In the seventh section, recommendations and suggestions are presented. Finally, as closure to this chapter, some final considerations are made.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Net Generation

Adolescence or youth could mean a period where the person experiences profound changes, both at the bodily and cognitive levels. With regard to their relationship with technology in the first instance and, secondly, to their social relationships facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT), it is said that child, adolescence and youth share a series of generational characteristics which are to be known or recognized as part of the digital world. In other words, those kids, which are immerse into a cyber-environment that makes them almost innately acquire special skill to smoothly handle electronic

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