Chapter 14
The Usability of Mobile Devices in Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

Thanks to technological developments, distance education helped new techniques and strategies to emerge in the instruction field. However, these developments may cause problems about integration of the interaction between students and instructors. Communication is seen as one of the biggest problems. Instructors' online communications and their attitudes towards this process affect quality of teaching and learning processes. Other factors affecting this process are learning environment and its effective use. This study is designed to incorporate a mixed method with the aim of reflecting instructors' experiences about different communication techniques and learning environments. In scope of this research, the researchers planned a four-week process using the communication that the researchers have been establishing with Ege University Faculty of Education's instructors. The researchers will use different mobile devices and feedback methods for the process.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education, which is becoming widespread in Turkey as well as throughout the world, is a learning process. Distance education systems are linked to interactions created at different place and time periods by factors such as instructor, learner, material and resource (Özkul and Aydın, 2012). Distance education, which started with letters in Turkey, advanced itself with technological developments such as TV and radio's coming to the country, is undoubtedly intertwined with technology. There are significant similarities between using TV to reach and educate people when it was merely popular and using mobile devices these days along with technological developments in education. Devices such as TV and radio which are pioneers of "education in times of need, wherever and whenever you want" ideas lead to today's distance education understanding. With the technology constantly developing, the mobile devices gave an opportunity to support lifelong learning which is one of the most important benefits of distance education and initiated mobile learning. Academicians reached a consensus on the need for further research to understand mobile learning better (as cited in Crompton, 2013). There are different definitions of mobile learning in the literature, but an old definition may lose its validity with new research, because it is a field which consistently makes progress. This is why we should ask more questions to understand mobile learning better.

BACKGROUND

How Did Mobile Learning Emerge?

With population growth, the need for a new education method and an action grew as well. Topics such as equality and lifelong learning in education were affected positively by the advantages of mobile learning. After mobile learning emerged and people noticed its advantages, it became easier to enhance and spread mobile learning devices thanks to technological developments. With the advancements in mobile learning devices, indications for their use changed. Their wide spread usage makes them reasonable to use in education.

What Is Mobile Learning?

Mobile learning is one of the branches of distance education and it is directly affected from technological advancements. Due to the wide range of studies in mobile learning and its tools, different views emerged. Even though academicians have not reached a consensus about its definition, the existing definitions give an idea.

According to Quinn (2000), mobile learning is a subtopic of e-learning managed through portable digital devices, but to Shepherd (2001), mobile learning is not only electronic but also mobile. Looking at these definitions, we can see how science works cumulatively. First definition is focused on general terms but the latter emphasizes specific words.

To O'Malley (2003), mobile learning takes place when learners are not in a designated or adjusted setting and when learners benefit from mobile technologies' advantages and opportunities. This definition includes mobile learning tools, mobile environment and its advantages. It is more detailed than the

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