Welcome to the special edition of the *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning* devoted to papers exclusively selected from the 2011 IADIS Mobile Learning conference which was held in March 2011 in Avila, Spain. This conference series was inaugurated in Malta in 2005 and it is the longest standing annual international mobile learning conference after MLearn. The Avila edition was the 8th and received 134 submissions from authors from 36 countries representing most European nations and every other continent. The conference theme was Mobile Lifelong Learning (mL3).

The organisers intended to explore the synergies between mobile learning research and lifelong learning. In particular, there was interest in prompting the articulation of how the affordances of mobile technologies for lifelong learning (Sharples, 2000): portability, unobtrusiveness, persistence, intuitiveness, adaptability and ever-present availability; have been capitalised on within the context of lifelong learning. To further frame the conversation, lifelong learning was defined as “all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective” (European Commission, 2002, p. 7); which occurs predominantly in informal and too-rich environments; and frequently implies a collaborative activity (Fischer & Sugimoto, 2006).

The topics of the conference included pedagogical methods and theories for mlearning, social software for mlearning, gaming, simulations, and augmented reality for mlearning, mlearning in diverse settings ranging from formal to informal, educational and work based, user studies the development of tools, technologies and platforms, as well as speculative ideas regarding the future of mlearning.

This special edition contains five contributions. The first paper by Sam Rottenberg, Claire Lecocq, and Sébastien Leriche titled “Design and Evaluation of a Project-Based Learning Ubiquitous Platform for Universal Client: PBL2U,” presents a prototype of a project-based learning ubiquitous platform. The underling pedagogical objectives of the platform are to support the learning of project management while exposing users to lifelong learning skills. At a more technical level, the authors aspire to develop a platform that allows...
people to participate in the project regardless of the kind of mobile or desktop equipment they use, their network infrastructure and software. In line with the forementioned objectives, the paper describes the challenge and the proposed solution in terms of its functional scope, distributed and software architecture. The paper concludes with a small experimentation and proposing scenarios of application.

The second article, “Student Experiences with Mobile Electronic Updates from a Virtual Learning Environment” by Laura Crane, Phillip Benachour, and Paul Coulton reports on a study aimed at studying the potential benefits of mobile applications as assistive extensions of current virtual learning environments. In particular, the authors recount on their use of RSS and Twitter as multicasting and communicating widgets to attempt to sustain students’ motivation and engagement. Participants’ response to RSS was more positive that respond to Twitter and they showed a preference for temporal updates at specific times rather than real time.

The third contribution of this issue, “Designing a Mobile Application for Conceptual Understanding: Integrating Learning Theory with Organic Chemistry Learning Needs” by Sonal Dekhane and Mai Yin Tsoi presents “TsoiChem©”, a working prototype of a mobile app for a multi-touch device designed to increase conceptual understanding of organic chemistry. The paper describes the iterative development process undertaken aimed at leveraging multi-touch affordances of the device to support the students identify and understand common misconceptions. The three modes of the app: “Practice It,” “Name It,” and “Find It” and their features are explained and results of usability tests provided.

Hanna Vuojärvi, Miikka J. Eriksson, and Heli Ruokamo provide the fourth article of the issue, “Designing Pedagogical Models for Tourism Education: Focus on Work-Based Mobile Learning.” The authors describe the development process of a pedagogical model to support work-based mobile learning in tourism education and offer a recount of findings of the implementation of the model with a group of tourism students undertaking an apprenticeship in a skiing resort. The results presented provide indications of the implications for further developments of the model.

The last contribution of this special edition, “Recording Mobile Learning: An Evaluation of the Number of Audio Recorders Needed in an M-TEL Study,” is by Fredrik Rutz. This paper addresses an area in need of much research, evaluation methods for mobile learning. In particular it states the inherent difficulties with capturing actions, interaction and conversations of learners on the move. The backdrop to the paper is the MULLE study but its focus is on investigating how many recording devices are sufficient to capture sufficient audible conversation to conduct qualitative analysis. Beyond discussing interesting and relevant considerations the study concludes that every participant should carry a recording devices and that close-up video recording helps connect the conversations with the activities performed.

The contributions of this issue and those made at the conference represent but a snapshot of research in the field of mobile learning and in particular on the theme of mobile lifelong learning. Thus, the ongoing work on the development of platforms, extension to existing technologies and applications, indicate the need to support mobile lifelong learners’ transition between technologies, devices but also interaction modes. Continuous research on pedagogical models points to the need for developing a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning implications of commonly proposed uses of mobile technologies. The investigation on evaluation methods in mobile learning highlight the need to further analyse, conceptualise and implement appropriate data collection tools and strategies able to capture the essence of mobile learning experiences.

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REFERENCES


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