Academics’ Perspectives on the Challenges and Opportunities for Student-Generated Mobile Content in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysian universities, there is a scarcity of local content to support student learning. Mobile content is predominantly supplied by the United States and the United Kingdom. This research aims to understand the situation from the academic perspective, particularly in the field of local cultural studies. Student-generated multimedia is presented as a solution to the critical lack of local content whilst also providing an innovative learning approach to better engage students. Academics were exposed to the concepts of mobile learning and student-generated content by allowing their students to create multimedia for assignments using mobile devices. Before and after, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the academics. The main themes that emerged in Stage 1 were challenges, while Stage 2 successfully demonstrated student-generated content activity. Technical challenges were overcome and students encouraged to use their own mobile devices, although a minority of academics thought that having a standardised device would be better.

KEYWORDS

Academic Perspectives, Asia, Local Content, Malaysia, Mobile Content, Multimedia

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, and Asia in general, there is a lack of local content to support mobile learning (So, 2012). The majority of the available mobile content is supplied by English-speaking countries, notably the USA and the UK. This foreign content is unsuitable for students studying the local culture and furthermore discourages the production of content domestically. Interviews conducted by the author with six experts from the Malaysian mobile industry revealed a number of challenges to providing local content in Malaysia, including: a lack of existing mobile content, low interest in developing content for mobile learning (mLearning), and a narrow market for local content in Malaysia (Ariffin, Dyson, & Hoskins-McKenzie, 2012).

The lack of local digital content in Malaysia has a particularly negative impact on students studying their own culture. For convenience, the term Local Cultural Studies (LCS) is given to Humanities subjects related to the teaching and learning of Malay culture, for example: Local History, Local Culture and National Heritage, Malay Wood Craft, Malay Drum, Cooking, Batik Textile, Ceramics, and Local Drama. These subjects are not as popular as, for instance, the Information Technology and Engineering subjects. Moreover, the teaching of LCS has not kept pace with technology developments. For example, mLearning initiatives are rarely implemented in this domain. The advancements in mLearning, such as the use of mobile phones for learning and student-generated multimedia, may assist students in studying local Malay culture and make this area of study more engaging. Introducing...
up-to-date mobile technologies into their learning could enhance the interest level of what might otherwise be viewed as dull subject matter which is irrelevant to the current technological times. Given the very high ownership rate of mobile phones among Malaysian university students, it is reasonable to expect students to generate their own multimedia content using their mobile devices (Hussin, Manap, Amir, & Krish, 2012). Furthermore, the mobile phones are mostly reputable brands such as Nokia and Sony Ericsson (Song, Murphy, & Farley, 2013). Students usually only require the multimedia functions provided by their mobile phones, such as photo, video and audio-recording capabilities to create content (Ariffin & Dyson, 2012). By encouraging student-generated content, students are introduced to a relatively modern approach to learning these subjects that simultaneously creates more local content and reduces the cultural content gap in Malaysian institutions.

In order to understand the challenges to LCS for student-generated mobile content, this study used a qualitative research method. According to Silverman (2013), qualitative research is a grounded research approach that informs the researcher while looking for various meanings through an interpretation of the collected data. Kukulska-Hulme, Sharples, Milrad, Arnedillo-Sánchez and Vavoula (2009) pointed out that mLearning research should identify factors contributing to the learning environment from the human perspective. The researcher interviewed academics and analysed the collected data. Since initial interviews revealed that mobile learning and student-generated activities were not widely used in LCS, it was seen that academics would be unable to provide meaningful comments on the suitability of this new approach to learning in their subjects. Therefore, the suggestion was made to incorporate student-generated multimedia activities into their subjects. After the generation of LCS content, a second round of interviews was conducted. Transcripts of the interviews were subjected to thematic analysis and organised using NVivo software. This article focuses on the themes that emerged from the perspective of the interviewed academics. The findings indicate that the learning activities caused a shift in the academics’ perspectives on using this innovative and active approach to learning LCS.

This study begins by introducing the main issue, which is the lack of local content for mLearning in LCS within Malaysian institutions. In the background of this study, the author discusses why local content is important, the role of LCS in supporting local culture, and the opportunities presented by student-generated multimedia to supply local content for LCS. The author briefly outlines an overview of the qualitative research method used and the rationale for this choice. In the discussion, the researcher elaborates on the transformation of the perspectives of academics towards acceptance of student-generated multimedia content. The article concludes with a description of the contribution of this approach to a better quality learning process.

BACKGROUND

Local content development is important for sustaining minority cultures, for example, in countries with small populations. There has been a great deal of alarm in recent decades regarding the danger of minority cultures being swamped by more dominant cultures, particularly from English-speaking countries such as the USA and the UK. Hampton (2003, p. 9) acknowledged this, while stressing that:

… in order for local content to be successful in meeting its objectives, it must first and foremost be responsive to local needs, demands and opportunities before international priorities. This requires that the process of local content development must be locally owned and driven.

The globalization of cultural values, as dictated particularly by the US, via media platforms (like the Internet) and entertainment (such as movies and television), can dominate content production in developing countries (Montes, 2013). For instance, videos for the T2T mLearning project in the Philippines were narrated with an American accent and local students found the content difficult to
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