A Study of English Mobile Learning Applications at National Chengchi University

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ABSTRACT

The pervasive popularity of the Internet in the past decade has changed the way many students live and learn, in part, because modern technology has made it possible for learners to access Real-Time Multimedia information on the Internet, or research any topic of interest to them from virtually any computer anywhere in the world. Students can also receive immediate feedback from their peers and/or their teachers when involved in collaborative projects. As a result, teachers of all disciplines need to incorporate the Internet and the concept of mobile learning into today’s classrooms to take advantage of this technology. This research investigated the response of English majors to a mobile learning platform (NCCU-MLP) developed at National Chengchi University (NCCU) in which they were involved as participants. The goal of the NCCU-MLP is to improve the students’ English ability as well as to update the teachers’ understanding of how to use the technology. The purpose of this research was to investigate the responses of students to a mobile learning environment. The research involved 18 participants in a pilot study and 37 participants in a follow-up study who participated in a group activity involving mobile learning activities. The students were asked to complete the activity following which they completed a brief survey of their response to the mobile learning activity. The findings indicate a positive response from the participants regarding the content and procedures involved in the activity. Technical support for the project was found to need enhancement for future projects of this nature.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Digital Natives, Language Learning, Mobile Learning, Wifi Multimedia System

BACKGROUND

The pervasive popularity of the Internet in the past decade has changed the way people process information. It has also changed the way many students live and learn (Prensky, 2001; Wagner, E. D. & Wilson, P. (2005). Learning has evolved from the traditional teacher-centered classroom to a more collaborative student-centered classroom, and to mobile learning wherein students...
have direct interaction with the teachers, their peers, and even the world via the Internet. Technology has taken learning to the next level of innovation. With the installment of WiFi (Wireless Fidelity) or IEEE 802.11 WLAN (Wireless Local Area Network), it is possible for learners to access Real-Time Multimedia information on the Internet. Students with a mobile device such as a PDA, or a notebook computer, can access the information they wish to know and learn from virtually any location in the world at anytime of the day or night. In that sense, learning has become mobile. Facing a group of students who grew up with the Internet, “digital natives” as researchers have called these students, teachers of all disciplines need to incorporate the Internet and the concept of mobile learning into today’s classrooms (Prensky, 2001). In addition, since more than 70% of the information on the Internet is in English, English has become the most commonly used language for people around the world to access information and to communicate. As a result of these circumstances, how to improve the students’ English ability is another challenge that teachers face today.

Being one of the campuses that celebrates a WiFi environment, National Chengchi University provides its teachers and students with a “mobile learning” context. However, how to encourage students to take advantages of this environment to improve their English is a question that has remained unanswered. After a series of discussions, a proposal was made by the authors to combine the traditional approaches to learning and the latest technology to the English learning activities where students participate in groups to test the feasibility of incorporating mobile learning into a college level English class. NCCU, being the top rated internationalized university in Taiwan, postulated that both local students and international students on campus should be able to take advantage of this “mobile learning” context.

This article is divided into three main parts. The review of the evolution of learning in the past decades, the theory of mobile learning, and the significance of its application in learning is discussed first. In this section, the gap found in the literature review will also be discussed. In the second section, the design of the group activity and the technical support will be described in detail. The last section will focus on the discussion of the results of the study, its limitations, and future possibilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To receive an education, schools are no longer the only option for students. In fact, a student can take courses tailored to one’s needs at any time and any place today. Such is the nature of distance learning (d-learning), where students and the instructors are separated by time and/or distance (Georgiev, T., Georgieva, E. & Smrikarov, A., 2004). D-learning offers numerous advantages, especially for those who need flexibility in their life, such as learners with restricted mobility, an irregular work schedule, or family responsibilities. In addition to having freedom in time and location, d-learning is also student-centered. Not only do learners choose their materials in some cases, they also proceed at their own pace and intensity in some cases (USjournal.com, LLC). Students are not the only beneficiary of distance learning; institutions also increase revenue by delivering education to distance learning students since the class size increases while overhead stays the same in some cases (Valentine, 2002).

Though distance learning is often thought to be a new form of education, it actually has a history of over 100 years. As early as the 19th century, efforts were made to promote adult education beyond university campuses using correspondence type courses where interaction takes place through the postal system. With technological improvements, more and more mediums have become available to serve as educational tools. During the World Wars, the concept of serving education through radio was developed when broadcasting licenses were granted to many higher educational institutions by the U.S. government. Though the concept never matured, it prompted research in other
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