Chapter 10
Implementation of Mobile Learning at the Open University Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

As part of its ongoing effort to offer an effective blend of learning modes, the Open University Malaysia (OUM) recently incorporated mobile learning into its blended learning model. Having enrolled more than 86,000 learners over the last eight years, OUM strives to continually improve its delivery mode for the benefit of its learners. Mobile learning is seen to be the next wave of learning given the fact that almost all OUM learners have mobile phones. A study conducted in late 2008 to determine the readiness of its learners for mobile learning indicates that about 99% of OUM respondents have a mobile phone. The readiness survey also found that majority of respondents would be ready for mobile learning within six months of the study. The chapter will highlight, among others, the introduction of mobile learning at OUM, the initial finding with the pilot implementation and recommendations for the way forward.

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INTRODUCTION

Open University Malaysia (OUM) is established in August 2001 in response to the country’s need to democratise education and to offer opportunities for higher education to the country’s working adults. It is the pioneer in open and distance learning (ODL) in Malaysia. OUM believes that education should be made available to all, regardless of time, place, age and socioeconomic background and therefore has set its mission to widen access to quality flexible education and provide lifelong learning opportunities by leveraging on technology, adopting flexible modes of learning, and providing a conducive and engaging learning environment at competitive and affordable cost. Subsequently, OUM adopted the motto “University for All”. OUM offers a blend of pedagogies comprising of face-to-face tutorials, self-managed learning and e-learning. This unique blend of pedagogies has been well received by the adult working population as testified by a total enrolment of 86,000 in May 2009 as compared to 753 learners enrolled in 2001. Internationally, OUM has learners in Bahrain, Yemen, Maldives, Indonesia and Singapore.

The use of computers and Internet facility is important to many ODL institutions like OUM. In OUM, the e-learning is supported by the learning management system known as My Virtual Learning Environment (MyVLE). MyVLE enables learners to communicate with their tutors and peers in the virtual world and is available 24/7. To enable e-learning to take place, learners need to have a computer with Internet access. In a report published by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC, 2008), only 28.2% of Malaysians had access to personal computers in 2004 and the broadband penetration rate was only 15.2% in 2007 as compared to the 85.1% of the mobile phone penetration rate (per 100 households). In view of the latter, OUM decided to explore the possibility of disseminating learning materials through the mobile phone. After all, the mobile phone technology has advanced tremendously and has become reasonably affordable and most importantly, its use is widespread.

Soon after OUM’s decision to embark on mobile learning, a study to determine learners’ readiness was conducted late in 2008. The readiness factors were those from the aspects of technology readiness and psychological readiness of OUM learners for mobile learning. The study also aimed to determine how soon learners would be ready and what their expectations were in terms of learning materials that they would like to access through their mobile phones. This readiness survey also determined learners’ attitude and acceptance of mobile learning.

MOBILE LEARNING

Definition

There are many definitions of mobile learning. Mobile learning means differently to different groups of people. It can be defined as either learning that happens across locations or learning opportunities that are offered by portable devices that typically overcomes physical and geographical barriers of learning. Those found in the literature often overlap.

Geddes (2004) defined mobile learning as the acquisition of any knowledge and skill by using mobile technology; anywhere, anytime that results in an alteration in behaviour. Lehner and Nosekabel (2002) refer mobile learning as a facility that supplies a learner with general electronic information and educational content that aids in acquisition of knowledge regardless of location and time. In another definition of mobile learning, O’Malley et al. (2003) defined it as any sort of learning that happens when the learner is not at a fixed, predetermined location, or learning that happens when the learner takes advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies and Smith (2008) refers to it as learning