

# SUITABILITY OF M-LEARNING TO ENHANCE LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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## ABSTRACT

Mobile learning (m-Learning) is one of the major developing areas of research in the field of education. Increased power and reduced cost of computers, laptops as well as mobile devices have paved way to new ways of learning such as e-Learning and m-Learning. This paper presents findings of the first phase of a project which intends to seek the effectiveness of m-Learning among undergraduates to study English language. The objective of this phase is to find existing practices and preferences among the target group of users. In order to elicit the information, a survey was carried out among the students of the University of Colombo School of Computing (UCSC). The analysis of the survey results reveal that most of the students are having positive attitude towards m-Learning and believe that mobile phones could be used to enhance English proficiency. Furthermore, their preferences on learning styles, as well as suggestions which will guide the research are revealed.

## KEYWORDS

Mobile Learning, Questionnaire survey, English Language Learning and University of Colombo School of Computing.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The use of mobile phones have transformed the way of carrying on activities by allowing easy interconnections and enhanced communications. Mobile devices network availability and penetration is happening at a dramatic pace in developing countries (Gounder, 2011). What has attracted interest in the use of mobile phones as learning devices is their potential to support anywhere, anytime access (Burston, 2011). Aamri and Sulaiman (2011) have studied the current use and practices of mobile phones in the process of learning English Language by the students of Sultan Qaboos University. The author has identified the existing uses and practices, through a questionnaire and states that the students use mobile phone in learning, but in a very limited way (Aamri & Suleiman, 2011). The above study has been useful in designing mobile learning content and therefore, the aim of this study is also to find the existing uses and practices of using mobile technology by the university students of Sri Lanka to learn English. The findings of this study will enable the researcher to better understand the context as well as to seek design considerations when developing m-Learning content.

## 2. THE STUDY

### 2.1 Methodology

The methodology used for this study was an on-line survey which was shared among all UCSC undergraduates. The survey consisted of open ended as well as closed questions. Students who participated in this survey were from two different disciplines, which were 'Computer Science' (CS) and 'Information and Communication Technology' (ICT) accordingly. The questionnaire was distributed among 800 students of UCSC and out of them, 189 responses were received within 3 weeks period with a response rate of 23.75 %.

## 2.2 Findings

### 2.2.1 Part One: General Information

Total number of respondents were 189 and out of the whole respondents, only 1 person did not own a mobile phone. The next question was asked in order to identify the widely available types of phones among the university community. Around 51% of the students owned a phone which has standard java enabled features, and 13% of students were having a smart phone, while rest of them owned a phone with basic features with voice calls and SMS.

### 2.2.2 Part Two: Mobile Usage

When asked about the mostly used features in the mobile phone, it was figured out that voice calls and SMS had significant usage when comparing to Camera, Music, Games and MMS. Voice calls and SMS were used by more than 50% of students and camera features were used by around 19% of students. Further, when asking about the Internet access through the mobile, it was revealed that only around 28% of students were frequently using the internet via mobile.

### 2.2.3 Part Three: Learning Habits

Students were asked to rank the given options with regard to their learning preferences. The given options were, Text, Listening to Instructions, Watching video, Role play/ Drama, Games, Interacting with Friends, Questions and Answers. 29% of students placed text as their first preference. Listening and learning through video tutorials have got the second and third preferences accordingly. The question related to the difficulties in learning English revealed that most of the students were having problems with vocabulary and oral skills. Students also stated that Sinhala is very useful to understand things when comparing to English. When asking about the learning aspects to be enhanced in future, more than 80% of students have stated that speaking is the most essential skill. Listening, Writing and Reading have rated as 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> accordingly. Few questions were asked in order to find their performance in English related examinations conducted by SriLankan government. Although 99% of respondents have passed English at the ordinary level exams, only 89% have managed to pass English in Advanced Level exams.

### 2.2.4 Part Four: Attitudes towards Mobile Learning

Table 1. Attitude towards m-Learning

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
I believe mobile phones could be used to teach / learn English	18	51	26	4	1
I am willing to purchase a mobile phone with advance features if it will help improve my learning	17	48	20	12	3
I would like to install a learning application in my mobile phone to improve English proficiency	32	45	18	4	1
I do not mind paying for internet connection for my mobile, if I can learn through my mobile	10	32	32	25	1
SMS based learning application would be ideal to promote English language learning	10	36	27	25	2
Learning through mobile devices will help me to utilize my time productively	27	47	19	6	1
I think I can improve my English speaking skills through a mobile	10	50	29	10	1
I believe m-Learning will not provide any advantage for me	1	5	19	60	15
I think learning through mobile phone will not build teamwork and collaboration	7	25	32	30	6
I believe learning through mobile will increase the cost of learning	3	35	35	24	3

This five point likert scale question was issued in order to identify the attitude if the students in m-learning (Table3). By analyzing these answers, it was clear that most of the respondents are having positive attitude towards m-Learning.

### 3. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that this study could be a starting point to implement m-Learning at UCSC. The survey depicts a high mobile ownership and increased usage in standard java enabled phones with voice calls, SMS, MMS and GPRS facilities. Even though the survey shows a tendency towards standard mobile phones, it is not a doubt that the society is moving from standard mobile phones to 'smart' phones (Chansanchai, 2011). Further, it is also identified that students mostly use their mobile phones as a tool to make phone calls and send SMS. Since majority of the students are rarely using the internet through their mobile, it would be a challenge to implement a solution with the aid of internet access through the mobile. However as stated in section 2.2.4 the students are willing to access internet through mobile for learning purpose. Hence we can consider a potential for developing mobile internet based solutions. Based on section 2.2.3, it would be worthwhile to investigate using mobile based solutions which target oral and vocabulary related aspects. Including the mother tongue also will be useful since the mother tongue plays a great role which should be paid attention (Atkinson, 1987). In summary, the positive attitude towards m-Learning, high usage of mobile phones, willingness to spend to access educational material, enables the researchers to conclude there is potential to use m-learning to enhance English Language proficiency among the students of UCSC.

### 4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORKS

The survey results which have been presented here with regard to mobile usage and practices among students of UCSC, have presented certain scenarios which can be worth investigating. According to the results, it is found that SMS can be used as a medium to learn English. Further, it encourages the researchers to provide a mechanism to enhance voice learning and vocabulary aspects through mobile devices. But, the lower response rate will limit the outcome of this study being applied for a larger society.

### 5. CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to identify the learner preference for mobile language learning and the attitude towards m-Learning at UCSC. The survey analysis of the results depicted that most of the students are having positive attitude towards m-Learning and believe that mobile phones could be used to enhance English proficiency. Further, this study has proved the strong potential for using SMS as a medium of English language learning. By analyzing the survey results, it is worthwhile to investigate more in implementing a solution to cater the shortcoming in vocabulary and oral skills.

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