A Study on Mobile Learning Possibilities at AIOU

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ABSTRACT

Practice and experience of distance education is working from more than one hundred year which main characteristic is time separation between instructor and trainee. Then e-learning offered new means which are based on computer and net technologies. Now m-learning comprise the ability to learn everywhere at every time without permanent physical connection to cable networks. This paper explores the possibilities of mobile learning at AIOU. It was revealed that mobile learning is effective for the improvement of distance learning and at higher level of

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studies there are many possibilities to start m. learning at AIOU. Many students at MS/ M.Phil. level have mobiles and internet connections and they have positive attitude in adopting mobile learning so it was recommended that AIOU may take initiative to train the tutors and staff for launching m. learning. It is also suggested that mobile phones and laptops may be provided to the distance learners at cheaper prices and installments with the collaboration of different companies. Internet connection may be provided to students at cheaper rates with the cooperation of PTCL broadband. AIOU may start alert text messaging system along with the official letters and documents through club texting website.

Keywords: Study, Mobile Learning, M. Learning, Possibilities, AIOU.

INTRODUCTION

M. Learning can be achieved by the use of portable devices such as moveable computers, notebooks, palm tops, cell phones, PDA and Tablet PC. They must have the ability to connect to other computer devices, to present educational information and to realize mutual information exchange between the teacher and the student. ". According to (Georgieva, 2006). "Today the more and more rapid development of the ICT contributes to the increasing abilities of the mobile devices (cell phones, smart phones, PDAs, laptops) and wireless communications, which are the main parts of the mobile learning. On the other hand for the implementation of mobile learning it is necessary to use a corresponding system for the management of such type of education".

In the United States the PDAs have already been used in schools and for workers on the move and this thing had significant results in terms of improved learning effectiveness. In Europe, mobile learning is beginning to develop, and telecommunications companies such as Nokia and Vodafone have already integrated these technologies into their training and development system. "The use of new technology for educational purposes has always been focused by distance learning approach. Technology-supported teaching and learning has helped in covering the physical distances between teachers and students, to enable the flexible delivery of education at a distance, anyplace and anytime. Today, the use of mobile devices to enhance

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distance learning systems is being utilized. The emerging technologies, such as Mobile learning can be an effective tool for learning or enhancing the teaching-learning process, because it increases access and do provide strong support to underpin different types of learning" (Naismith, et.al., 2005). According to (Yousuf, 2007). Distance learners can use mobile phones/ MP3 players to listen to their course lectures, and for storage and data transfer. New technologies especially mobile technologies are now challenging the traditional concept of Distance Education.

D. LEARNING

D. learning stands for distance learning. "The field of distance education has changed dramatically in the past ten years. Distance education, structured learning in which the student and instructor are separated by place, and sometimes by time is currently the fastest growing form of domestic and international education. What was once considered a special form of education using nontraditional delivery systems, is now becoming an important concept in mainstream education. Concepts such as networked learning, connected learning spaces, flexible learning and hybrid learning systems have enlarged the scope and changed the nature of earlier distance education models. Web-based and web-enhanced courses are appearing in traditional programs that are now racing to join the "anytime, anyplace" educational feeding frenzy". (http://ocw.metu.edu.tr/file.php/118/Week10/Gunawardena-McIsaac-distance-ed.pdf)

EFFECTIVENESS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION:

The importance of education can not be neglected in 21st century and distance education is contributing to enhance the literacy rate all over the world at large scope "research comparing distance education to traditional face-to-face instruction indicates that teaching and studying at a distance can be as effective as traditional instruction, when the method and technologies used are appropriate to the instructional tasks, there is student-to-student interaction, and when there is timely teacher-to- student feedback (Moore & Thompson, 1990; Verduin & Clark, 1991).

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EMERGING TRENDS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Most of the emerging trends in the field of distance education are related to computer and internet e.g. blended Learning, ICT, cloud computing, adaptive learning environments, e-learning web 2.0, emailing, class chat rooms, connecting classrooms and e-portfolios. Open CourseWares are providing opportunity to the distance learner to get free knowledge and courses through Learning management system like moodle.com. Educational websites like 4Shared, slideshare, HowStuffWorks, educational blogs and wikis are also very much helpful for getting information related to different topics. E-Books, online Journals and digital libraries have solved the problems of carrying heavy books or buying expensive journals, Social networking sites like facebook, twitter, linkedIn, skype, oovoo and teacher tube are amazing in their educational use; students can fill the gap between learner and tutor in distance education system by using social networking sites. Use of telephone as alert text messaging system and mobile learning are also connecting the distance learners any time and anywhere. Usage of ipads in the classroom, podcasts, course casting, iTunes U, webquest, open-source network, RSS FEEDS, dasher, eType, fax and digital TV are also emerging trends in education which can smooth the progress of distance education system. The use of new instructional methods helps to maintain student's interest and make the learning procedure more encouraging and fruitful.

E. LEARNING

E- Learning stands for electronic learning it consisted of all forms of electronic support to teaching and learning process. "e-learning is a broader concept [than online learning], encompassing a wide set of applications and processes which use all available electronic media to deliver vocational education and training more flexibly. The term "e-learning" is now used in the Framework to capture the general intent to support a broad range of electronic media

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(Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV and CD-ROM) to make vocational learning more flexible for clients." (ANTA 2003b, p. 5)

M. LEARNING

http://alana6705.blogspot.com/2010/04/what-is-mobile-learning.html

According to Fleischman (2001), "In the word m-learning "m" stands for "mobile", representing the back- stage mobile delivery technology. It is obvious that for the expansion of the idea of learning and the creation of learning schemes that are based on the effective use of motivation that arises when a student is faced with the stimuli, mobile devices with Internet access can offer significant advantages. Mobile technology actually offers the appropriate educational environment to assist learning activities both inside and outside the classroom". Similar to e-Learning, mobile technologies can also be interfaced with many other media like audio, video, the Internet, and so forth. Mobile learning is more interactive, involves more contact, communication and collaboration with people (Vavoula, 2005). So Mobile learning is defined as the provision of education and training on mobile devices: Personal Digital Assistants

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(PDAs), smart phones and mobile phones. One of the characteristics of mobile learning is that it uses devices which citizens are used to carrying everywhere with them, which they regard as friendly and personal devices, which are cheap and easy to use, which they use constantly in all walks of life and in a variety of different settings, except education.

"Opposite to the limitations of working and learning only in the classroom or in the lab, mobile technology offers access to learning material regardless of location and time. In this framework mobile learning is translated into flexibility in accessing learning materials but also classmates and teachers anytime, anywhere. Mobile learning is the ability to enjoy an educational moment from a cell phone or a personal digital assistant" (Harris, 2001).

M. Learning is the acquisition of any knowledge and skill through using mobile technology, anywhere, anytime that results in an alteration in behaviour. The following points are to be noted from this definition the term 'mobile technology' refers to any device that is designed to provide access to information in any location, or while on the move. Specifically this would include, but not be limited to mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDA), tablet computers and laptops. Mobile learning can improve the complete system of distance education by improving ways of interactions among Instructors and distance learners. The plus point of this technology is that it's easily accessible to large number of distance learners and it can be used anytime and anywhere.

According to Attewell (2005), there are several advantages inherent in mobile learning:

● helps learners to improve literacy and numeric skills

● helps learners to recognize their existing abilities

● can be used for independent and collaborative learning experiences

● helps learners to identify where they need assistance and support

● helps to overcome the digital divide

● helps to make learning informal

● helps learners to be more focused for longer periods

● helps to raise self-esteem and self-confidence

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The term mobile learning (m-learning) refers to the use of mobile and handheld IT devices, such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), mobile telephones, laptops and tablet PC technologies, in teaching and learning. As computers and the internet become essential educational tools, the technologies become more portable, affordable, effective and easy to use. This provides many opportunities for widening participation and access to ICT, and in particular the internet. Mobile devices such as phones and PDAs are much more reasonably priced than desktop computers, and therefore represent a less expensive method of accessing the internet (though the cost of connection can be higher). The introduction of tablet PCs now allows mobile internet access with equal, if not more, functionality than desktop computers.

(http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=135556)

Alert Text messaging system

Mobile Learning via SMS helps reduce the transactional distance of psychological and communication space often faced by distance learners who are separated in terms of geographical distance and time (Moore, 1997, p.22). It also enables the academicians to reach out to learners outside of conventional communication spaces, and it helps to keep learners connected to the university, their peers, and their tutors.

(http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/926/1738)

Now on internet many websites are there which are providing emergency SMS text messaging alert systems for colleges, universities, & schools. Such as Club texting website, according to them "Our emergency messaging system allows colleges, universities and other educational institutions to instantly communicate with an entire campus in minutes. Our text messaging services is used by hundreds of educations institutions to send out campus-wide text alerts, which are delivered to students' phones immediately. More than just an emergency SMS

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Broadcast system, our software allows students to respond to SMS alerts, providing you with a vital stream of first-hand information in the event of a crisis.

(http://www.clubtexting.com/education/education-sms-alerts.html)

IPADS IN THE CLASSROOM

Apple's tablet computer, the iPad, has proven to be popular with not only everyday consumers but educators as well. Grants from both public and private sources have allowed schools across the nation to provide them to students. These tablet devices are easy-to-use and perfect for classrooms involving a wide variety of learning styles. Students can complete assignments on the iPad, share their work with teachers and peers, read textbooks, take notes, blog, play educational games, write papers and much more. Teachers are also able to easily monitor progress and even grade papers right through their device, saving time, paper and allowing for better feedback. Students who take classes outside of the school setting, or who are homeschooled, may also find the gadget useful in learning, as it is incredibly portable and powerful. There are some who criticize the use of iPads in the classroom, but with hundreds of thousands of them available to students, they're unlikely to go anywhere anytime soon.

(www.snhu.edu/13052.htm).

PODCASTS

"A podcast can be defined as being an audio and/or video broadcast that has been converted to an MP3 file or other audio file format for playback in a digital music player or computer (PC Magazine). The greatest advantage of a podcast over webcast is that it can be viewed anywhere or while doing anything. There is confusion about podcasting; it is thought that

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a podcast is solely an ongoing broadcast. This may be true but anything prerecorded that can be downloaded and played back is also considered to be a podcast.

 (Distance Web Education using I Podcasting AFisher_DTEC6850_Paper 22-09-207.doc)

FLEXIBLE LEARNING

According to Anta (2003) "Flexible learning expands choice on what, when, where and how people learn. It supports different styles of learning, including e-learning. Flexibility means anticipating, and responding to, the ever-changing needs and expectations of VET clients - enterprises learners and communities." In one sense there is a continuum between these terms, online is a subset of elearning and e-learning is a subset of flexible learning. However there is also a distinction between technology and approach. Online and e-learning are about specific technologies. Flexible learning is a philosophy and an approach, of which the use of technology is one, albeit very important, component.

MOBILE LEARNING POSSIBILITIES AT AIOU

●Aiou online programs

DCS initiated E-learning activities in 1999 and the idea of Open Learning Institute of Virtual Education(OLIVE) was approved in 2001. this was first milestone towards E-learning. The work was started to establish infrastructure and facilities required for E-learning. Initially course materials and Learning Management System(LMS) were developed for E-education. Online classes were conducted at AIOU main campus, Lahore region and from other places during four semesters from spring,2002 to autumn 2003. Based on the experiences, DCS decided to offer PGD(CS)in online mode from spring, 2005 semester due to effectiveness of E-learning low cost, fast communication methods and automated performance measurement mechanisms that enhance the quality of learning.

●Internet users in pakistan

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Pakistani internet users have been on the rise at an accelerated pace, crossing the 20 million benchmark as a greater percentage accessing the internet via mobile phones, said Freedom on the Net in its 2011 annual report.

(http://tribune.com.pk/story/283253/internet-users-in-pakistan-cross-20-million-mark)

●Mobile users in pakistan

66.5 % of the total population is using the mobile phone in Pakistan. In the month of January 2012 more than 1.7 million mobile SIM cards were sold out. The mobile phone users in the country are growing with speed. According to PTA (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority) mobile is in the reach of more than 114.6 millions peoples of Pakistan.

(http://www.mobileszoo.com/mobile-users-pakistan)

Allama Iqbal Open University is one of the Mega University of the world and like other distance universities of the world it has started many online programs, as far as mobile learning is concerned we may say that at M.phil and Ph.D level it is possible to launce because almost all the distance learners at that higher level of education have their laptops and mobile phones with internet connections, and there are many websites who may provide alert text messaging system to AIOU. Atleast short messages system (SMS) can be started easily which are cheap and easy to use and distance learners can get the important information immediately and may response anywhere. In Pakistan internet users and mobile users are growing dramatically and this ratio shows that possibilities of mobile learning are increasing in Pakistan and at AIOU as well.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research work were:

1. Highlight the significance of mobile learning in distance education system.

2. Explore the possibilities of M. learning at AIOU.

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PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY

The study was descriptive in nature so questionnaire was used as instrument for this study; in the questionnaire five point likert scale was developed for collecting the data from the population of the study. For purpose of data collection 205 MS/ M.phil Scholars semester spring 2011 and 2012 of AlOU was taken into account. The questionnaire was developed on five point likert scale ranges from strongly agreed to strongly disagree.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: Highlight the significance of mobile learning in distance education system.

S.No	Statements	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	%	Mean
1	Mobile learning is easily available anytime.	92	36	2	0	0	98.5	4.69
2	Mobile learning is easily available anywhere	81	45	4	0	0	96.9	4.59
3	Mobile learning offers instant support to distance learners.	79	47	4	0	0	96.9	4.58

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4	Mobile learning improves the communication between tutor and learner.	105	25	0	0	0	100	4.80
5	Portable devices are easy to carry.	76	52	2	0	0	98.5	4.57
6	Quick feed back in Distance learning is possible through mobile learning.	68	52	10	0	0	92.3	4.45
7	Mobile learning is affordable for distance learners.	12	20	14	40	44	24.6	2.35
8	Mobile technologies are easy to use for distance learners.	88	40	2	0	0	98.5	4.66
9	Feedback about assignments can be given on mobiles.	84	46	0	0	0	100	4.65

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No.	Statement	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	%	Mean
10	Timings of tutorials can be sent on mobiles.	78	52	0	0	0	100	4.60
11	Schedule of Workshops may be informed on mobile phones.	102	28	0	0	0	100	4.78
12	Date sheets from university may be quickly obtained on mobile devices.	92	36	2	0	0	98.5	4.69
13	Results from university are easy to get on mobiles.	70	46	10	4	0	89.2	4.40
14	Print material and study guides may be easily accessed in mobile learning system.	96	28	0	6	0	95.3	4.65
15	Mobile learning helps to raise self confidence.	102	28	0	0	0	100	4.78

Scale value for this table is SA (Strongly Agree) =5, A (Agree) =4, UNC (Uncertain) =3, DA (Disagree) =2 and SDA (Strongly Disagree) =1

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The Table 1 shows that most of the respondents (98.5% with mean score 4.69) agreed that mobile learning is easily available anytime and (96.9% with mean score 4.59) easily available anywhere. Sufficient majority of the respondents (96.9% with mean score 4.58) supported the statement that mobile learning offers instant support to distance learners. Maximum respondents (100% with mean score 4.80) opinioned in favour of the statement that mobile learning improves the communication between tutor and learner. A significant majority (98.5% with mean score 4.57) of the respondents agreed that portable devices are easy to carry. Similarly a majority of the respondents (92.3% with mean score 4.45) agreed that quick feed back in distance learning is possible through mobile learning. Mobile learning was declared affordable for distance learners by 24.6% respondents whereas mean score found was 2.35 for this statement. Maximum respondents (98.5% with mean score 4.66) were on the view that mobile technologies are easy to use for distance learners. 100% respondents (with 4.65 mean score) were agreed that feedback about assignments can be given on mobiles. Similarly 100% respondents (with mean score 4.60) supported the statement that timings of tutorials can be sent on mobiles. All of the respondents (100% with 4.78 mean score) opinioned in favour of the statement that schedule of workshops may be informed on mobile phones. Maximum respondents (98.5% with 4.69 mean score) were on the view that date sheets from university may be quickly obtained on mobile devices similarly Majority of the respondents (89.2% with 4.40 mean score) agreed that results from university are easy to get on mobiles. A significant majority (95.3% with mean score 4.65) of the respondents agreed that print material and study guides may be easily accessed in mobile learning system. 100 % respondents agreed (with 4.78 mean score) that mobile learning helps to raise self confidence.

Table 2: Explore the possibilities of M. learning at AIOU.

S.No	Statements	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA	%	Mean

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1	I have cell phone to attend the call from tutor.	105	25	0	0	0	100	4.80
2	I can receive and send SMS to my teachers.	102	28	0	0	0	100	4.78
3	I may send voice mail from my cell phone.	50	36	6	24	14	62.2	3.65
4	I may do audio & video recording on my mobile phone.	79	47	4	0	0	96.9	4.58
5	My mobile have MMS facility/function.	36	40	10	28	16	58.5	3.40
6	I often use MP3 on my mobile phone.	16	24	16	40	34	30.8	2.60
7	For searching material I use search engine on my cell phone.	22	34	22	36	16	43.1	3.08
8	Maximum learners at AIOU have mobile phones.	105	25	0	0	0	100	4.80

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9	Most of the students have internet connections on their cell phones.	16	24	16	40	34	30.8	2.60
10	Most of the M.phil scholars have laptops.	12	20	14	40	44	24.6	2.35
11	Distance learners are ready to adopt flexible learning via portable devices.	34	30	20	32	14	49.2	3.29

Scale value for this table is SA (Strongly Agree) =5, A (Agree) =4, UNC (Uncertain) =3, DA (Disagree) =2 and SDA (Strongly Disagree) =1

The Table 2 shows that all of the respondents (100% with mean score 4.80) agreed that they have cell phones to attend the call from tutors. In the same way 100% respondents (with 4.78 mean score) are agreed that they can receive and send SMS to the teachers. A sufficient majority of respondents (62.2% with mean score 3.65) supported the statement that they may send voice mail from cell phones. A significant majority (96.9% with mean score 4.58) of the respondents agreed that they may do audio & video recording on their mobile phones. 58.5 % respondents (mean score 3.40) are on the view that their mobiles have MMS facility/function. Some of the respondents (30.8% with mean score 2.60) agreed that they often use MP3 on their mobile phones. For searching material 43.1% respondents (with 3.08 mean score) agreed that they use search engine on their cell phones. 100% respondents (with 4.80 mean score) agreed that learners at AIOU have mobile phones. Only 30.8% respondents (with 2.60 mean score) agreed that most of the students have internet connections on their cell phones. Some of the respondents (24.6% with 2.35 mean score) agreed that most of the M.phil scholars have laptops. 49.2 % respondents (with mean score 3.29) agreed that distance learners are ready to adopt flexible learning via portable devices.

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FINDINGS

The efficiency of distance education is enhancing through flexible learning and this flexible learning is possible via mobile learning. In this study most of the respondents agreed that mobile learning is easily available anytime and easily available anywhere. Sufficient majority of the respondents supported the statement that mobile learning offers instant support to distance learners. Maximum respondents opinioned in favour of the statement that mobile learning improves the communication between tutor and learner. A significant majority of the respondents agreed that portable devices are easy to carry. Similarly a majority of the respondents agreed that quick feed back in distance learning is possible through mobile learning. Some of the respondents agreed that mobile learning was declared affordable for distance learners and maximum respondents were on the view that mobile technologies are easy to use for distance learners. 100% respondents were agreed that feedback about assignments can be given on mobiles. Similarly 100% respondents supported the statement that timings of tutorials can be sent on mobiles. All of the respondents opinioned in favour of the statement that schedule of workshops may be informed on mobile phones. Maximum respondents were on the view that date sheets from university may be quickly obtained on mobile devices similarly Majority of the respondents agreed that results from university are easy to get on mobiles. A significant majority of the respondents agreed that print material and study guides may be easily accessed in mobile learning system. 100 % respondents agreed that mobile learning helps to raise self confidence. All of the respondents agreed that they have cell phones to attend the call from tutors. In the same way 100% respondents are agreed that they can receive and send SMS to the teachers. A sufficient majority of respondents supported the statement that they may send voice mail from cell phones. A significant majority of the respondents agreed that they may do audio & video recording on their mobile phones. More than half percent respondents are on the view that their mobiles have MMS facility/function. Some of the respondents agreed that they often use MP3 on their mobile phones. For searching material some of the respondents agreed that they use search

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engine on their cell phones. 100% respondents agreed that learners at AIOU have mobile phones. Only 30.8% respondents agreed that most of the students have internet connections on their cell phones. Some of the respondents agreed that Most of the M.phil scholars have laptops. 49.2 % respondents agreed that distance learners are ready to adopt flexible learning via portable devices.

CONCLUSION

The small and portable technological gadgets make possible to get the knowledge and to access the educational material anytime and anywhere and it facilitates the students and tutors at large extent. Majority of respondents in this study confirmed the importance of mobile devices for its flexible availability, improving the communication between students and tutor. The short message (SMS) is highly cost-effective and very reliable method of communication in distance learning where teacher and student are separated to each other by time and space. Distance learners may also employ cell phones/ MP3 players for storage and data transfer and may listen the course lectures as well. Mobile learning can also provide good support to inform various schedule of university regarding conformation of admission, schedule of workshop; assignments feed back, date sheet and results as well. The student may get immediate help and the teachers may get instant feed back in mobile learning system. As far as the possibilities of mobile learning at AIOU is concerned it is concluded that maximum students at MS/ M.phil level have mobiles and internet connections and they have positive attitude in adopting mobile learning and AIOU may easily launch mobile learning as it is not expensive and just need proper planning. So it is proposed that AIOU may take initiative to train the tutors and staff for launching m. learning. It is also suggested that mobile phones and laptops may be provided to the distance learners at cheaper prices and installments with the collaboration of different companies. Internet connection may be provided to students at cheaper rates with the cooperation of PTCL broadband. AIOU may start alert text messaging system along with the official letters and documents through club texting website.

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