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SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

2nd International
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■ **THEME:** ■

**INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION FOR SELF RELIANCE**

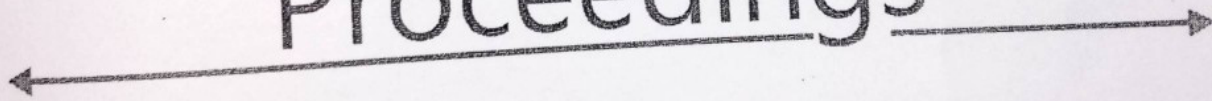


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**Edited by: Dr. R. O Okwori, Dr. I. Y Umar, Dr E. Raymond, Dr. C. S. Gana,
Dr. K. A Saka and Mrs. A. G Tafida**

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Using the Mobile Phone in Teaching English Language in Nigeria Secondary School

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Abstract

As technology becomes a greater part of everyday life, it is natural that it becomes a central and essential part of learning. The reasons for the use of technology in language learning are diverse and multifaceted: one main purpose is obviously the enhancement of a specific learning situation. As many educational institutions today suffer from cuts in contact hours and large class sizes, technology offers a way of counteracting these constraints by taking part of the language learning process out of class and making it more student-centered. The evolution of handheld portable devices, such as mobile phone, and wireless technology has resulted in radical changes in the people's lifestyles around the world, including for learning. This paper takes a look at the mobile phone and different ways by which mobile phones could be used to teach English as a second language in Nigeria secondary schools. Some of the ways include using it in note-taking, for recording conversations outside the classroom, to keep a blog, among others. Anticipated problems in language teaching through the mobile phone such as accessibility of the device, additional workload on the teacher were also highlighted and recommendations such as providing enabling environment for the use of mobile phone in teaching English language and provision for the use of affordable technologies in the curriculum and English language text books were offered.

Keywords: English language, mobile phone, teaching, secondary school,

Introduction

The present rapid growth in Information Communication and Technologies (ICT) has brought amazing changes various fields, including education. Presently, there is a substantial increase of technological utilization for educational purposes. With the potentials ICT offers, educational institutions are now seeking for new paradigms to restructure their educational curricula and classroom facilities to bridge the existing technology gap education. This process however requires effective adoption of technologies into existing environment in order to provide learners with the required knowledge as well as to promote meaningful learning (Tomei, 2005). The evolution of handheld portable devices and wireless technology has resulted in radical changes in the people's lifestyles around the world, including for learning. Mobile learning or m-learning is a rising art of using mobile technologies to enhance the learning experience. As highlighted by Peters (2007), mobile technologies such as mobile phones, can significantly reduce people's dependence on fixed locations, and thus have the potential to revolutionize the way people work and learn. The purpose of this study is to investigate the possibility of utilizing the mobile phone as a language learning device in secondary schools in Nigeria. Hence, according to Chinnery (2006) mobile phones have certain characteristics that make them appropriate learning tools. Dias (2002), cited by Chinnery (2006) also observes that mobile phone ownership is nearly universal amongst college-age individuals. Some of these characteristics are their ubiquity, their accessibility to users' lives and their portability enabling any time and any place learning. Other pedagogical reasons for considering the mobile phones in the second language classroom include the fact that phones are social tools that facilitate authentic and relevant communication

and collaboration among learners. This makes them an ideal tool to support situated learning theory, which states that learning is more likely to take place when information is contextually relevant and can be put to immediate use (Lave and Wenger 1991). For example, second language learners can use mobile technology to access relevant vocabulary and expressions, to look up movie reviews while at the theater, or to discuss weekend plans with an English-speaking friend.

Another benefit is that learners are used to working with them, often more so than with computers. Thornton and Houser (2003) report that young Japanese learners prefer to use mobile phones for many activities, from emailing to reading books. Moreover, since mobile phones are part of students' everyday routines, they help minimize the separation between the classroom and the outside world. Applied linguists agree on little when it comes to theories for explaining language learning, but one thing seems clear- more exposure to the target language and more practice, or time on task, explains most of the variation in students' success. Any tool that can increase students' access to the language will contribute greatly to their progress. Research on the use of mobile phones for the delivery of vocabulary materials to English learners in Taiwan shows that students enjoy using their phones because of easy access to materials and the ability to practice anytime and anywhere; in addition, some students like the screen size limitations, which make the amount of content more manageable than that of other teaching materials (Chen, Hsieh, and Kinshuk 2008). Another compelling argument for using mobile phones in the classroom is that they give students control over their own learning. Students control the medium, and teachers, by elaborating how best to use the medium, provide a blueprint for autonomous learning, especially during the wide range of daily social activities where mobile phones are most likely to be used. Also, mobile phones are relatively cheap and increasingly powerful (Chinnery 2006; Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler 2005). Pederson (2009) defines mobile phone as an object that uses the global system for mobile communications to send and receive calls. Colombo and Scifo (2006), cited by Bhavnani, WunChui, Tanakiran and Salarszky (2008), define it as a telephone system that can move or be moved easily and quickly from place to place. It is also described as an object that has accompanied us and simultaneously changed our everyday life over the last three centuries. The mobility and portability in mobile phone have changed our society, making it more mobile and flexible. Wikipedia (2007) reports that mobile phone was introduced in Japan in 1979, but became a mass medium in 1998 when the first downloadable ringtones were introduced in Finland. Similar to the internet, the mobile phone is an interactive medium, but has a wider reach, with 3.3 billion mobile phone users at the end of 2007 compared to 1.3 billion internet users (ITU). Mobile phone has several unique benefits over either the television or the internet because it is permanently carried and always connected. It has the best audience accuracy available to every user without any credit cards or pay pal accounts.

An overview on the use of Mobile phone for language teaching

The mobile phone, referred to as the 7th mass medium (Moore, 2007) has recently become less expensive, lighter, and more powerful and has become more important in language learning and use. Basoglu and Akdemir (2010) observe that as mobile phones become increasingly popular, new examples of language learning experiences in everyday surroundings are expected to be seen often and that learning through mobile phones can create different learning opportunities for students. They believe that even though studies about the use of mobile phones in language learning are recent and limited, results show that they have positive effects on the learning process. For instance, VanDrimmelen (2007) proposes eight ways by which mobile phones can be used in education. These are: as whiteboard and blackboard, hand held scanner, reminder list, for learning students' names and faces, as security and liability device, for assignments, for instant blogging and for memories. As a teaching tool, cell phone serves as calculators, digital camera, internet access and dictionaries.

Similarly, a study by Saran, Cagiltay and Seferoghuls (2008), cited by Basoglu and Akdemir (2010), showed that students specified positive feedback to the use of mobile phones in language learning. Students stated that they were delighted to use the information in their mobile phones. Cavus and Ibrahim (2009) investigated the use of wireless technologies in learning English vocabulary using short message service (SMS) text messaging. The results showed that students expressed positive attitudes while learning new words through mobile phones. In another study, McConotha, Praul and Lynch (2008) conducted a research by giving the students the opportunity to use an M-learning product for the purpose of assisting them in preparation for two scheduled exams. Practice and review questions were made available in M-learning devices. The results showed that by using mobile devices in the learning process, students made better scores. In investigating the effectiveness of using mobile phones while browsing WAP sites to learn listening skills and students' attitudes towards using mobile phone, Nah, White and Sussex (2008) found that while using mobile phones for this purpose, the students expressed positive attitudes to activities and they found them convenient and interactive. The students could study at anytime and anywhere spontaneously, so it was student-centred learning process. In another study involving a comparison of undergraduate students' English vocabulary learning, using mobile phones and flash cards, Basoglu et al (2010) found that the use of vocabulary learning programme in the mobile phone improved the students' vocabulary learning and that using vocabulary learning programs on mobile phones was more effective and entertaining. Many other studies were conducted and results showed mobile phone as a potential learning tool. Mobile phone does not only improve learners' vocabulary and grammar but also enhances the development of language skills, particularly, the reading, writing, and listening skills. For instance, Kiernan and Aizawa (2004) used mobile phones to have learners exchange e-mails with one another in order to teach targeted structures, while Taylor and Gitsaki (2003), cited by Stokewell (2010), required their learners to use the browser function of their phones to perform internet searches. Levy and Kennedy (2005) sent learners language-related text notifications through SMS about what they had learnt during class or details of upcoming television programmes they wanted the learners to watch. Each of these studies capitalized on different features of mobile phones (e-mail, Web browsers, and SMS) and showed the importance of phone as a learning tool.

Further work on investigating how learners acquire vocabulary through mobile phones was conducted by Chem, Hsieh, and Kinshuk (2008). In their study, learners deemed to have varying verbal and visual learning skills were provided with four different types of annotations for learning English vocabulary depending on their learning preferences. Flash cards were sent to their mobile phones through SMS which included one of the four different types of annotation and English word only, English word with written annotation, and English word with pictorial annotations. The flash cards were viewed in the classrooms and learners were given 50 minutes to learn 24 vocabulary items. In a posttest carried out immediately after the activities on desktop computer in the classroom, they found that the pictorial annotation- assisted learners who had lower verbal and higher visual ability to retain vocabulary, at least in the short term, performed better.

Studies have also looked at the actual mobile phone use outside the classroom, for instance, through distance learning. This can be seen in studies by Thornton and Houser (2005) and Kennedy and Levy (2008), cited by Stokewell (2008). Both studies were based on the "push" mode of operation, that is, where teachers control the frequency and the timing of messages sent to learners. Thornton and Houser sent mini- lessons for learning vocabulary via e-mails to learners' mobile phones three times a day, using new words in multiple context to allow learners to infer the meanings. Similarly, learners in the Kennedy and Levy's study were given the option to receive messages which presented known words in new contexts and new words in contexts that were familiar to learners through SMS to their mobile phones on an average of nine to ten

messages per week. A survey was administered in both studies and in each case, it was indicated that learners felt these messages were very helpful for vocabulary learning, although some indicated that the messages were too frequent.

The educative use of mobile phones could be more than just information delivery and retrieval. Prensky (2005) urges educators to recognize their potential and design appropriate tasks:

Educators should bear in mind that cell phones can be used for context as well as content... just as we are designing and refining Web-based tools for such tasks so must we be designing similar tools for cell phones...the communication and social features of the mobile phones are likely to be of great help.

The multimedia capabilities of mobile phones, such as capturing digital pictures and video can enable the development of themes and issues that benefit from representations using educational media by, for example, producing videos, documentaries, animations of educational concepts and news bulletins. The ability to communicate and share these artifacts through Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs and Wik is provides authentic products that students can use for reflection and foundations for 'remixing' and further knowledge constructions (Herrington and Herrington, 2006).

One of the limitations of using mobile phone for language learning is that much of it occurs in artificial environments, generally within the classroom itself. In order to gain a real indication of the nature of mobile learning, it is wise to view its use in naturalistic setting. An example of where learners use mobile phone outside the classroom was seen in a research conducted by Stock well (2008). In the study, 75 pre-intermediate learners of English were provided with tailored vocabulary activities based on listening activities covered in class, and were able to complete these either on mobile phones through the internet browser function on their phones or on a normal desktop or laptop computer. Surveys and server log data revealed that learners used the mobile phone in the vast majority of cases; many indicated from the outset that they did not intend to use the mobile phone for their vocabulary study, citing problems such as the cost of internet access, the screen size, the keypad and the study environment as the primary reasons. The study showed that 61% of the learners did not use the mobile phone at all, with a further 24% of learners using the mobile phone for less than 20% of the vocabulary activities. Wylie (2010) opines that creative ELL teachers are using mobile phones to help students with vocabulary and grammar through SMS text exchanges with the teacher, peers, or foreign language students. For instance, a recent pilot programme initiated by Irish government used mobile phones to help encourage students to learn Irish alongside their dominant language, English. They decided that the impact of mobile learning would be a great motivator for students. One of their ideas was to have daily text messages with Irish words sent to the students during their Irish class. The students were then tasked with using the word in class correctly, or on the school's teacher monitored, text-based, web chat rooms. Both teachers and students felt that this had a positive impact on language learning at school.

Before using mobile or cell phones in class, there is the need to have a plan and a purpose which the teacher wants to achieve. For instance, is the teacher focusing on speaking, listening, reading, writing, or some combination of the four skills? Or does the teacher simply want the students to reflect on their language use outside the classroom? Also, is there an added value to using a phone for the activity the teacher has in mind? If there is none, perhaps it is better to find an alternative. The next step is to take stock of the resources that are available. This is because there are enormous range of phone makes and models, as the technology is always advancing. With the above preparation, the following steps can be taken to teach English language in secondary through the mobile phone.

- 1: Use the Notes feature of the mobile phone to collect everyday language
Most mobile phones have a feature that allows note-taking. Ask students to use this feature to take notes on the English they read or hear outside of school and either present the notes to the class or send them to you as a text message. Instead of giving regular homework, you can ask students to hunt for specific language forms (e.g., common nouns, the past perfect tense, formulaic expressions), and the student who collects the largest number of correct samples wins.
- 2: Use the Camera feature to take pictures of text
One of the easiest ways to use a mobile phone for learning is to record samples of the target language by taking pictures. Students can take pictures of English text by using the Camera feature on their mobile phones. They can transfer the pictures to a computer and upload them from there.
- 3: Use the Voice Memo Recorder feature to record language from media outlets.
Most phones include a memo recording feature that can collect language samples from television or radio. The students' collected samples give an opportunity to analyze the language, discuss where they were collected, and provide feedback.
- 4: Use the Voice Memo Recorder feature to record conversations outside the classroom
Students can record interviews or conversations they engage in outside the classroom. Students can play the interviews and conversations in class for feedback and discussion.
- 5: Use the Text Messaging feature to reinforce vocabulary learning
A study by Thornton and Houser (2003) shows that Short Message Service (SMS) text messages can be used to send out vocabulary items at spaced intervals, thus increasing student retention. For example, the teacher could text the words covered in class to encourage students to review them outside the school context. By sending out the words multiple times, the chances that students will remember them are increased. Lomine and Buckingham (2009) observes that based on short texts (160 characters – 150 characters on some older phones), SMS has three advantages: (a) it forces users to express themselves concisely; (b) texts use little memory which keeps costs down, (c) no extra technological training is required.
- 6: Use free programs to make flashcards for mobile phones
If you do not want to create your own vocabulary lists, there are several companies that produce flash card software that runs on mobile phones, such as www.flashmybrain.com (there is charge to set up an account). You or your students can create vocabulary flashcards that can be retrieved, shared, and practiced anywhere.
- 7: Use the Text Messaging feature for circular writing
Many students do not like to write these days, they associate writing in the school context with boring assignments and a punitive environment of criticism and negative feedback. O'Connor (2005) posited that popular forms of technology such as text messaging can be used as a learning tool if students are taught how to make the connection between its form of writing and the formal, academic. Therefore, even if students are not ready to write essays, they can practice with shorter texts to develop their writing skills. One activity is circular writing, where students create a story together by contributing one text message at a time. Each student writes a sentence or two and then sends this on to the next student, who adds another message, and so on until the story is complete. The teacher is copied and has a record of the story as it emerges. The teacher can experiment with different text types such narratives, news reports, instructions, etc.
- 8: Use the mobile phone to keep a blog
A more advanced form of using the mobile phone for writing tasks is keeping a blog. This does

require a phone with a connection to the Internet (or the use of a wireless network at home or perhaps at school). Students use the Text Messaging and Camera features to add messages and post pictures to their personal blogs. This is great for writing about personal experiences, places visited, and people met, but it can also be used as an activity in which students collect information and report on it like journalists. Teachers can read these blogs and provide feedback, request more information, or ask students to comment on each other's work.

9: Use the mobile phone for microblogging on twitter

No report on mobile writing would be complete without mention of twitter, the popular microblogging service. Microblogging involves sending short messages from a computer or a mobile phone. Twitter is now used by many different professions, including educators, to keep people informed about who is doing what. Twitter can be used for a wide variety of assignments, such as asking students to report on their daily activities. To focus on specific aspects of language, students could be asked to write down each idiom they find in a book they are reading or to report when they hear someone use a negative adverb such as seldom or hardly. The teacher may not be able to or want to read all the comments, or tweets, himself, but could ask students to follow some of their classmates' tweets and respond to them.

10: Use the mobile phone for social networking

Like Twitter, Facebook and MySpace are enormously popular social networking tools that allow groups of "friends" to meet, post messages, share pictures, and generally interact online in a myriad of ways. Most of the interaction takes place in writing, and simply asking students to use English instead of their native language produces a great deal of writing practice. Some teachers actively use such sites to keep in touch with students or to organize activities online. The sites can be accessed through mobile phones, and it could be good fun to ask students to post on each other's pages in relation to a topic you have just discussed in class. This activity is best used within range of a wireless network, so it may not work for everyone.

11: Use mobile phone memory to distribute listening material

Many phones have memory for graphics, photos, and music that can be used to download listening material for students, who can in turn transfer them to their phones or other media. This could be a record for the class, a podcast, or course listening materials.

12: Use the mobile phone to play games

Many of the free games for mobile phones, such as Scrabble and crossword puzzles, involve a focus on language. Although not all of them may be suitable for second language learners, they at least encourage students to engage in the target language, and to do so in the context of entertainment. Once students determine that their phones have the capability to play games, they must download and install the programs.

13: Use the Voice Memo Recorder, Notes, and Calendar features to keep a portfolio
Most learning inevitably takes place outside the classroom. Students need to process new information and assimilate it into their interlanguage, which is their current stage of second language development as reflected by their control of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Encouraging students to reflect about their language acquisition helps them to take control of their own learning and positively affects the assimilation process. Mobile phones, by virtue of their portability, lower this barrier. Ask students to document their learning progress by using the Notes and Voice Memo Recorder features. In addition, you could encourage students to use the Calendar feature or other productivity tool available on most phones to set goals, deadlines for assignments, and reminders to rehearse material covered in class.

Challenges facing the use of mobile phone in English language teaching

The following are some potential problems associated with using mobile phones in the classroom:

Lack of access to mobile phones

Not all students in all classes will have mobile phones, however, it is probably safe to say that of all the technologies available to teachers, mobile phones are the most widespread. It is also important to make sure that all the students have access to phones that have the capabilities the teacher needs. Also, one mobile phone could be used by many students for certain activities.

Noise and disruption in class

Despite the exciting potential for mobile phones to increase opportunities for learning, the prospect of allowing noisy phones into a classroom may seem a bit daunting, especially if one has little experience using them as a teaching tool. As with music, movies, and computers, their usefulness depends on having well-defined tasks for your students to work with. Phones can be disruptive. For example, it would be counterproductive if they ring in class in the middle of a silent reading activity. As a result, some ground rules are needed.

Increased teacher workload

The use of mobile phones, or any new technology, has the potential to increase the teacher's workload. There may be a learning curve, which is an investment that will hopefully pay itself back in increased student motivation and engagement. However, there is also the question of how to deal with the extra communication that use of phones generates. For example, the teacher may receive numerous texts from the students. In this case, the teacher needs to set boundaries and make it clear to students what they can send to him when, what he can and cannot respond to as well as what he will respond to individually and in class. Even receiving 50 text messages may not be an issue if they all relate to the same assignment the teacher sets in class as he can follow up with the whole group. There are also tools that can help managing text messages. Programs like Notepage (www.notepage.net) can help the teacher to respond to multiple text messages or send out bulk messages from a computer, thus greatly reducing the time needed to respond.

Over-Crowded English language Class rooms

Most secondary schools in Nigeria are over-crowded with not less than thirty students. This may be a problem to the use of mobile phone in teaching English language. The formation of small groups and pair work can help in lessening the load on both the teacher and the large group of students. Also, a few of the more "advanced" students can also help to take care of some group work elements.

Conclusion

Mobile phone technology is just a tool and the skilled teacher matches the tool to the task in order to accomplish an important purpose. One key purpose is to increase students' motivation in learning the English language. At the same time the use of the technology needs to focus on students and their needs as well as match the learning activities effectively to their personalities, learning styles and characteristics as practically as possible. The different ways of using mobile phone by an experienced language teacher put forth in this paper can go a long way in; not only making language teaching and learning a stress free exercise but also create a learner-friendly language learning environment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations would help to make the teaching of English language through the mobile phone technology a reality.

1. Government at all levels should emphasize the use of technology, particularly those that are affordable, in language teaching.
2. Parents should provide their wards with mobile phones with the sole aim of using them for vital and educational communication.
3. Teachers of English as a second language should be prepared to face the challenges of exploiting the affordances provided by mobile technologies, such as the mobile phone, in language teaching in, not only secondary schools, but also other levels of the educational system.
4. Schools should provide enabling environment for the use of mobile phone in teaching English language so as to provide avenue for additional forms of learning both in the classroom and outside the school environment.
5. The curriculum planners and text book writers should make provision for the use of affordable technologies in the curriculum and English language text books respectively.

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