

## ***M-Learning: Use of Mobile Phones as an Effective Tool for Teachers' Professional Development***

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### **Abstract**

*M-Learning* (Mobile Learning) plays a significant role in creating an independent learning environment for both teachers and learners. It is evident that students of the present generation are more comfortable in using technology on a regular basis which is not the same for teachers. Tools such as Smart Board, Projector and Laptop have become compulsory teaching aids inside the classroom. *Mobile Assisted Language Learning* (MALL) supports the teachers to search for materials beyond the prescribed lessons which can provide a wider range of understanding on any topic from anywhere and at any time. Mobile phones can also be used as an important teaching tool to practice collaborative tasks, interactive sessions and as a continuous learning aid for teachers as well as learners. Smartphones and Tablets are used as effective tools for teaching LSRW skills in many countries but using Mobile phones inside Indian classrooms is still not in practice. The objective of this article is to help teachers understand the benefits and the different ways to use mobile applications for their personal and professional learning both inside and outside the classroom. In this article, mobile application tools such as *Seesaw*, *Medium*, *Snap Homework* and *WordPress* are described in detail and shown how they can act as effective tools to enrich the teachers' knowledge on the use of technology for their everyday teaching and learning process. The outcome of this study substantiates that Mobile learning tools do enhance teaching proficiency of English language teachers.

**Keywords:** M-learning, Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Mobile Applications, Teacher Development

### **Introduction**

*Mobile learning (mlearning)* has become a popular teaching and learning approach with a lot of advancements in the field of education. Innovative use of mobile learning tools inside and outside classroom creates an independent learning environment for both the teacher and the learner. ICT tools such as Computers, DVDs and projectors play an integral part in language teaching. Adding to the benefits and advancements in technology use, mobile phones have also become essential tools in the teaching arena. Constant attention and contact with friends, teachers, and family members are some of the major advancements with the use of mobile phones than other devices. Though majority of Indian schools argue that use of mobile phone creates distraction, they cannot deny the benefits it contributes for

practicing collaborative tasks for teaching LSRW skills. Another notable advantage of using mobile phone is that, it bridges the classroom and the outside world with many features like camera, voice recorder, podcast, video player, maps, internet browser, notes and calendar in a single device.

Teachers play a very important role in implementing *M-learning* inside the classrooms which can help learners to perform language learning tasks much better than traditional ways of learning. With the use of technology, the role of teachers has changed and it continues to change every day. This method of teaching cannot work as a regular method of teaching but it can give a change in the learning environment of learners by implementing it for simple activities that can create an active learning environment. The teachers need to encourage and support learners to practice simple activities that help learners to speak for instance, learners describing a picture in their own words can be an interesting activity for the learner. Laine and Suhonen (2008) suggest that mobile learning supports the learner to interact through collaborative tools such as photos, and video-sharing services, Weblogs and wiki for sharing content with other learners. Effective use of mobile phones inside the classroom is possible if the teacher is proficient, confident, updated and organised with proper framework for every class.

### **Mobile Assisted Language Learning**

*Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)* is used as an alternative approach for language teaching. Assisting learners with mobile devices and giving them personal space to learn language on their own anywhere and at anytime creates a new learning environment for the learners. *MALL* for adult learners provides new opportunities to explore on topics and discuss it in public forums like Twitter, WhatsApp group and Facebook. This spontaneous approach to learn different topics through Smart phones can help the learners to sustain their interest for a longer period of time than regular methods of learning. User-friendly features in Mobile technology help the teachers to create innovative tasks for learners and to share them with the learners with similar interest respectively Tayebeh Mosavi & Amin Nezarat (2012), suggest that *MALL* creates a more convenient learning environment that aids to be an important strategy to achieve and meet the learning needs of the learners. Since Mobile phones are multimodal, they can be used effectively to practice different tasks such as learning vocabulary through flashcards and pictures, reading comprehension, listening activity, Grammar and writing exercises.

Teachers play a very important role in implementing *Mobile Assisted Learning* which is more challenging and dynamic than other approaches of teaching. In this method of teaching, the teachers act as facilitators by providing them with activities like discussion and demonstration without setting any time limit for the learners. Another reason why teachers should use *MALL* in their teaching is to create an autonomous learning environment for the learners by instructing them to look for materials and ideas in the internet that they find interesting to read. Pursuing it further, teachers should be ready to raise challenging questions for the learners so that the students can search and explore the internet for more information on the given topics. Thus these kinds of activities can help learners to stay active for a longer period of time. Meticulous planning of right questions, group interaction and discussion for each topic can create an effective teaching and learning environment.

## Mobile Applications

In recent times, the use of computers among students has decreased because of the portable devices such as Smart phones and tablets. Mobile applications serve as easy tools to search directly for specific information than browsing and loading it on the webpage. The uses of Mobile phones have become easier with the inbuilt applications as well as regular applications that can be downloaded with official applications like Google play and Apple's App Store. In comparison with all other subjects, language teachers have more opportunities to create a completely different learning environment for their learners with the use of Mobile Applications. Students can experience changes in teaching methods that can initiate the interest of the learners. New teaching method like implementing mobile applications provides more opportunities for the teachers to have perspectives and ideas in their known subjects. Tasks such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing can be practised effectively with the powerfully designed features that can interest the learners as well as the teachers.

Mobile applications have a lot of advantages for English language teachers. Using Mobile applications such as voice recorder can help teacher to engage the class effectively especially while conducting collaborative tasks that include interaction among the learners. Another notable advantage of using mobile application tools such as *dictionary application* with detailed word explanation and *News application* with instant update that can be utilized as a tool for reference. It can help teachers and learners to continue their learning process even during their free time. Another factor to consider is it's systematically enabled learning features. For instance, teachers can use reading tools that can help the readers to continue their reading from the page it is stopped. Using Highlighters for favourite quotes, dialogues and vocabulary are a few interesting features of Mobile applications that lack in web browser. The following section of the article is an attempt to describe a few Mobile applications that can help teachers to improve their personal and professional teaching and learning.

## Seesaw Application

*Seesaw application* is an iOS supported application that can function in iPhone and iPad devices. This application can be used as an effective tool to maintain digital portfolio of individual students in a class which can be accessed by the teacher, students and their parents with a class code. Features like *Journal, Activities, Inbox, Skills and Blog* in this application can support teachers to create organised portfolio by documenting the development of each learner in the class than by maintaining it in hand written documents. The main advantage of using this application is to make the work of a teacher easier, effective and efficient by spending more time with their students after the class hours. Once the teacher has adapted this method of providing activities for students, a regular pattern of this system can work wonders for teachers as well as students in their language learning.

Teachers can instruct students to post their written works or ideas of their everyday lessons on the *Journal* column which can help students to display what they learned in their language class. Riddles, grammar activities, reading comprehension and written assignments can be posted on *Activities* column. *Inbox* feature in Seesaw application helps the teachers have live chat with students and their parents if they have any doubts on given tasks. The notification bar in the application allows the teacher to be attentive to all the messages posted by students and parents. *Skills* feature in Seesaw application is a paid feature with many advantages where the teacher can rate the students' performance based on their language

learning skills. *Blog* features in this application helps the teacher to publish the works of the students that helps the family members to be connected with classroom activities and witness the growth of their child's learning.

### **Medium Application**

Medium application is a boon for every reading teacher. This application helps the teachers to have ideas and perspectives of different topics that can be experienced in a single platform. Teachers who are engaging-readers are motivated to read and are socially interactive about what they read. These qualities show up in their classroom interactions and help create students who are, in turn, engaged readers. (Dreher, 2003:338). Medium is one such online application that helps teachers to be continuous active readers. This application also works as a platform for teachers to write and publish their own articles on any interesting topics or inspiring stories that they have experienced. The page provides articles and stories in different topic tags such as *Technology, Culture, Entrepreneurship, Creativity, Self, Politics, Media, Productivity, Design, Popular* topics and so on, based on the interest of the readers.

*Audio* feature in medium application supports the teachers to listen to the topics if they find less time for reading and they can also make use of this application to provide students with listening activity topics of their choice to make the activity effective since the application is structured as a huge platform with different topics. The use of *Bookmarks* in this application appears in a separate column where the teachers can find all their favourite quotes in a single page. *Interests* feature such as *Arts, Comics, Film, Food, Humour, Lit, music, Photography, Social media, Sport* and so on can be followed by the teachers so that they can receive constant update of the selected topics. Pursuing the benefits of Medium application further, it can be best used as an interactive tool for teachers to have constant connection with people who are experts in each topic. Teachers can have online chat, provide and receive feedback for every article published in this application.

### **Snap Homework**

*Snap Homework* application is an excellent alternative tool for school teachers to announce the day-to-day happening of every classroom activity, homework and message provided by all the subject teachers to students and their parents. *Classroom update* feature in Snap homework allows the teacher to attach photos, Audio documents and videos related to lessons, post pictures of group activity; attach materials for exam preparation from file manager, DropBox and Google Drive. *SnapPay, SnapSign* and *Invite* are other features that help teachers to maintain a record of regular attendance of students, official announcements, events and other school related activities. Grades from 1 to 12 will be provided with separate class code that can support parents to access the application and follow official posts in one application. Since it is a free educational application for the teachers, language teachers can post rhymes, poems, reading materials, speaking activity links and riddles to engage students even after school hours.

*Snap Homework* application helps the teacher to give a clear picture of his/her students' contribution in the class to their parents. Teachers can instruct students to practice collaborative tasks such as enacting a play, short story, debate and impromptu speaking activity in the class that can be recorded as Video/Audio format. This activity would

encourage the students to gain confidence and attention in every language class. “Building a parent –teacher relationship on mutual respect and trust is just as important as the ability to teach reading. It will nurture long-lasting, respectful relationships with parents and students that can last a lifetime” (Barbara Mariconda, 2003). Thus *Snap Homework* application supports teachers to get insight about their engagement with parents and students that results advancement in their personal and professional growth.

### **WordPress Blog**

WordPress blog application is a free blog creator to publish personal works online. This application can be used as an excellent tool for teachers to create their own classroom blog for their students to be connected lifelong. There are many interesting features in WordPress blog application such as *publishing articles, editing posts, categorizing articles* based on the title, *searching related content, Managing users' access, and Changing themes* of own choice. According to Deng & Yuen, “blogging fosters individual expressions, reflections, social networking and peer support” (2011:53). Paquet (2003) & Herring et.al (2004) are of the opinion that blogs create an opportunity for teachers to be engaged in their own learning and thus it empowers them and develops their reflective approach (as cited in Ismail Hussein Amzat, 2017, p.40). Language teachers can post general articles like reading strategies, writing tips, ideas for speaking activity and listening tips that involve teachers’ continuous learning. Language teachers can also form group of students and assign them tasks to manage, edit and develop contents related to English language for the classroom blog. These activities can nurture a lot of creative ideas among the students and the teacher can guide them whenever the support is needed. Thus the teacher can create a new self-learning experience for the students as well as set a new trend for other teachers.

### **Conclusion**

Teachers play a very important role in the lives of learners. Everyday technology brings in lot of opportunities and ideas for the teachers to teach creatively. In order to cope with the advancements in teaching methods and approaches, teachers need to be efficient in handling ICT tools with confidence. According to Amol C. Goje & Pravin L. Yannawar (2011), teachers should be equipped with knowledge on the use of technology in order to attain success in their teaching and learning. They emphasise that the teachers should learn to use a variety of technology applications available for teachers to create an effective learning environment in and outside the classrooms. Thus to conclude teachers should come forward to implement new methods of teaching with use of technology on most of the days as it is the expectation and demand of the learners of the digital age. It is also evident that new teachers would be comfortable in using mobile phones as a tool for personal learning as it has become a part of their lifestyle. The use of Mobile applications described in this article can certainly enhance the teachers’ creative knowledge along with their subject knowledge, as a result of which they can also empower themselves in their career, thus becoming effective teachers in the noble profession of teaching.

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