

Book Review – Mobile Learning: Transforming the Delivery of Education and Training

Olaf Zawacki-Richter

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Book Review

Mobile Learning: Transforming the Delivery of Education and Training

Editor: Mohamed Ally (2009). *Mobile Learning: Transforming the Delivery of Education and Training*. Athabasca, AB: Athabasca University Press. CDN\$39.95 ISBN 978-1-897425-43-5 (297 pages)

Reviewer: Olaf Zawacki-Richter, FernUniversität in Hagen, Germany

Mobile Learning: Transforming the Delivery of Education and Training, edited by Mohamed Ally from the Centre for Distance Education at Athabasca University, is published in the Issues in Distance Education Series of AU Press. The book comprises three parts with 13 chapters. Part 1 deals with theoretical foundations and provides an overview of the current state of mobile learning (two chapters). Part 2 includes four chapters that report on research into mobile learning, and part 3 presents various examples of the application of mobile learning in different contexts and subject areas (seven chapters). At the end of the book the reader finds an index and a helpful glossary with technical terms.

I must admit that I was always a bit sceptical about the development and relevance of mobile learning, although I was involved in a mobile learning workshop for Nokia as early as 2001. What is the added value of mobile learning? E-learning is learning at home or at the workplace, so is mobile learning just learning in between? Well, what convinced me was a research visit to South Africa and the enormous opportunities that wireless devices afford to provide access to education and learner support, especially in developing countries. Africa is obviously leapfrogging from an unwired, (almost) non-existent e-learning infrastructure to a wireless e-learning infrastructure (Brown, 2004; Zawacki-Richter, Brown, & Delpont, 2008). Mohamed Ally emphasises this important aspect of mobile learning in his introduction as well.

The first chapter, Current State of Mobile Learning, contributed by John Traxler, was previously published in *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* in 2007 (8, 2). He sets the stage by defining mobile learning in contrast to e-learning and makes the point that learning with mobile devices is more flexible, spontaneous, and ubiquitous and can be more personalised, situated, and authentic than “tethered e-learning.”

In chapter 2, Maguerite Koole presents a theoretical model for the development of mobile devices, the design of learning materials, and the design of teaching and learning activities called

the framework for the rational analysis of mobile education (FRAME). This comprehensive model covers different aspects of mobile learning, including the device, usability, and learner characteristics as well as social aspects of interaction via mobile devices.

The second part of the book contains research papers on mobile learning and begins with a chapter by Torstein Rekkedal and Aleksander Dye entitled Mobile Distance Learning with PDAs. It reports on experiences from the development, testing, and evaluation of mobile learning at NKI (Norwegian Knowledge Institute) Distance Education, funded by three European Union projects. It is interesting for the reader to follow the whole development from the first prototype course to the integration of mobile learning into mainstream provision at NKI. However, it is a pity that this chapter was not updated for this volume after its first publication in *IRRODL* in 2007 when the final project (Incorporation of Mobile Learning into Mainstream Education and Training) was only in its early stages.

Chapter 4, Using Mobile Learning to Enhance the Quality of Nursing Practice in Education, by Richard F. Kenny, Caroline Park, Jocelyne M. C. van Neste-Kenny, Pamela A. Burton, and Jan Meiers, draws upon Koole's FRAME model. After a literature review on the application of mobile learning in health care and nursing, they present an exploratory evaluation of a pilot project with two instructors and three volunteer students. They conclude that the use of mobile learning is especially feasible in supporting informal learning of health care professionals. This chapter was also originally published in *IRRODL* in 2007.

In chapter 5, Gill Clough, Ann C. Jones, Patrick McAndrew, and Eileen Scanlon conducted a survey to explore the various ways in which PDA and smartphone users exploit mobile device services to support their informal learning ($N = 200$). A full range of intentional and unintentional learning activities is described in this chapter.

In chapter 6, Kristine Peters investigates mobile learning in corporate settings. She carried out 29 interviews with manufacturers of mobile devices (4), individuals from corporations (6), and educational providers (19). Despite the opportunities and benefits of mobile learning, Peters finds only limited adoption of mobile devices for education and training and describes the impeding factors.

Chapter 7 complements chapter 5. Agnes Kukulska-Hulme and John Pettit sent out an instrument to students and alumni from the Master in Online and Distance Education at the Open University UK ($N = 75$) to investigate personal mobile device usage. They triangulated the results of nine interviews with individuals who showed interesting and intensive usage behaviour. The authors distinguish between five types of activities with mobile phones, smartphones, PDAs, and MP3 players: teaching, learning, work, social interaction, and entertainment. Interestingly, 30% of respondents use mobile phones for teaching and 17% for their own learning.

Chapter 8, written by Claire Bradley, Richard Haynes, John Cook, Tom Boyle, and Carl Smith, is a valuable resource for those who are or will be engaged in the design and development of multimedia material for mobile phones. The authors describe in great detail the iterative

development of four prototypes of multimedia objects for learning study skills informed by a formative evaluation process.

The following chapters present various applications of mobile learning in different contexts and subject areas. They draw on extensive practical experiences, reflect on a number of conceptual models, and describe best practices in mobile learning. Michelle Pieri and Davide Diamantini (chapter 9) evaluate a training course for managers in a blended m-learning format ($N = 15$). Laura Naismith and M. Paul Smith (chapter 12) report on a project in which a multimedia tour for museum learning was developed, and they discuss its design based on the feedback of 25 visitors. Chapters 10 and 11 deal with projects, programmes, and courses in developing countries. Merryl Ford and Teemu Leinonen present an international project that promotes mobile learning for schools in South Africa trying to use low-cost technology. Jon Gregson and Dolf Jordaan go on with a case study of a mobile learning project for students in a postgraduate distance learning programme for students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. They describe the challenges of providing access and support to students in developing countries and offer possible solutions. In the final chapter, Jocely Wishart describes a small-scale project for teacher training. Trainee teachers used mobile devices to record observations on each others' lessons, student behaviour, etc.

In his conclusion, Mohamed Ally lists the lessons learned from the contributions to this book as well as the challenges for educators and institutions to develop learning materials for mobile devices and to integrate them into mainstream delivery.

By and large, the research and development projects presented here are based on quite a small numbers of students, which suggests that mobile learning is still in project status and has not yet reached the mainstream. Large scale empirical studies on the design, impact, and effectiveness of mobile learning seem to be rare still. Some chapters in this book were already written in 2006, which is a long time ago given the rapidly developing field of mobile learning.

That being said, the editor is to be commended for this fine selection of papers that demonstrate best practice and explore the various applications and opportunities that mobile learning affords. This volume is a valuable resource for educators, trainers, and researchers alike.

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