

Chapter 8

Investigating the Daily Use of Mobile Phones as Tools to Enhance mLearning for Local Cultural Subjects in the Context of Malaysian Universities

Shamsul Arrieya Ariffin

Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), Malaysia

ABSTRACT

With the advent of mobile technology, students and academics are using mobile devices, such as mobile phones, for personal daily activities. Due to the heavy overseas 'Mat Salleh' content from English speaking countries, such as the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom this contributes to the lack of content. In fact, there is a lack of local content for local cultural subjects. Furthermore, there are limited qualitative studies that take into consideration the potential of students in the Malaysian universities to make use of mobile phones as tools to enhance mobile learning or mLearning, particularly for studying local cultural subjects. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted for this largely qualitative study. Thematic analysis was then conducted on the data collected. The main themes that emerged from this study comprise multimedia usage and software for daily use. Thus, this study contributes to understanding by revealing future potential, including suggestions for the use of the multimedia functions of the mobile phones for better learning outcomes.

BACKGROUND

Nowadays mobile learning (or mLearning) with the use of mobile devices, such as mobile phones, as an educational tool, has become a worldwide phenomenon. For instance in Malaysia the use of mobile phones has been widely adopted by university students (Hussin et al., 2012). Before proceeding further with this study, it is appropriate to understand the background of this study context with the focus on Malaysia.

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Lack of Local Content

Despite the urgency for the development of local content for mobile phones by the previous Malaysian minister (Lim, 2005), the study by Ariffin, Dyson and Hoskins-McKenzie (2012) identified that there is a serious lack of local cultural content. Unfortunately, the findings highlighted that local cultural content was not popular among developers. English language or ‘Mat Salleh’ content is more widely available via mobile phones in overseas countries, such as parts of Europe and the USA (‘Mat Salleh’ is a colloquial Malay word referring to English speaking content.) This leads to difficulty in accessing content pertaining to local cultural subjects for learning about the local culture in the Malaysian context. In Malaysia, it is important to follow the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (SKMM) guidelines, which is a government department that controls content development rules, such as avoiding words that are vulgar or treating others with disrespect (SKMM Guidelines, 2012). This is also in accordance with the national cultural policy that highlights the use of the main culture of the indigenous people and traditions, which is the Malay culture and behaviour (Mastor, Jin, & Cooper, 2000). The Malaysian government supports mobile learning through the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT), such as mobile learning. The recent Malaysian Development Plan for Education 2015-2025 indicates government interest in utilizing smart phone devices in education. Thus, strategizing these policies with mLearning content development should improve the outcome, including addressing the lack of content in Malaysia.

Research Aim

One of the aims of this study is to discover the potential to reduce the lack of local content for local cultural subjects or Local Cultural Studies (LCS) through the assistance of mobile devices as a tool for mLearning. For convenience, the term LCS has been used to represent subjects that relate to Malay culture as the local culture, such as History, Local Culture and National Heritage, and Cooking. Furthermore, there are limited studies in the area of local culture in the Malaysian context, particularly in understanding the experience of users with mobile devices. Malaysian university students could benefit from the use of mobile learning or mLearning in learning LCS. This area of study in the Malaysian context is under-researched. Therefore, this study explores the motivation of the users for the use of mobile devices, such as mobile phones, in their daily life, irrespective of whether their use is for educational purposes, as well as their potential use for the study of local culture.

Mobile Learning Definition for this Study

Dyson and Litchfield (2011) defined mLearning as learning facilitated by mobile technologies. This can be extended to different settings, for instance, to Malaysian universities for the study of local culture. However, this study defines mobile learning, as the use of mobile technology and devices, particularly students’ own mobile phones, in facilitating the learning of LCS. This is because, according to Hussin et al. (2012), although other suitable devices may support mobile learning activities in the process of generating local content, mobile phones are universally owned by Malaysian university students. In this study, mobile phones constitute a mobile device that can be used as a tool for mLearning for potentially improving the outcome for educational purposes.

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