INCORPORATING MOBILE LEARNING AND TESTING POSSIBILITIES TO ELT CLASSROOMS

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The ubiquitous use and hi-tech compatibility of mobile phones for fast and easy browsing have made them potential tools of instruction in English teaching and testing practices. The presence of numerous mobile applications, dexterously customized to meet instructional needs, have redefined the traditionally held perceptions of mobile phones as a distracting device to a supportive tool. The paper examines the potential benefits of incorporating two popular mobile applications, earmarked for their user friendly interface and device compatibilities, into ELT classrooms for interactive digital learning and administering regular in class tests.

Introduction

The pervasive presence of information and communication technology (ICT) has revolutionized the teaching learning process so much that the perceptions and paradigms held/practiced for long have been redefined. The role of the teacher from a disseminator of information and a commanding center of focus has been relegated into the background. The past buzzwords in teaching and learning were imitation, memorization, passive listening and blind obedience have been replaced with autonomy, independence, guidance, self -pace and task based learning. The boundary of formal four walls has withered away and learning and teaching, on the wings of technology, has become non-spatial, a-temporal and readily accessible anytime anywhere.
Though these shifts have had their good share in pedagogic practices, the area of English language testing still seems to be reluctant to go beyond the traditionally practiced framework. Studies on language assessment (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) show that administering one/two formal test at the middle/end of a course is unreliable and unauthentic as language skills tested within a span of two/four hours of exam can never be a valid evidence to testify to learner’s real skills in the language. Moreover, the learner’s performance, under an unnatural setting, depends on a lot of emotional and physical factors. So studies (Marie, 2011) on language testing propose the idea of continuous/alternative assessment in which the learners’ competence in the actual use of the target language is assessed comprehensively on a regular basis with minimal emotional stress and employing a variety of tools.

The ubiquitous use of cell phones, their mobility, connectivity and high-tech compatibility have turned them into potential tools of learning and testing in ELT. The advanced level of digital literacy of a generation that our learners belong to can better be exploited if mobile learning (m-learning) possibilities are productively integrated into teaching and testing. The availability of numerous mobile applications, dexterously customized and educationally designed to meet pedagogic and educational needs, can easily be incorporated if the ‘digitally immigrant’ teachers are effectively up-skilled. So, the paper examines the possibilities of integrating some select mobile applications (m-apps) for teaching/testing and the potential benefits of this digital testing in maximizing learning outcomes and aligning methodology and testing strategies along with the technical knowhow of a digitally well exposed learners. The relative advantage and disadvantage of m-testing, in comparison to the traditional paper pen tests, will also be discussed.

**M- Learning and Testing**

The emergence of handheld or hybrid devices like phablets /smart phones has paved the way for round-the-clock access to the internet with ease and speed and it seems to have reduced the world into palmtop globe. The fact that most of the learners in many countries possess a smart phone and are well exposed into its educational utilities/applications makes it easy to use it as a great pedagogic tool to extend learning beyond the formal framework. The integration of mobile technology and educational apps into teaching and learning English has numerous advantages. It transforms learning from a teacher dominant process to learner-based interactive process and leaves ample space for independent pace. It can effectively cater to learner levels and differences as these apps offer a variety of options for customization or personalization.
The key plus of m-testing is the feasibility of immediate feedback as correction is done automatically. The teachers are relieved of the laborious task of grading and tabulating learner's scripts meticulously. Since m-testing takes care of marking and tabulating tasks, the assessment strategies can include a series of continuous tests to measure learners' achievements in language skills on a regular basis. Moreover, providing learners with feedback on a regular basis motivates them well and helps them know of their strength and weaknesses in the target language. In addition, both teachers and students get considerable chances to revise/review their teaching/learning tactics to maximize learning outcome and better level of skill acquisition.

In short, the favorable opportunity of ubiquitous use of cell phones and the advanced level of our learners' digital literacy and booming emergence of apps for educational purposes have to be utilized to revamp learning experiences in a way the digitally native generation looks for. Integration of m-testing tools into the traditional framework of paper and pen can tremendously enrich and enhance the validity, efficacy, comprehensiveness and authenticity of language assessment. Two of the m-testing applications that I have successfully used for teaching and regular in-class tests on reading skills, vocabulary and grammar are the following. They offer a simple user interface, easy account creation steps and reasonably good customization options at absolutely free of cost. Feedbacks from my learners and their experience with m-testing have been much great.

**Socrative Student/Teacher**

Socrative ([http://www.socrative.com](http://www.socrative.com)) is a free e-learning platform which works both on computers and mobile phones and has an amazingly simple user interface. Only the teacher needs to create an account in Socrative and it takes seconds because the only detail needed is an active email. Once a teacher account is created, a room number is generated which the students have to type in to log on to the room. The teacher himself/herself can test all options of the app if (s)he has two devices, one for student log in and the other for teacher log in. It helps engage the entire classroom with educational exercises and games while capturing student results in real-time. Moreover the quizzes created by a teacher can easily be imported/shared by others using a code generated for each quiz. In addition to grading the results of tests/quizzes automatically, Socrative has also effective options like real time group games, exit ticket and short quizzes.

**Most Popular Activities:**

Short Answer Questions: Ask an open-ended question. Students respond and all their answers populate your screen for projection. Then ask students to vote on their favorite and watch the results come in.
Quick Quiz: A teacher paced or student paced activity with multiple choice and/or short answer questions. Results can be viewed question by question and exported to a report that is automatically aggregated and graded.

Create a Quiz: Design your own Quick Quizzes with our built in feature or import them with our Excel template. Share with your community!

Space Race: Teams of students answer multiple choice questions in this fast-paced rocket race game. First team to get their rocket across the screen wins! You’ll get a graded report!

Exit Tickets: Get a quick, paper-free pulse-check at the end of class. All answers are aggregated into a report!

Multiple Choice: Ask a MC question, and see student responses on the projection screen as a bar chart.

Figure:1 screenshots

Infuse Learning Application

Infuse Learning (http://www.infuselearning.com) is a free student response system that works with any Internet-connected device like computer/tablet/mobile phones on Android/iOS platforms. Infuse Learning allows teachers to push questions, prompts, and quizzes out to students’ devices in private virtual classrooms. It has a highly user friendly interface and students can log in using the room number given by the teacher. This e-learning platform helps teachers and learners interesting/assessment as it accommodates a wide variety of formats like standard multiple choice, true/false and short answer.
questions. But Infuse Learning also offers an option for students to reply by creating drawings or diagrams on their iPads, Android tablets, or on their laptops.

Unlike Socrative, it offers more customization options. Teachers can choose to enable translation for questions, prompts, and answer choices that students see on their devices. Another advantage is audio narration for questions, prompts, and answer choices. The result of the quizzes can be immediately downloaded/emailed to the mail address associated with the account. Since the results are recorded in excel format, tabulation and editing are made much easier.

Figure-2. InfuseLearning

The m-learning and testing can’t be a replacement for the traditional mode of instruction but making use of its educational potential and integrating it as a supplementary tool will work wonders in maximizing teaching and learning efficacy and achievement level of our learners. Like any form of digital learning, this mode too has inevitable practical hurdles as it necessitates good connectivity, signal strength, device compatibility, application availability etc. In an era of digital literacy and technical innovations, these limitations are definitely surmountable.

Conclusion

The pervasiveness of internet use and round-the-clock connectivity seem to have boosted up the prospects of an emerging shift from e-learning to m-learning. Though the transition will take its own course of time, it will be a reality in the future due to factors like high level compatibility of mobile phones, ubiquity of its use and high speed wireless connectivity. The promise of instant access to learning anytime and anywhere will open up tremendous
benefits, both for teachers and learners. To cope with massive changes taking places in instructional tools, pedagogic practices and the expectations of the future generations, educators have to explore the green pastures of integrating ICT into teaching and testing practices.

References