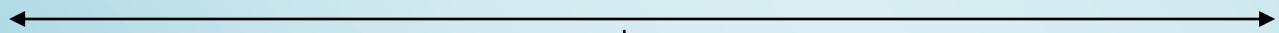# North Asian International Research Journal Consortium

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E-LEARNING AND M-LEARNING: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the theoretical aspects of two of the recent approaches to learning, namely, e-learning and m-learning. With the proliferation of information and communication technologies in the field of education, the traditional teaching-learning practices have got a new dimension in the form of web-based learning, which is popularly known as e-learning. And this new trend has got a newer lease of life with the frequent use of hand-held devices, such as mobile phones, tablets, Smartphone's etc. The practice of teaching and learning with the use of such devices is known as m-learning.

Along with defining e-learning and m-learning in their accepted context, this paper also explores the benefits and constraints of these types of learning. It argues that this innovative ways of learning are novel in their approaches and are considered beneficial for both learners and teachers in engaging them to learning and improving outcomes. At the same time, this analytical article contends that to make e-learning and m-learning successful, a lot of changes are to be introduced in terms of cost of using such devices, accessibility and security. Thus, the paper serves as an eye opener with regards to the pros and cons of e-learning and m-learning.

Key Words: **e-learning, m-learning, innovative approaches.**

INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the 21st century saw a significant change in teaching-learning practices owing to the popularity of mobile devices and the Internet. With ever evolving features of the continuously developing electronic devices, today's teachers and learners can have easy access to effective learning materials and resources. As a result, electronic learning, which is popularly known as e-learning is gaining immense popularity among all sections of the academia. And as a sub-section of e-learning, mobile learning, which is commonly termed as m-learning is also on the rise. Instead of totally depending on instructions imparted by the teachers with

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the help of text books or other printed materials, today's learners show a tendency to learn through computer and other networking devices like mobile phone, smart phone and tablet (Mangal & Mangal, 2009).

The present paper makes an effort to discuss the issues of e-learning and m-learning from a theoretical point of view. Besides giving a comprehensive definition of the two terms under discussion, the paper explores the immense potential of e-learning and m-learning in meeting the educational needs of the 21st century learners and teachers. It also informs us about the constraints and threats of using or rather misusing these innovative approaches to learning.

WHAT IS E-LEARNING?

The term e-learning refers to the type of learning that is carried out, facilitated or supported by the electronic devices, media or resources which are commonly known as information and communication technology (ICT). It is essentially the computer and network generated transfer of knowledge and skills (Kumari, 2011). E-learning includes numerous types of media through which contents in the form of text, audio, images, animation, and streaming video are delivered. It also includes technology applications and processes such as audio or video tape, satellite TV, CD-ROM, and computer-based learning, as well as local intranet/extranet and web-based learning. Mangal & Mangal (2009) define e-learning as "an electronically carried out learning facilitated and supported by the use of advanced learning technology particularly calling for the services of computers, networking and multimedia" (p-765). Thus, the definition of e-learning centres on its being a learning approach and a technique for the presentation of academic discourses via the Internet or any other electronic media including multimedia, CDs, satellite devices (TV), or any other advanced educational technology.

However, the most common form of e-learning today is the Internet, which is said to be a broad field of study itself (Paris, 2004). In the words of Palmer (2001), "The Internet offers a new range of educational technologies to educators, that includes: electronic mail, file transfers, the multimedia capability of the World Wide Web, low cost desktop videoconferencing, online, interactive tutorials, real time group conferencing, remote access to laboratory experiments and 3D interactive modeling" (p-314). Therefore, whenever someone says that he/she is engaged in e-learning, he/she probably refers to having online learning.

WHAT IS M-LEARNING?

Although there is no universally accepted definition of m-learning, it is usually considered as learning with the help of mobile or similar handheld wireless devices. Lehner & Nosekabel (2002) define m-learning as any service or facility that supplies a learner with general electronic information and educational content that aids their acquisition of knowledge, regardless of location and time. Aderinoye, et. al. (2007) argue that mobile learning is a novel educational approach that encourages flexibility as students do not need to be of a specific age, gender, or member of a specific group or geography, to participate in learning opportunities. In this way the restrictions of time, space and place have been lifted.

Whatever be the definition, the idea of mobile learning refers to two key points: the ubiquitous nature of the technology and the use of 'connected devices', i. e., having access to the World Wide Web. Keeping this in mind, the main strength of m-learning is said to be more about learning that takes place outside the formal learning environments of traditional schools, colleges, universities and training classrooms. Therefore, the concept of m-learning takes into account the ideas of performance support, informal learning, and of course, learning that is driven solely by the curiosity of the learner (Berge and Muilenburg, 2013).

BENEFITS OF E-LEARNING AND M-LEARNING

The impact of e-learning and m-learning practices can be clearly seen if one simply observes the current phenomena in the larger domain of education. Today, many schools even in the developing countries have introduced computer education which facilitates e-learning, which is commonly recognized as a powerful and valuable extension to traditional educational initiatives (Manjon, et. al., 2007). The tendency to provide digitally equipped classrooms with Internet facilities is on the rise almost everywhere around the world. It is argued that the new technological tools support educational practices resulting thereby in generating a considerable amount interest in research and development on both technological and educational issues in e-learning with striking results.

Indeed, mobile devices, such as handheld computers, mobile phones, notebooks, and tablets are very common not only in the hands of the teachers but also in the hands of the learners. With the availability of cheaper mobile devices with internet browsing facilities, m-learning is gaining much prominence and popularity. M-learning is considered to be a convenient way of learning today as it is accessible from virtually anywhere and at any time. And like any other forms of e-learning, it is also a medium of collaborative learning (Saylor, 2012).

Naturally, mobile learning has been considered to be a subset of e-learning (Behera, 2013). And it enhances the learning experience by engaging the learners on their own terms and providing them immediate feedback (Aderinoye, et. al., 2007). These devices are particularly helpful for language learners with innovative features like flashcards for vocabulary, audio or video podcasts for listening to conversations, and mobile dictionaries (Dix, 2005; Yau & Salavati, 2011).

Moreover, Isaacs (2012) has shown how Short Message Service (SMS) technology facilitates communication between students and teachers in remote areas; and how mobile phones can support curriculum delivery, education management and information systems, peer communications, teacher training and continuing teacher professional development (CTPD). At the same time, the use of SMS is also said to be facilitating the inhibition of correct spelling and grammar (Attewell & Savill-Smith, 2004).

According to Balacheff, et al. (2009), both teachers and students are seen to be using mobile devices to transmit learning materials to and from learners in a variety of situations. The key features of m-learning are technologies which allow learners to collect and send learning materials to their peers and colleagues outside of the classroom; and the result is an alteration in behaviour (Geddes, 2004). In this context, terms like 'blended learning' (Sauter & Sauter, 2002), 'flexible learning' (Collis & Moonen, 2001) or 'distributed learning' (Lea & Nicoll, 2002) are becoming prevalent these days.

CONSTRAINTS OF E-LEARNING AND M-LEARNING

Although, web-based mobile devices with smart ideas to make learning on the go are thought of as a key to learning success by motivating the users through interactive approaches, experts also talk about the constraints in making the effort successful. First of all, in order to effectively participate in such technology mediated learning the learners need to have a computer or a mobile phone with internet connectivity (Sharples, 2005). And in order to take advantage of the continuous technological up-gradation, it is necessary to upgrade the mobile devices frequently. It is a costly affair for many students, particularly in the third world nations. Besides, for regular operations with e-learning and/or m-learning devices uninterrupted power supply is a necessary pre-requisite. In addition to this, there are typically periodical data charges for availing the internet services, which cannot always be afforded by the users of lower income category.

Experts also talk about the detrimental effects of using them at random. For instance, Banerjee (2013) argues that too much addiction to mobile devices for browsing social networking sites causes some sort of mental

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fluctuations and absent-mindedness among young learners. On the other hand, Kuss & Griffiths (2011) report that excessive use of social media can increase stress levels, ruin sleep patterns and even degrade meaningful personal relationships leading to anxiety, depression and loneliness among the learners. These, in turn, may cause anxiety among the parents regarding the well being of their young children. As a result, they may try to restrict the frequent use of e-learning and/or m-learning citing the harmful impacts of those technologies.

CONCLUSION

Despite the apparent constraints regarding the use of mobile technologies, it is advocated that instead of preventing students from using mobile devices, teachers should let them know about the mobile options and apps which are easily available and which can help them in their efforts to learning a language (Hockly, 2008). It is also argued that with the revolutionary trends taking place in using ICT, there is an opportunity to embrace m-learning using low cost mobile technologies, such as mobile phones to enhance learners' literacy and numeracy skill and to recognize their existing skills (Aderinoye, et al., 2007). This view is supported by Rutkauskiene, et al. (2011), who believes that mobile learning needs to be integrated into the mainstream educational programmes of the country with the object of encouraging both independent and collaborative learning experiences among the school children.

There is no doubt that there has been a considerable increase in mobile phone use in developing countries like India, and particularly among the teenagers. This has caused a fundamental change in the nature of people's way of thinking regarding the knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing process. Therefore, it is impractical to assume that students should keep themselves away from the lures of such devices as smart-phones, e-readers, notebooks, tablet phones, i-pads etc. Along with a lot of recreational activities, some students are found to use mobile devices to learn outside classrooms. Therefore, the potentials of e-learning and m-learning should be tapped for the greater interest of today's learners and teachers.

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Dreams are not what you see in sleep,

it is the thing that doesn't let you sleep.

- APJ Abdul Kalam