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My iPhone and Language Teaching

Oscar Rubio Vargas

Autonomous University of Baja California

Bachelor's degree in Philosophy in Education in English Teaching by the University of Exeter, Master's in English teaching by the University of Guadalajara, Mexico. Currently working at the Language Faculty of Mexicali, Baja California as a teacher of the Language Teaching program and also gives courses on English, Electronic Interactive Media, Materials Design for Online Education and training workshops for the use of new communication technologies. He has a wide experience in the development, design, implementation and evaluation of technologies and instructional design. He is enrolled in the Ph. D. program in English Language Teaching at the University of Southampton.

Electronic mail: ozrubio@gmail.com

Summary

The new generation of smart phones and its features like advanced processing power, memory capacity and a variety of applications are considered as new alternative in the educational field and are becoming a potential tool for teachers interested in innovation in any subject, including in language teaching and learning. Smart phones are considered at a glance in this paper.

Introduction

The day was coming and I was really anxious. I had been counting the days for its arrival.

They told me it was the best electronic gadget on the market, and the price I was paying was my money's worth. In reality, I had read in the internet reviews and comments about this fine communication device available in this digital age, my first iPhone 4. I had seen previous versions of this phone like the iPhone 3, and the 3S, and I must admit that my jaw dropped wide open when I saw all its features. Now, the time had come and I was getting my own

iPhone. Actually, I decided to buy one I could use it as a teaching device tool because as I will explain this is not an ordinary handheld device. It belongs to the family of smart phones.

The iPhone comes with email, calendar, short message system, photo, music and Internet support, however, it does not seem to be very impressive because most of the smart phones today contain all those features. But what makes the difference with this revolutionary phone is its wide screen, and rich HTML desk-top web browser. You can visualize and navigate the internet as in a regular PC or laptop. Having an iPhone is like having a workable desktop on a phone. Therefore, imagine having a wireless, Wi-Fi internet functionality in a phone Giurgiu and Barsan (2008). As I said before, the iPhone with all its features and applications have the potential for an excellent teaching and learning mobile tool. There is no doubt that with these features a lot can be done with it. All is needed is time, and desire to innovate using this mobile device.

The iPhone

On June 29, 2007 the first iPhone was sold. Since then, more than 217 million iPhones have been sold all over the world. It has become a spark of commercial, cultural and behavioral revolution. The iPhone is carried everywhere by people every day. Cisco Systems expects that by the year 2016 there will be more mobile technology like this than people (Burrows, 2012).

Today, the price of an 16 GB iPhone model is around \$200.00 Dlls, but even though prices seem a bit high, students at the Language School are seen walking around the school carrying iPhones or some kind of smart phone like Nokia, Android, Blackberry or Windows. With this technology still in its infancy in education, maybe learners cannot be expected to carry or take complete courses on their iPhone or smart phone, but the features of this device can be used to implement language learning chunks that can provide learners' communicative competence development in one or any of the four language skills.

Permeability and Features

An advantage of this form of mobile technology is that most students already own it. Learners can carry this device as their language learning tool anytime and anywhere. If technology is so available and at hand reach of learners and teachers it would be unwise not to make use of it. The truth of the matter is that today smart phones have more computing power than personal computers did a few years back, and thanks to this development happening in mobile technologies there is a chance for great innovation in language teaching and learning (Ranger, 2010).

Another features that makes these family of phones really great, are the different apps, short for applications that play audio, video, record voice, as well as send and receive emails, chat, and text and many more. In addition, there are all types of apps for language learning such as flash cards, vocabulary, reading, speech recognition, text-to-speech recognition, and writing as well as many other subjects. All these apps functionality can be adapted for complementary classroom language teaching and learning experiences (Robledo, 2012).

Use in Education

Studies in educational technology show the impact of technology on learning and demonstrate its potential for collaborative learning, and have shown producing better outcomes than non-technology collaborative learning. When compared to face to face teaching, mobile learning through the smart phone motivates learners' participation and collaboration in the construction of knowledge. Thanks to these new technologies, there has been a reconstruction of roles and interaction between teacher/learner and learner/learner Tzu-Chien, Hsue-Yie, Jen-Kai, and Jie-Chie (2002). Smart phones allow learners' interaction and to construct their own learning environment and to create a more active learning process (Markett, Sanchez, Weber, & Tangency, 2006).

There is no doubt that the best teaching practice allowing learners to engage in meaningful learning is when material and activities are well design promoting interaction, collaboration, are content-based, content rich, personalized, authentic, and culturally relevant Kelso (2010) . New mobile smart phones features have the potential for these teaching practices when learning experiences are well designed and appropriate to the technology. The smart phone allows 24/7 educational opportunities like those mentioned above, and that can take place outside the classroom anytime, anywhere.

Future of Smart Phones

New technologies offer different opportunities for outside classroom learning like to capture, download, read lessons, listen to audio, and watch video clips. As new generation of smart phones emerge, they will have more processing power, memory capacity, features and applications designed for learning diversity of subjects and among them languages. There is no doubt that these technologies have created new ways of communication, text production, collaboration and learning (Levy. 2009).

Teachers' Readiness

An important observation made by Garret (1991) on technology on language learning is that technology is here to serve language learning, not vice versa. Studies show that there is a large number of committed professionals interest in the topic of smart phones used on language learning, but still there is a great need for trained professionals in the field.

Beale (2005, p. 35) says that "for smart phones to become successful pervasive system components, they must support and enhance various users activities and offer useful, effective functionality." The smart phone allows the creation of interesting content allowing communication whether through video, audio, or text. It is highly personal, a two way device, and useful for creating and consuming information.

Teaching Practice

Now, I am enjoying all the different features of my iPhone 4, but I know that out there is the iPhone 4s, and the new iPhone 5 has just come out. The race against technology is unstoppable. There are always new improvements, and upgrades being done every so often, but what matters is to use what is available and affordable at the moment, and to use it the best way possible trying to exploit all its potential before moving or adapting another technology.

So far, I have used my iPhone in the "Developing Listening Comprehension and Oral Skills Course" to present audio segment activities, and video clips. All the audio and video activities are presented to students with pre, while and post activities prepared to develop listening and oral skills. The versatility of the phone allows me, via especial adaptor, to connect to the digital projector or to a sound amplifier. In addition, the apps used to present the materials allow students and teacher to interact and collaborate within the classroom. But of course, the iPhone can be taken to other levels outside the classroom too.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to quote Kukulska-Hulme (2009) referring to the digital age we live on "We are living in interesting times, in which teachers and learners must try to work together to understand how portable, wireless technologies may best be used for learning"

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