

EDITORIAL PREFACE

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Welcome to volume 6, issue 3 of the International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning. The four articles included in this issue range from broad concerns of mobile and blended learning such as affordances and challenges, to very specific applications of mobile learning tools. Along the way they address interesting cultural issues such as the relationships between male and female learners in Arab states, and the traditional approaches to university teaching in the Russian Federation. The domains covered include language learning and targeted health education.

The first article in this issue is “*Integrating Mobile Learning in an Undergraduate Course: An Exploration of Affordances and Challenges for Learners in UAE*” by Fawzi Ishtaiwa of Al Ain University (Abu Dhabi). What makes this article particularly interesting is that it provides insights into multiple aspects of mobile and blended learning, drawn from a study of students using their own mobile devices in the classroom. Some of the findings in the article may be applied across cultures, while other aspects provide informative insights into the particular issues of learning with mobile devices in Arab countries. As well as addressing the positive outcomes of the students’ experience, such as having a more active learning environment, and being able to continue collaborative learning outside the classroom, Ishtaiwa also highlights some negative issues. These include

some students plagiarising the on-line contributions of other students, and parents’ negative attitudes, some of whom did not regard working with mobile devices as ‘study’. This kind of balanced view of both positives and negatives is important in mobile and blended learning research. In terms of insights into a particular culture, the article is notable for the responses it draws from female students in particular, who felt that the anonymity provided to them by on line interaction made it possible for them to communicate with male students or instructors without feeling shy or engaging in behaviour that others (including parents) might regard as unacceptable. A further issue highlighted in the article is the lack of resources available in Arabic, particularly for students studying Law, emphasising the English-centric nature of much of the information available on line, and suggesting further challenges for the future.

Our second article is “*Mobile Voting Systems for Creating Collaboration Environments and Getting Immediate Feedback: A New Curriculum Model of a University Lecture*” by Svetlana Titova of Lomonosov Moscow State University (Russian Federation), and Tord Talmo of Sør-Trøndelag University College (Norway). In this article, which describes the use of a particular student response system (SRS) developed in Norway, the authors acknowledge the large number of similar classroom interaction tools that have been developed over recent

years, and are widely used. However they go beyond simplistic applications of such tools: “Mobile technologies enable instructors to create a high level collaboration environment (HLCE) based on an enquiry-based learning approach which inspires students to learn for themselves, bringing a genuinely research-like approach to the subject.” Although the specific study reported in this article was undertaken with Russian students taking an Introduction to American Studies course in English, much of the material in the article may be applied to any course topic. Thus the authors explain how the use of mobile voting systems can be utilised to flip the classroom and ultimately to create opportunities for MOOC style delivery of courses. Results from the study indicate that the longer the course goes on, and therefore the more familiar the students and instructors become with using the tools, the greater the benefit in terms of learning outcomes.

Article three is “*Development and Use of an EFL Reading Practice Application for an Android Tablet Computer*”. Its authors are all based in Japan; from Kyoto University of Foreign Studies (Yasushige Ishikawa, Craig Smith, Ichiro Akano, Kate Maher) Tezukayamagakuin University (Mutsumi Kondo) and IE Institute Co., Ltd. (Morihsa Wada). This article focuses on a specific issue for Japanese students learning English, which is that each learning domain tends to have its own specialised set of terms that need to be learned. The particular topic area that is addressed in this article is international affairs. Thus, as the paper reports, “a proposal has been made to establish English for specific purposes (ESP) courses which would be linked to Japanese-language international affairs courses and replace the current English for general purposes course.” As reported in the article, the research began with a survey to provide a student needs analysis. Then, using a number of sources, a list of 550 nouns (with their verb collocations) which were considered particularly useful for international affairs courses were identified. These words

were integrated into an Android application that enabled students to see how these words were contextualised in documents relating to international affairs. Despite some challenges, the application seems to have assisted students to improve their learning in a number of ways.

The final article in this issue is “*Delivering and Assessing Learning Material Through Gquest: A Case Study on Patient Education*” by Giordano Lanzola, Germana Ginardi, Paola Russo and Silvana Quaglini from the University of Pavia (Italy). Although this article reports on a specific mobile application, in itself this is not the main area of interest. Rather, the main contribution of this article is a design concept that a system which is designed primarily for mobile data collection can also be used for mobile learning. Specifically, a mobile health (m-health) application that was initially designed to capture data about patients was extended to provide targeted health information back to those patients. Whereas the web contains much information about specific health issues, patients need to be provided with the correct information for their condition, validated by health professionals. As the authors explain, they extended their data capture application, called Gquest, to also act as a mobile learning m-health application called AmyGuide. “As a case study we exploited Gquest to administer an interactive tutorial aimed at fostering self-management in patients suffering from a life-threatening disease called amyloidosis.” Both patients and health practitioners found the application to be beneficial when evaluated by patients who were suffering from amyloidosis.

I hope you find the articles included in this issue to be interesting, and also hope they might inspire you to consider applying some of the innovations they report into aspects of your own work.

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