Literature Review of *Informal Learning with PDAs and Smartphones*

Lori Moore

University of West Georgia
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The program that is being evaluated is the extent to which experienced users of mobile devices used their mobile devices to support intentional and opportunistic informal learning. The evaluation of the study was formative in that researchers had to rely on the questioning of participants. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to answer research questions.

Participants were collected from active web forum users. There were a total of 100 participants in the study that were divided into age categories of “under 18”, “18-29”, “30-39”, “40-49”, and “over 50”, with most of the participants being between 18 and 49 years of age. Seventy-seven percent of the participants were fully employed, with 85% being male and 15% being female. Seventy-two percent of the participants in the study responded that they were involved in some type of formal learning, either on campus, through a distance learning program, or work-related training.

The study was conducted over a 4-week period. Two-hundred messages containing survey links were posted in five PDA and Smartphone forums, inviting members to take part in a survey. Participants provided details of informal learning with mobile devices. Essential questions were “What extent did experienced-users of mobile devices use their devices to support intentional informal learning?”, and if so, “Did mobile devices also encourage unintentional learning encouraged through connectivity support such as collaboration?”

Quantitative questions attempted to establish the level of enthusiasm participants felt towards their mobile devices using a Likert scale, to which 67% selected a response of “I keep it with me all the time and would feel lost without it.” Relative frequency (such as, daily, weekly,
occasionally, etc.) was also assessed in the following categories: writing notes; browsing the
web; reading e-books; storing, viewing or sharing photos; reading web forums; taking photos;
recording audio; and writing applications. “Writing notes” had the highest percentage (70%) of
the daily plus weekly totals, with browsing the web, reading e-books, and photo storing,
viewing, or sharing’s percentages in the forties.

Qualitative textual detail was collected about informal learning associated with mobile
devices. Although responses were somewhat lengthy, they provided the best insight to support
informal learning.

Results from the study suggested that mobile devices are used extensively in an
informal learning context by enthusiasts. A pattern of learning uses emerged as some of the
uses deployed the mobile device capabilities relatively unchanged, while others triggered
adaptations to typical learning activities to provide a better fit to the needs of the learner.

The purpose of the study was to provide the basis for the design of a flexible mobile
learning framework that could be extended to support developments in the mobile technology,
and increasing the use of Web 2.0 technologies by informal learners.

With new mobile technologies, it is important that educators have an understanding of
the effects of this technology on learning. Because of the nature of the technology, this study
had to rely heavily on questions obtained from participants that were dispersed, instead of
having a more structured setting, such as a class. This study attempted to try to determine if
there was any unintentional learning associated with collaboration between individuals
communicating with PDAs and smartphone-type technologies. As educators in high schools try
and block the use of cell phones, this study might be useful to help change the thought process and look at the value of language, learning, and development of communication skills. Because technology of this type and new technologies to come will impact learning, hopefully more studies will focus on this new technology, so educated decisions can be made that will be most beneficial to students.
References