From M-Library to Mobile ESL: Athabasca University as an Advocate for Mobile Learning

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About Athabasca University

• Canada’s Open University - distance learning and online learning
• Location: Athabasca, Alberta, Canada
• Learning centres in Edmonton and Calgary
• More than 32,000 students
• Individualized and self-paced studies
Why advocate mobile technology at AU?

- AU students study from a distance
- Quick and efficient access
- Instant delivery and updates
- Affordability/portability
- Novelty of gadget/display
- Allows individualization & self-pace learning for students with busy lives
- Supports those with special needs
Two Case Studies at Athabasca

• M-Library: Mobile Digital Reading Room Initiative

• Mobile ESL: learning English as a Second Language Lessons for newcomers
What is a Mobile Library?

- The idea of a mobile library is to provide learners with access to the university library and to course resources using mobile devices.
Special Features

- Mobile friendly AU Library site: Supported device: PDA, Palmtop, Blackberry, IPAQ, Smart phones
- The site include mobile friendly:
  - Digital Reading Room
  - Digital Reference Centre
  - Digital Thesis & Project Room
  - Library catalogue
  - Search engine
Special Features (ctd)

• Auto-detect and reformat
• Learning object reuse
• Easy web maintain/update
• Podcasting
• Wireless library catalogue
• Federated search
• Mobile content conversion on the fly
Mobile ESL Project
Overview of Project

• Develop and test innovative approaches to ESL learning using mobile devices and a variety of testing and practice methods
• Based on best selling Penguin series
• 86 lessons and related interactive exercises
• Repurposed for Canadian content
• Downloadable in .doc or .pdf format
Mobile Devices Used

- Mobile phones with wireless capabilities (Samsung D807x)

- Desktop access support
Subjects Involved in Study

The subjects involved were adult learners registered in ESL programs at:

• Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
• Global Community College
• Evangelical Chinese Baptist Church
Evaluation Methods

• The students learn the content of the lesson followed by difference practice exercises and testing techniques.

• The testing techniques used were multiple-choice, jumbled-sentence, true-false, and matching
Student Preference for Question Types

- Multiple Choice: 75%
- True / False: 93%
- Matching: 18%
- Word Ordering: 47%
Pre-test vs Post-test vs Retention test

Test Scores

Pre-test | Post-test | Retention Test

0 | 15 | 20
90% Strongly Agree or Agree that technology provides flexibility to learn anywhere, anytime.
60% Strongly Agree or Agree that they would take other lessons using mobile technology.
Student Feedback in General

- Students indicated that a good use of mobile technology for ESL would be when waiting for an appointment or on the bus or whenever and wherever there is some spare time.
- One concern expressed was the cost of Internet access.
- Reported positive experience with the ESL grammar course and the use of mobile technology in learning ESL grammar.
Suggestions for Future Delivery

• Use **text-to-speech** technology to improve the learning experience
• More examples to help students understand the questions better
• Use the mobile device to interact with teachers
• Use of Apple **Iphone**
Conclusion: AU Mobile Learning Aims High

• High Tech
• High Touch
• High Trust
Further information

- Website:

  http://eslau.ca

  http://library.athabascau.ca/