

Mobile Informal Learning

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Mobile informal learning

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Mobile devices are gradually becoming ubiquitous and useful for personal information management and communication through different channels. This mobile revolution depends on two paradigms: firstly, the mobility of people and information, and secondly, the personalisation and contextualisation of information. This leads to new understandings of connectedness, interaction, participation, and context. In the field of education these paradigms have been reflected by the concepts of “flexible learning” and “situated learning”. Flexible learning has been the key concept of distance education for many years and focuses on the flexible organisation of learning tasks in the context of formal education. Situated learning has its background in workplace learning and refers to the arrangement and to the embeddedness of learning experiences in real life or authentic environments. Both concepts play an important role for the different approaches of mobile learning.

While the majority of flexible learning approaches have been related to formal education with predefined learning goals, the situated learning approaches have been linked to informal and incidental learning. With regard to acquisition of domain knowledge and skills, informal and incidental learning is characterised by its learner centred, weakly structured, and incidental nature. This type of learning is triggered by and situated in activities, experiences, and events. These “learning fragments” are usually not isolated to the learner, but part of a long-term learning process in which different learning goals are followed in parallel. Furthermore, learning processes have been identified as tightly coupled activity and reflection phases.

The main benefit of mobile technologies in this context is their availability, when learning and learning needs occur to people. Thus enables people to connect their fragmented learning experiences to their long-term learning goals. This raises the question on the aspects and dimensions that are key parameters influencing learning processes, and on the technical consequences of these aspects for developing mobile solutions to support informal and incidental learning. Besides of appropriate educational content, contextualisation, personalisation, interaction, awareness, and reflection are the main aspects that need to be explored in greater detail.

Contextualization is a key concept for informal learning activity support enhanced by the opportunities offered through mobile technology. Personalisation facilitates and accommodates the individual differences within the learning activity based on individual characteristics. The interaction aspect is crucial to organise information flows and navigate through different channels. Awareness is an important aspect for learning that can be related to several stages of the learning process, depending on the ability to select and to structure available information in a learning situation, as well as to relate this information to prior knowledge. While awareness focuses on the perception and selection of information, reflection considers structuring and analysis of information.

The challenge is to identify relevant patterns for these aspects resulting in a framework for mobile informal learning considering the different aspects and phases of learning processes and supporting the design of mobile solutions for different forms and stages of informal and incidental learning.