



Concept Note:

Mobile Learning Week 2014

Empowering teachers with technology

17-21 February 2014, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France

“A government’s investment in training teachers to use educational technology productively is more important than its investment in technology itself.” –UNESCO

BACKGROUND

In less than a decade mobile technology has spread to the furthest corners of the planet. Of the estimated 7 billion people on Earth, 6 billion now have access to a mobile deviceⁱ. Africa which had a mobile penetration rate of just 5% in the 1990s is now the second largest and fastest growing mobile phone market in the world with a penetration rate of over 60%ⁱⁱ. Collectively, mobile devices are the most successful and ubiquitous information and communication technology (ICT) in history.

Concurrent to the explosive growth of mobile technology is an increasing demand for formal education. Due to a “youth bulge” in the global population, more and more children are enrolling or trying to enrol in schools. This is putting pressure on governments to hire more teachers and improve the capacities of those already working.

To ensure universal primary education UNESCO estimates that 6.8 million teachers need to be hired worldwide by 2015: 1.7 million are needed fill new posts and 5.1 million are needed to replace outgoing teachers. These shortages—both current and anticipated—impede a wide-range of development efforts by preventing young people from gaining access to the high quality instruction needed to excel in knowledge-based societies. The shortage of trained and motivated teachers is most acute in parts of the world where *more* and *better quality* instruction is desperately needed. Today while the average number of students per teacher in OECD countries is 21, this figure is 65 in Rwanda, 79 in Malawi, and 84 in the Central African Republic.ⁱⁱⁱ Compounding the numerical challenges of teacher supply, are concerns about teacher quality. Many children who are in school fail to develop basic competencies. According to UNESCO data, 250 million students worldwide cannot read, write or count even after four years of school.^{iv}

Mobilizing resources to raise both the quantity and quality of global teacher workforce is challenging, particularly in developing countries. However, because people often already own and know how to use mobile devices, these tools—particularly in light of their growing functionality and declining costs—could help prepare new teachers and provide

professional development to working teachers. UNESCO recently published a six paper series on how mobile devices are assisting teachers and contributing to their training in diverse contexts. The central finding was that mobile technology, while not a panacea, has a track record of improving educational efficiency and helping educators acquire the complex skills needed to complete meaningful work in classrooms. The Organization has also launched four on-the-ground initiatives that leverage mobile phones to facilitate the professional development of teachers and support their work with students. In short, the mobile revolution and teachers are beginning to come together, but much more can be done.

MLW 2014 will explore how mobile technologies can meet the needs of educators and help them improve their effectiveness. It will consider the benefits as well as challenges associated with mobile learning—such as ensuring equity of devices, online safety, limited mobile-friendly content and the need for teacher training—in the hope that discussing these issues will spark ideas for solutions.

As mobile technology jumps from the margins of education to the mainstream, from informal settings to formal ones, and from small independently-funded projects to large government-supported initiatives, teachers will be key to the success of new technology integrations. Teachers are the pillars of education systems and their involvement is crucial to the viability of ICT in education efforts. Without the support of teachers in their myriad iterations—including those who work with children, youth or adults—technology generally remains peripheral to teaching and learning.

THEME AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

By placing teachers at the centre of discussions about mobile technology and education, MLW 2014 aims to explore how educators can—now and in the future—best utilize mobile devices to achieve national and international learning objectives. This overarching “teacher theme” will be underscored by four central questions:

1) MOBILE PEDAGOGY: How is mobile learning changing the role of teachers and what integration approaches ensure that mobile technology is best utilised to improve education quality?

How should mobile technologies be integrated into formal and informal learning environments?

2) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: How does mobile technology build the capacities of teachers and support their work with students?

In particular, how does mobile technology assist teachers working in resource-poor settings?

3) **TOOLS: What mobile tools and content facilitate learning, assessment and classroom management?**

How can teachers and students tailor and develop their own mobile learning resources and share these resources with others?

4) **POLICY: What policy environments – at the national, district or school levels – help teachers effectively leverage new mobile technologies and improve educational outcomes?**

What approaches ensure successful projects are sustained, refined and expanded?

OBJECTIVES AND TARGET AUDIENCE

In order to improve of teacher development and effectiveness through mobile learning, MLW 2014 has three core objectives:

- Convene mobile learning experts, practitioners, researchers, industry partners and government representatives to share innovative mobile learning initiatives, best practices, trends and research.
- Provide a forum for dialogue and networking so that opportunities and challenges related to mobile learning are discussed and interrogated.
- Launch or announce key UNESCO contributions, including publications and findings from field projects.

MLW 2014 is mainly aimed at the following audience:

- Government representatives, particularly representatives from ministries of education.
- Teacher training institutions and universities offering teacher training, including deans and trainers.
- School leaders and principals.
- Mobile learning practitioners and experts from donor organisations and NGOs.
- Researchers.
- Industry partners.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

New structures and elements, notably training workshops and demonstrations of mobile learning innovations, have been added to the program to ensure it addresses timely issues, accommodates the needs of participants, improves upon previous events, and further solidifies the reputation of MLW as a flagship UNESCO event.

To engage the important questions listed above, MLW 2014 will consist of four separate events:

17 February	18-19 February	20 February	21 February
WORKSHOPS	SYMPOSIUM	POLICY FORUM	RESEARCH TRACK
<i>The workshops will be dedicated to hands-on trainings and interactive demonstrations of mobile learning content, technology and interventions, including from the private sector.</i>	<i>The symposium will feature keynote speakers and numerous breakout presentations. Speakers will share lessons learned from past experiences and research and then articulate ambitions for the future. The keynote speeches and breakout presentations will be organized around the four guiding questions that anchor the overarching event. Also at the symposium, companies and organizations will exhibit new mobile learning technology, content.</i>	<i>Similar to the forum hosted at MLW 2013, the senior policy forum will bring together high-level decision makers from Ministries of Education to discuss how mobile learning can advance shared educational goals, particularly as they relate to teachers and teacher training.</i>	<i>The research track will allow scholars to share findings from their investigations of mobile learning implementations with teachers. The research will pay particular attention to policies focused on teachers.</i>

UNESCO WORK TO BE LAUNCHED or DELIVERED

As input into MLW 2014, UNESCO will:

- Release a comparative review of its mobile learning projects targeting teachers in four countries: Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Senegal.
- Share findings from a global review of mobile learning initiatives that seek to empower and improve the literacy skills of women and girls. The research funded by the US State Department examines the intersection of gender, mobile technology, and education.
- Launch a publication that indicates how teachers and others use mobile technologies for reading in developing countries. The publication is part of the UNESCO Mobiles for Reading project, implemented in partnership with Nokia and Worldreader.
- Share a framework for a mobile learning toolkit for teachers. The toolkit aims to provide practical advice about how to implement mobile learning solutions in classrooms.

- Announce the start of a review of national mobile learning initiatives in Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and other countries.

IMPORTANT DATES

July-August 2013	Secure partners
September 2013	Call for presentation proposals; invite keynote speakers and sponsored participants
November 2013	Review and selection of proposals; registration opens; marketing and communication campaigns begin in earnest
January 2014	Promote event and final preparations
February 2014	UNESCO Mobile Learning Week

FUNDING AND PARTNERS

UNESCO is actively seeking partners to sponsor and support MLW 2014. For lead sponsors, the Organization welcomes donations of \$50,000.

ⁱ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44452&Cr=sanitation&Cr1=#.Ucly2Tu9akr>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.gsma.com/publicpolicy/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/africamoewebfinal.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.unric.org/en/latest-un-buzz/27886-new-unesco-infographic-why-the-global-teacher-shortage-is-a-setback-for-all-development-efforts>

^{iv} http://www.globaleducationfirst.org/images/Education_First_Infographic_section-full%281%29.jpg