

IELA AWARD WINNER

# Microlearning in Practice: Contemporary Insights on Its Design, Application, and Impact

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the evolving landscape of microlearning by synthesizing peer-reviewed literature and real-world insights from instructors and learners affiliated with the online learning platform GoSkills. Using a qualitative, exploratory design, it examines how microlearning is defined, delivered, and experienced across corporate and educational settings. A review of 13 academic sources highlights key dimensions such as brevity, adaptability, targeted instructional design, and emerging digital formats. Semi-structured interviews with three instructors and three learners complement this review, offering a grounded perspective on how these concepts take shape in practice. While microlearning offers clear advantages in flexibility, motivation, and knowledge retention, its conciseness may limit deeper learning unless supported by thoughtful scaffolding or contextual aids. By drawing on recent literature and practitioner experiences, this study contributes to a better understanding of microlearning's current strengths and challenges and outlines future research directions, including its integration into broader learning ecosystems and the evolving role of AI-powered learning technologies.

## KEYWORDS

microlearning, bite-sized learning, instructional design, learning design, corporate training, workplace learning, professional development

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced, distraction-heavy environments, traditional long-form training often clashes with how professionals prefer to learn. The growing demand for accessible, flexible, and time-efficient learning has accelerated the adoption of microlearning—an instructional approach characterized by brevity, focus, and adaptability. Gaining traction across both corporate and educational settings, microlearning delivers compact, goal-oriented lessons designed for on-demand access, aligning with shifting digital habits and increasingly fragmented attention spans.

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Despite its growing popularity and increased scholarly attention, microlearning remains a dynamic and loosely defined concept. Academic literature highlights its benefits—improved retention, learner motivation, and accessibility—while also pointing to challenges such as content fragmentation, limited depth, and inconsistent implementation. These tensions give rise to pressing questions: What defines microlearning in practice? How do instructors design for it? How do learners experience it? And in an evolving workplace landscape, where should future research on microlearning be headed?

This study addresses these questions through a two-pronged qualitative approach. First, it synthesizes findings from 13 peer-reviewed academic sources published between 2018 and 2025, identifying key conceptual foundations, instructional design principles, and practical benefits. Second, it draws on semi-structured interviews with six participants—three instructors and three learners—to explore how these ideas are implemented and experienced in real-world contexts. By bridging theory and practice, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of microlearning's potential, limitations, and future applications within broader learning ecosystems.

## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative, exploratory research design, combining a literature review with semi-structured interviews. The literature review synthesized findings from 13 peer-reviewed sources published between 2018 and 2025, selected for their relevance to the evolving definition, implementation, and evaluation of microlearning. These included nine reviews and four empirical studies focused on corporate learning settings, offering insights into instructional design principles, delivery formats, learner outcomes, and implementation challenges.

To complement the literature, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three instructors and three learners affiliated with GoSkills, an online learning platform that offers microlearning-based courses for professional development. Instructors discussed how they design and deliver microlearning in practice, while learners reflected on their experiences engaging with bite-sized courses in various professional contexts.

## 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Defined by its brevity and focus, and adaptability, microlearning is increasingly positioned as an effective solution for today's time-constrained learners. This review synthesizes findings from 13 peer-reviewed academic sources published between 2018 and 2025, comprising nine reviews and four empirical studies, to examine how microlearning is defined, implemented, and evaluated. Key themes include its evolving formats, core design principles, reported benefits, and emerging limitations—providing a foundation for the analysis that follows.

### 3.1 Definition of microlearning

Microlearning is widely recognized for its brevity, adaptability, and ability to address learners' immediate needs. Scholarly attention has surged—Sankaranarayanan, Leung, Abramenska-Lachheb, Seo, and Lachheb [1] report a 33.5% year-on-year rise in peer-reviewed publications, and search-trend data

analyzed by Moore, Hwang, and Moses [2] reveal a sustained upward trajectory since 2017—yet the field still lacks a universally accepted definition.

Foundational contributions by Hug [3] continue to shape scholarly understanding, proposing a multidimensional framework that underscores the pedagogical depth and versatility of the concept. Rather than prescribing a fixed meaning, Hug identified seven dimensions through which microlearning can be described, analyzed, and developed:

- **Time:** short, measurable learning durations
- **Content:** concise, narrowly focused units
- **Curriculum:** integrated into formal modules or informal learning paths
- **Form:** delivered as fragments or “knowledge nuggets”
- **Process:** grounded in iterative or situated learning activities
- **Mediality:** ranging from face-to-face to digital and multimedia formats
- **Learning type:** reflective, task-based, pragmatic, or corporate-oriented

A recent synthesis by Monib, Qazi, and Apong [4] reinforces this framework and offers a contemporary conceptualization, defining microlearning as an instructional design approach that delivers targeted learning experiences in short bursts to achieve clear objectives.

### 3.2 The evolving forms of microlearning

Microlearning can take many forms, reflecting its flexible nature and adaptability to different learning environments. One area where variation is particularly evident is duration. While brevity is widely recognized as a core feature, definitions of what qualifies as “short” differ across the literature. Shail [5] defines microlearning as experiences lasting between one and 10 minutes, whereas others suggest even more compressed formats. Torgeson, as cited in Samala, Bojić, Bekiroğlu, Watrionthos, and Hendriyani [6], describes microlearning as content designed for consumption within just three to five minutes.

In terms of delivery, microlearning spans a variety of formats—ranging from structured e-learning modules to newer, bite-sized materials enabled by digital media. A bibliometric analysis [1] identifies video, image, and audio-based content as the most commonly cited types in the literature. These include short educational videos, podcasts, infographics, and other compact formats designed to convey discrete concepts quickly and engagingly.

Mostrady, Sanchez-Lopez, and Gonzalez-Sanchez [7] emphasize the growing influence of digital technologies in shaping both the dissemination and structure of microlearning. Social media platforms, mobile apps, and e-learning systems not only expand access but also shape the formats being adopted. As a result, microlearning content can now include social media posts, memes, GIFs, and interactive quizzes—blurring the lines between entertainment and education while enabling just-in-time learning.

This kind of on-demand access is reflected, for example, in how learners increasingly turn to platforms like YouTube for step-by-step tutorials, or to Reddit and Google’s AI Overviews for quick, contextualized answers when faced with a task or knowledge gap.

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI)—such as conversational tutors and chatbots—are making microlearning more adaptive, responsive, and learner-driven than ever before, further contributing to these immediate and personalized learning encounters.

Taken together, these developments suggest that microlearning is no longer confined to structured e-learning environments. Instead, it operates across a spectrum of digital interactions, raising important questions about how emerging technologies—and shifting learner behaviors—are reshaping its role.

### 3.3 Design of microlearning

While microlearning continues to evolve in format and delivery, its instructional effectiveness depends heavily on how it is designed. According to a systematic review [4], six guiding principles emerge that distinguish effective microlearning from simple content fragmentation:

- **Clear, singular learning objective:** Each microlearning module should be anchored in one well-defined, actionable objective. This focused approach reduces cognitive overload and ensures that learners can grasp the intended concept or skill without distraction. Objectives should be learner-centered, relevant, and applicable to real-world contexts.
- **Bite-sized content:** Content should be delivered in compact, easily digestible units. This “small chunk” approach supports cognitive processing by allowing learners to absorb one idea at a time. Importantly, these segments should function as stand-alone pieces while also contributing to a broader learning pathway when needed (Figure 1).
- **Concise timeframes:** Although definitions of “short” vary across the literature—as previously discussed—the key is to balance brevity with instructional depth. Modules should contain just enough content to meet their objective without overwhelming the learner. This efficiency promotes frequent, on-demand engagement while respecting learners’ limited time.

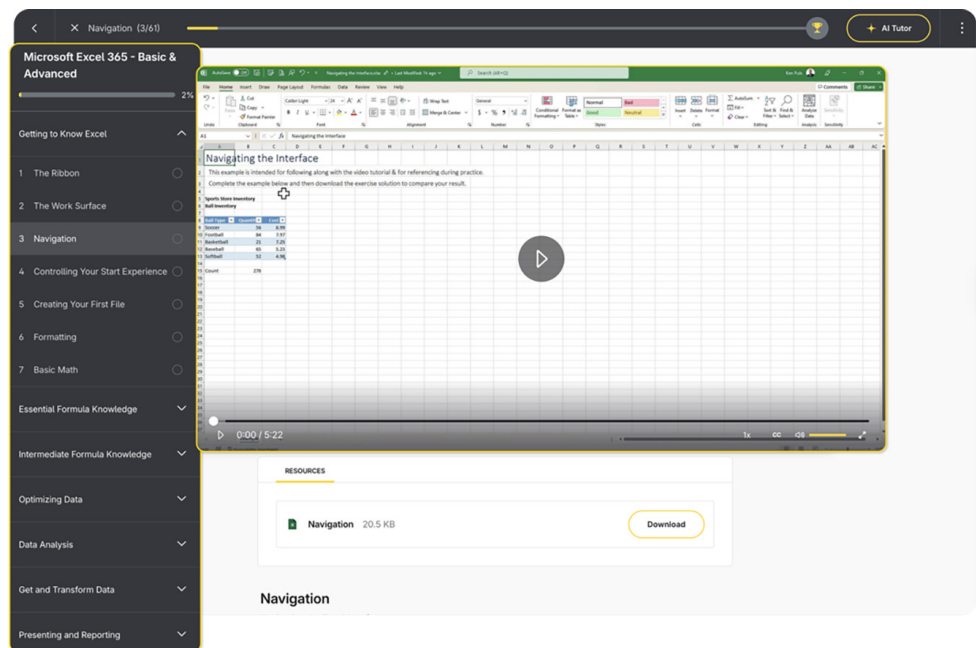
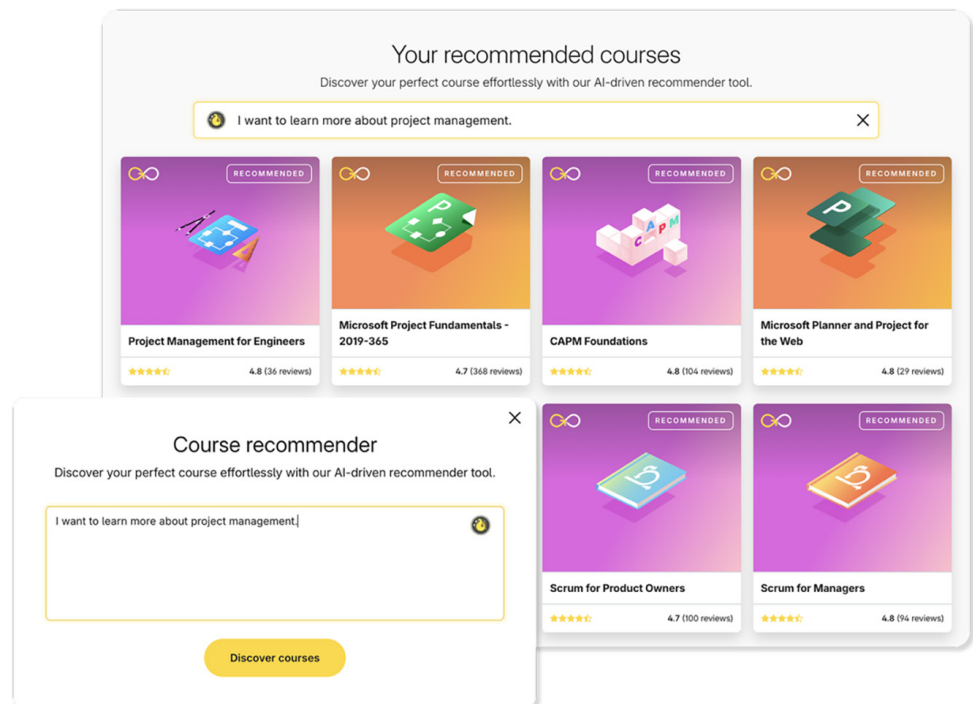


Fig. 1. GoSkills courses feature 3–7-minute bite-sized lessons, each focused on a single learning objective

- **Engaging and interactive experiences:** Interactivity is a cornerstone of effective microlearning. Elements such as quizzes, simulations, gamification, and

social learning features enhance motivation and promote active participation. Rather than passively consuming content, learners should be invited to think, respond, and reflect.

- **Personalization:** Tailoring content to learners' roles, interests, or prior knowledge increases relevance and motivation. Personalized microlearning encourages a sense of ownership and enables deeper learning by aligning with individual goals and contexts (Figure 2).



**Fig. 2.** AI-powered course recommenders, like the one from GoSkills, personalize learning by suggesting courses aligned with individual interests and goals, enabling learners to take charge of their development and driving higher engagement and completion rates

- **Adaptable delivery through appropriate media and platforms:** Learners often prefer dynamic, visual content such as video or audio, particularly when accessed via mobile devices. Choosing the appropriate medium and platform—whether a corporate learning management system (LMS) or a specialized microlearning app—enhances usability, engagement, and scalability.

These principles offer a framework for developing learning interventions that are not only concise but also meaningful, engaging, and tailored to learners' needs.

### 3.4 Perceived benefits of microlearning

A growing body of literature—spanning academic reviews and empirical studies—highlights the multifaceted benefits of microlearning, particularly in workplace training and professional development. These benefits span cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions [4], and offer practical advantages in engagement, accessibility, and job performance. Common themes across the research include:

- Enhanced knowledge retention and recall
- Improved learning outcomes and job performance

- Higher completion and engagement rates
- Reduced cognitive load and mental fatigue
- Flexible on-demand access from any location
- Alignment with modern digital habits and mobile usage
- Increased learner motivation, satisfaction, and confidence
- Support for self-directed and peer-to-peer learning
- Cost-effective scalability and business impact in corporate settings

**Cognitive and performance-related benefits.** Microlearning is consistently associated with improved knowledge acquisition, retention, and application. Studies report higher test scores, faster recall, and stronger long-term retention when content is delivered in small, targeted segments [4], [5], [7]. Learners also demonstrate greater ability to transfer knowledge across contexts and develop transferable skills, such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and self-regulation.

In workplace settings, these benefits are often reflected in tangible performance gains. For instance, Govender and Madden [8] observed that employees who engaged more actively with microlearning platforms significantly outperformed peers in product sales, particularly in banking and credit-related services.

**Engagement, completion, and learning experience.** The bite-sized format of microlearning eases cognitive processing, reducing learner fatigue and fostering a sense of momentum and completion. Shorter modules are more likely to be completed, which contributes to sustained motivation [5], [6]. In one study [9], 85% of employees reported greater engagement with microlearning compared to traditional courses.

The ability to pause, revisit, and progress at a comfortable pace enhances both personalization and retention. When paired with gamified features and timely feedback, microlearning environments support stronger motivation and more consistent participation [10].

**Accessibility and digital affordances.** One of microlearning's greatest strengths is its flexibility. Through mobile apps, e-learning systems, and even social media, learners can engage with content anytime and anywhere—whether during commutes, between tasks, or on short breaks [6], [7]. This makes microlearning especially well-suited for time-constrained professionals and aligns with fast-paced digital lifestyles, including those of Gen Z learners.

Its mobile-optimized design also supports training across geographically distributed and hybrid workforces—a growing priority in today's post-pandemic corporate landscape [4].

**Motivation, autonomy, and social learning.** Microlearning supports both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by enabling small wins, boosting learner confidence, and offering a sense of achievement. Learners can self-select modules based on personal goals and learning needs, fostering autonomy and engagement [4], [10].

Its compact structure also makes it highly shareable, supporting peer-to-peer learning. Learners can exchange modules, insights, and best practices in the flow of work, encouraging informal and collaborative knowledge-building [6].

### 3.5 Challenges and limitations of microlearning

While microlearning has demonstrated clear benefits in both corporate and educational contexts, several challenges also warrant attention. In the reviewed

sample, only two studies explicitly examined its limitations—highlighting the need for further investigation.

One study [7] notes that microlearning’s brevity, while beneficial for engagement, may impede deeper learning. Some learners struggle to connect discrete content pieces into broader conceptual frameworks, particularly when modules lack continuity. The study also raises concerns about the heavy reliance on digital delivery, which may not align with all learning preferences or contexts. Additional challenges include limited feedback, fluctuating motivation, and unequal access to technology—all of which can impact learning effectiveness.

Similarly, a mixed-methods study involving 200 employees from four multinational corporations [9] identified key limitations. Although participants valued the flexibility and convenience of microlearning, they reported issues such as fragmented content, reduced opportunities for reflection or discussion, and difficulty retaining complex information. Some also expressed the need for stronger support and follow-up to bridge the gap between learning and on-the-job application.

## 4 INTERVIEW FINDINGS

### 4.1 Insights from instructors

To complement and contrast the findings of the literature review, three experienced educators were interviewed about their practical approaches to microlearning. One serves as a course producer at GoSkills, while the other two contribute training content to the platform alongside their work in other professional domains.

- **Dan Gorgone:** An instructional designer since 2009, Dan has produced over 100 e-learning courses for various platforms. In addition to developing online content, he has led live workshops and corporate training sessions. He is currently the course producer at GoSkills.
- **Ilgar Zarbaliyev:** A Microsoft MVP and Microsoft Certified Trainer (MCT) Regional Lead with over 20 years of experience in data analysis and business intelligence, Ilgar is also an ambassador for the European Training Foundation. He currently designs GoSkills’ Excel challenges—a series of hands-on Excel exercises released monthly.
- **Bill Raymond:** A 13-time Microsoft Most Valuable Professional (MVP) for Microsoft Project, Bill is an award-winning author and trainer. At GoSkills, he teaches the Microsoft Project Fundamentals course and several AI-related courses.

**Dan Gorgone.** Gorgone targets a 5-minute duration per online lesson—an interval he considers sufficient for introducing a new concept. He defines a “lesson” as a single element within a course focused on a specific skill or topic. He uses storytelling, visuals, and examples to convey the core idea. To reinforce learning, each lesson is followed by a quiz, scenario, or practical exercise, ensuring that engagement and comprehension extend beyond the initial instruction.

**Ilgar Zarbaliyev.** While Ilgar Zarbaliyev delivers his courses online, they are usually attended by a live audience—a methodology known as virtual instructor-led training (VILT). This format makes it difficult to break lessons into short, five-minute chunks.

Each session lasts approximately 90 minutes, presenting a challenge in maintaining learners’ attention. To overcome this, Zarbaliyev integrates storytelling,

visuals, interactive quizzes, and dynamic on-screen activities throughout the session. These techniques help reinforce learning, enhance retention, and sustain participants' energy levels.

This scenario highlights a common challenge faced by modern learning and development professionals: can traditional, classroom-style training benefit from microlearning principles—and if so, how?

**Bill Raymond.** Raymond begins each lesson with a concise 30-second introduction to outline the objectives, followed by approximately five minutes of guided exercises and examples. He concludes with a brief 30-second recap or additional tips. Like Dan Gorgone, he adheres to the “one topic per lesson” principle, explaining, “*For example, if I am teaching a student how to create a prompt using AI, I will not also teach how to export the results to Microsoft Word.*”

He also advocates for role-relevant, bite-sized reinforcement activities embedded within longer virtual workshops, tailored to learner personas. In the post-COVID landscape, he observes a shift away from lengthy sessions and dense manuals toward iterative workshops, capstone projects, and easily accessible micro-resources.

A typical workshop model might involve transforming a traditional two or three-day course into a series of 60- to 90-minute weekly sessions spread over four to nine weeks. Each session might include 20–25 minutes of instruction, 15 minutes of exercises, and dedicated time for discussion or Q&A. This structure represents microlearning nested within a larger instructional framework—offering a potential answer to the earlier question of how microlearning principles might be integrated into traditional training formats.

Crucially, this model also addresses one of the core criticisms identified in the literature: that microlearning's brevity may hinder deeper learning. By spacing instruction over time and encouraging contextual application, Raymond's approach enables learners to revisit content, practice real-world tasks, and engage in peer discussions. The result is increased knowledge retention, improved on-the-job performance, and greater learner engagement compared to conventional long-form courses [11].

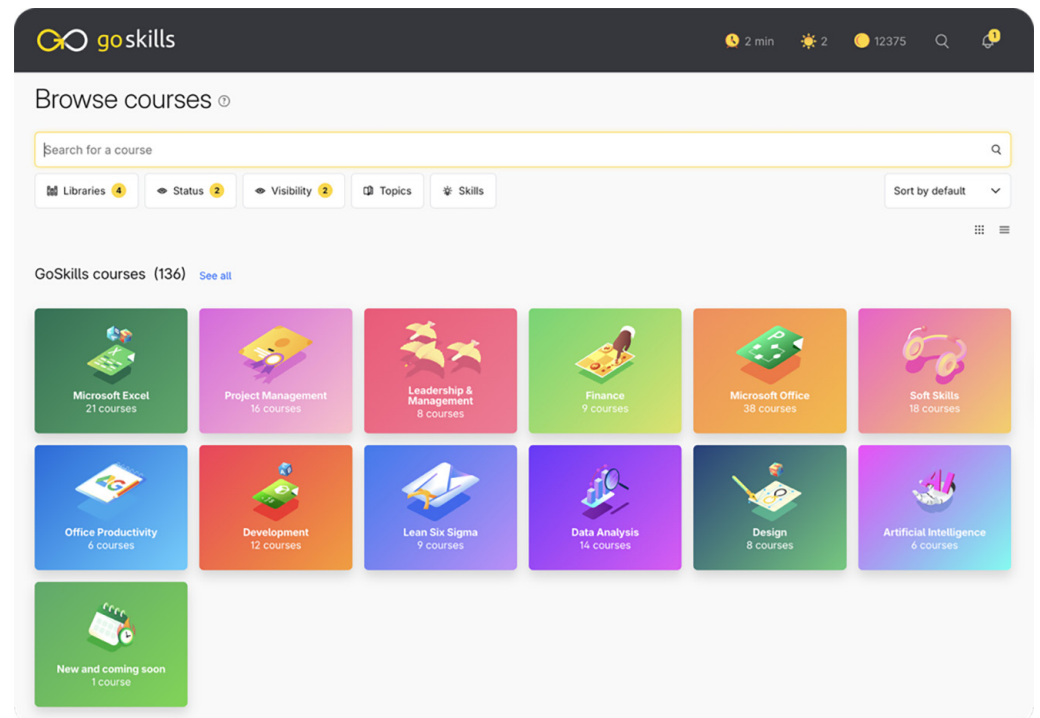
See Table 1 for a synthesized and comparative view of the three instructors' approaches across core instructional design dimensions.

**Table 1.** Instructor implementation of microlearning

Criteria	Dan Gorgone	Ilgar Zarbaliyev	Bill Raymond
Scoping and sequencing	One concept per lesson; tightly scoped content aligned to a single learning objective	Broader coverage withing 90-minute sessions	Strict “one topic per lesson” approach; separates concepts to reduce cognitive overload
Lesson duration	~5 minutes per lesson	90-minute live sessions segmented with varied instructional techniques	~6 minutes for self-paced lessons; 60–90 minutes for workshops with micro segments (20–25 minutes of instruction, 15 minutes of practice)
Engagement techniques	Storytelling, visuals, and real-world examples	Storytelling, dynamic visuals, on-screen interaction, and live audience engagement	Objective-led intros, storytelling, and application-focused scenarios
Practice and reinforcement	Quizzes, scenarios, or exercises immediately after the lesson to solidify learning	Interactive quizzes and on-screen exercises throughout sessions	Post-lesson tips, exercises in workshops, and peer discussions to reinforce learning over time

## 4.2 Insights from learners

Three learners were also interviewed about their experiences with microlearning through the GoSkills platform (Figure 3). Each comes from a different professional or academic background and has completed multiple courses in areas such as Excel, project management, Lean Six Sigma, soft skills, and leadership. Their insights offer a grounded, user-level perspective on how microlearning supports skill development, engagement, and the application of knowledge.



**Fig. 3.** The GoSkills course library offers expert-led, certified business courses on topics including Microsoft Excel, project management, leadership, soft skills, artificial intelligence, and more

- **Avery Dace** is a claims adjuster who joined GoSkills in February 2019. He has completed courses in Excel for business use, including PivotTables and data analysis.
- **Mariah Campagne** is a salon suite owner who began using GoSkills in June 2025. Her training spans business and operations topics, including Lean Six Sigma, job interviewing, and conflict resolution.
- **Rashaude Ohiokpehai** is a college student who enrolled in GoSkills in October 2021. He has completed over 35 courses across a wide range of categories—including project management, productivity, finance, marketing, public speaking, and leadership—showcasing a strong commitment to multidisciplinary learning.

Themes that emerged across the three learners include that they:

- Engaged with micro-units during non-prime hours (e.g., evenings, work downtimes, night shifts), demonstrating the value of flexible scheduling.
- Reported that shorter lessons lowered their cognitive load.

- Experienced a faster sense of accomplishment, which motivated continued learning.
- Appreciated when micro-lessons were paired or clustered with templates, datasets, or mini-exercises that contribute to building a specific, tangible skill (Figure 4).
- Found it easier to revisit specific sections for quick refreshers when needed.

These insights reinforce, among other benefits of microlearning, the notion that designing for anytime, anywhere access removes scheduling barriers and gives learners an element of personal control over when learning takes place.

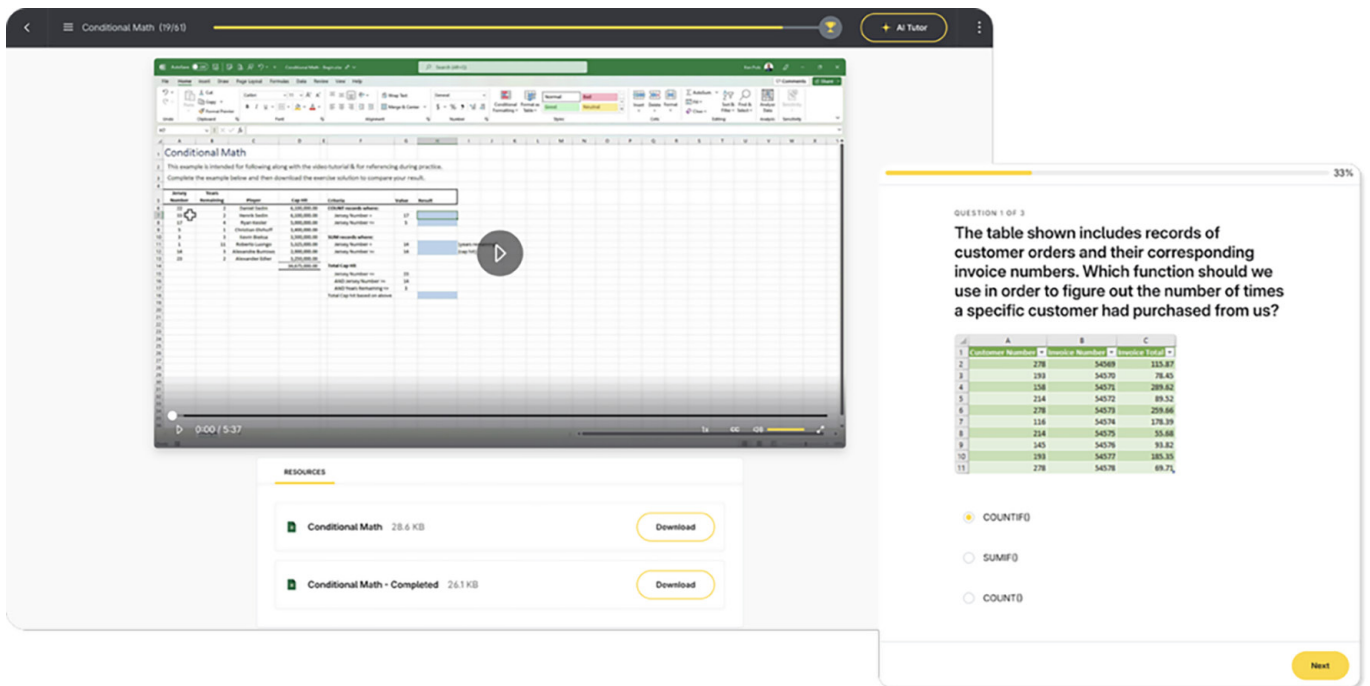


Fig. 4. GoSkills video lessons are paired with quizzes and practical exercises to enhance learning retention

One interesting perspective came from learner Avery Dace, who prefers short videos for initial knowledge acquisition and “just-in-time” lookups, but believes there is still a place for longer learning formats—particularly for advanced, integrative practice once baseline familiarity has been established. This supports the need for optional deep dives or supplemental resources, rather than a wholesale switch to long lectures.

Mariah Campagne shared that the ability to control playback speed is especially useful when the learner already has foundational knowledge. It may be noted that the reverse is also true: slowing down playback can be very helpful for complex topics or niche areas, such as language learning.

From the third interview, Rashaude Ohiokpehai revealed that he occasionally wants “more explanation” within short clips. This highlights the potential value of virtual tutors that can provide contextual assistance within and beyond the scope of a given lesson. Rather than diverting attention to external search engines for clarification, an embedded AI tutor (Figure 5) could help learners remain engaged and focused on the content at hand [12].

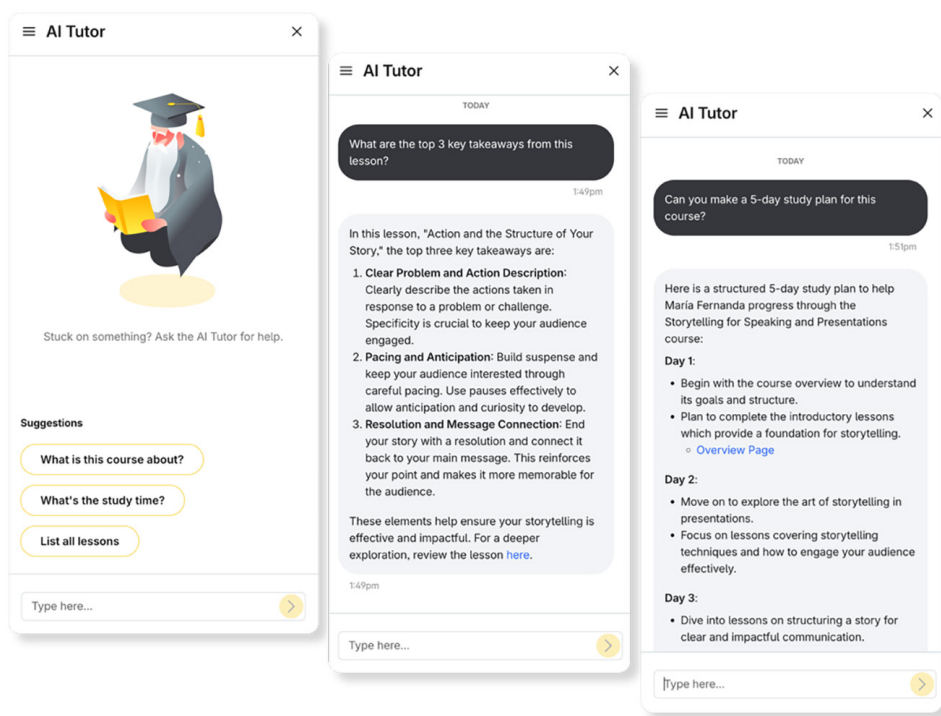


Fig. 5. AI tutors, such as the one from GoSkills, support learners by answering course-specific questions, exploring topics in greater depth, suggesting real-world applications, and creating custom study plans to enhance engagement and retention

## 5 DISCUSSION AND STUDY LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study offer insight into how microlearning is both conceptualized in the literature and implemented in real-world contexts. Interviews with instructors and learners revealed strong alignment with core principles identified in academic sources, such as brevity, focused objectives, and on-demand access. Instructors emphasized storytelling, single-concept lessons, and timely reinforcement activities—practices that directly reflect best practices described in recent reviews. Learners, meanwhile, highlighted the motivational impact of short lessons, flexible scheduling, and the ease of revisiting content. This shared emphasis on clarity, flexibility, and relevance reinforces microlearning’s value in time-constrained professional environments.

The interviews also offered valuable insights into how microlearning can be enhanced and extended. While instructors aim to keep content concise, some learners expressed a desire for greater depth or contextual support—pointing to the value of optional extensions such as templates, interactive feedback, or, more recently, AI tutors. Additionally, the example shared by Bill Raymond demonstrates that microlearning principles can be effectively embedded within longer instructional formats, such as workshops. Segmenting content into timed sections for instruction, practice, and Q&A illustrates how traditional training models can incorporate microlearning design features without sacrificing depth or structure.

The study is now without limitations. The sample—both in terms of peer-reviewed sources and interview participants—was small and context-specific. As such, findings may not generalize across other industries, educational settings, or organizations with different instructional approaches. Furthermore, only a small

portion (15%) of the reviewed literature addressed the limitations of microlearning in depth, which constrained the breadth of critical analysis available for comparison.

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although microlearning has garnered significant attention in academic literature, its dynamic and multifaceted nature calls for continued investigation, particularly in corporate settings. As highlighted in a bibliometric analysis [1], most evaluation studies have focused on higher education, typically assessing outcomes such as instructional effectiveness, learner motivation, engagement, and self-regulated learning. While organizational, medical, and language education contexts have also been explored, they remain comparatively underrepresented.

One avenue for future research lies in examining how contemporary workplace demands—such as multitasking, digital interruptions, reliance on automation, and time scarcity—shape the design and experience of microlearning. A related line of inquiry could explore the social and cultural dynamics that influence its adoption across organizational contexts. Investigating how these real-world conditions impact learner engagement, access, and performance may offer valuable insights into when and why microlearning succeeds—or falls short—as a training strategy.

Further research could also explore how microlearning integrates into broader instructional ecosystems. While many implementations emphasize standalone, short-format modules, interviews in this study suggest that microlearning principles can be embedded within longer sessions, such as 60- or 90-minute workshops. Hybrid or “micro-infused” approaches that balance brevity with instructional depth and cohesion represent a promising direction for future inquiry.

Finally, an area of growing interest lies at the intersection of microlearning and artificial intelligence. As learning platforms increasingly incorporate AI-driven features—such as adaptive learning paths, personalized nudges, and on-demand tutoring—the very formats of microlearning are being redefined. How might AI tools support or transform the delivery of microlearning? Conversely, how do microlearning principles shape the development and design of AI-powered learning systems? Investigating this bidirectional relationship could yield valuable insights into both the future of workplace learning and the evolving role of instructional technologies.

## 7 DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT in order to improve readability and language. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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