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Bond Padagogy Project

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What mobile learning technologies do students currently bring with them to the classroom?

Advantages of the iPad. Overall, many of the students were enthusiastic about their esteem for the iPad. Two of the descriptors used by students were “kick” (a slang expression meaning excellent) and “revolutionary.” Other volunteered attributes of the iPad held in esteem were the “long battery life” and the screen size, said to be “good for games.” Some students specifically addressed learning using iPads, describing interactivity and “learning on-the-go” as advantages.

Disadvantages of the iPad. While the students listed numerous advantages of the iPad, as described above, the students were no less vocal regarding their perception of disadvantages. The majority of the complaints regarded features that the students believed that the iPad should have, but does not. These missing features included: USB port, Microsoft Word, camera, flash, chat functions and 3G. Numerous students also commented that typing on the touch-screen keyboard is not comfortable and is error-prone. A common theme was that the iPad was a novelty, but not a valid educational tool.

Experience of Using the Electronic Textbook. Whereas there were minimal complaints specific to use of the mobile LMS application, the electronic textbook provoked extensive commenting, the majority of which was positive. Some of the functions they commended were: highlighting, searching, dictionary and bookmarking. Numerous students described the format of the book as “engaging.” One student said, “people will engage with already doing something. It’s like it’s a game.” A minority of students criticized the electronic version of the book, stating that navigating through the book was “awkward” and/or stating that they prefer to read from paper.

Discussion

Research into mobile learning is exciting both for its student learning potential and as a newly emerging sub-domain in educational research. Because this nascent field is the focus of emerging literature, opportunity abounds for research to make a meaningful contribution. For the 135 students who participated in this research, it appears that the affordedness of a new learning tool in a blended learning environment added modality to their existing tool- chest of technologies and provided stimuli to achieve and warm, if not enthusiastic, attitudes toward the emerging mobile learning platform of the tablet computer, and added something to their performance. Indeed, it seems that those who borrowed the iPad twice had the highest grades after controlling for age and self-management of learning (both of which are positive correlates with grade performance).

These findings are, as always, preliminary and should be treated with caution. On the face of it, the results seem to invoke notions of the Hawthorne effect in which a novel stimulus generates increased arousal and thus, for some, better performance. That those who borrowed the iPad had better grades, is perhaps indicative of the students’ motivations and eagerness to learn, eagerness to use technology, and eagerness for innovation and engagement in the classroom. Certainly the results indicate that the ability to use internet-connected technologies during class is important to students, particularly in a class on Digital Media and Society!