

DEMYSTIFYING MOBILE LEARNING: STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE 21ST CENTURY LEARNING AND
TECHNOLOGY IN A PRE-UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION PROGRAM IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
BY USING THE IPAD AS A LANGUAGE-LEARNING DEVICE

Do your students reach for their mobile telephone or a pen and paper when they have something important to remember? To acknowledge and exploit the educational advantages of modern technology, the government of the United Arab Emirates recently embarked on a mobile learning strategy to equip students with the skills required to function in the 21st century. This innovative program aims to integrate the use of iPads into all pre-university foundation programs (approximately 14,000 iPads have been distributed across three federal institutions of higher education). This presentation examines the implementation strategies employed and the teaching and learning experiences of a cohort of second language teachers working with approximately 2000 pre-undergraduate students at Zayed University, based in the United Arab Emirates.

The initiative, approved in March, was designed for immediate implementation at the beginning of the academic year. The primary objectives were to determine how the iPad could be educationally effective in a second language-learning environment and to provide the students with the requisite skills to function in today's technological society. This bold initiative has had an immediate impact on student learning and the university faculties' approach to teaching.

One hundred and fifty English as a Second Language teachers received iPads in June and were provided with basic technological training. Faculties were then encouraged to develop different language learning strategies and approaches with applications for the iPad over the summer with the use of an online training site housed on EDMODO. Although the initiative is in its early stages, preliminary data has been gathered on the faculties' perceptions of using the iPad as a teaching tool and on the effectiveness of the initial training program and professional development given to them. It should be noted that data about student perceptions on the use of mobile devices for learning and a more in-depth study into the success of the iPad as a device to embrace and enhance 21st century learning strategies are currently being undertaken and will not be discussed in this presentation.

Discussion:

This presentation is for educators who are investigating the introduction of mobile

devices into their institution and will focus on three main areas: the initial planning and the benefits of a pilot project, faculty professional development and training, and, lastly, the lessons learnt so far will be shared, along with further recommendations. The last 10 minutes will be for feedback and suggestions from the audience.

- The iPad initiative will be outlined, how it started, and the strategies that were adopted to prepare for its full implementation will be explained. I will examine its effectiveness by presenting an evaluation of the efficacy of the use of the six pilot courses in the classroom.

- I will report on faculty development and training. I will share and evaluate the strategies that were developed for training faculty on basic iPad use and the professional development that was employed to promote the use of the iPad as a teaching and learning tool. The training utilized a number of strategies, from face to face sessions to the use of online applications such as EDMODO, which offers facilities for online training, as well as the means to establish a forum for professional learning communities.

- I will demonstrate the lessons learnt so far by analyzing some of the main issues encountered at the start up and the areas of professional development that need to be emphasized in the initial training. These include the importance of ICT integration models such as TPCK (Technological, Pedagogical, Content, Knowledge) and Dr. Rubin Puentedura's SAMR model. Other important considerations are the use of new technology and how it can be best served to interface with the existing curriculum and teaching methodology. Finally, the use of incentives in order to overcome faculties' reluctance to the challenge of change will be assessed.

Some initial Findings:

- Teachers were initially very apprehensive about the change to an iPad from the existing laptop-learning environment.
- Teachers' technical knowledge with regards to the operation of iPads and how they could be used in the classroom was extremely limited.
- Teachers' perceptions about the educational use of the iPad in classrooms became more positive after the first training session.
- Teachers have found that the students are engaged when working on projects that involve the use of iPad apps.
- The iPad is preferred over the PC for collaborative activities such as movie making,

and brainstorming, however, most students prefer to write and edit documents on a PC.

- Teachers and students like the immediate access to email and the ease of accessing the Internet, which is provided by the iPad.

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