

Chapter 4

Educators and Mobile: Challenges and Trends

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ABSTRACT

More practical and experiential education was the demand of executives recently surveyed about how universities could better meet employers' needs (Harvey & Manweller, 2015). As an alternative, with enhanced Web and mobile technologies, executives are seeing the opportunity to provide employees access to essential education in the workplace. Global e-learning is expected to top \$107 billion in 2015 (Pappas, 2015), and U.S. corporations each year are now spending \$1,169 per employee on training (Bersin, 2014b). Bersin says organizations are facing not a lack of employees but a lack of key skills among employees, and that is driving the trend (Bersin, 2014b). Harvard's Clayton Christensen, famous for his theories on disruptive technologies, suggests that even Harvard could be in jeopardy if it does not respond to these trends (Christensen, 2012). This chapter explores different strategies and technologies that can help meet these demands, and includes a case study of a university plan that makes distance learning more faculty-friendly, student-accessible, and cost-effective.

INTRODUCTION: STATE OF THE ART

The future of mobile education may depend as much on economics and lifestyle as on technology. It has been noted that technological application does not get interesting until technology itself gets “boring” (Shirky, 2009). The technology for exciting mobile-based distance-learning programs already exists and is getting better by the week. It is just waiting for the right people in the right situation to innovatively apply the technology.

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Within educational institutions we already see mobile technology being used in conjunction with smart boards to create so-called smart classrooms. Teachers are able to interact with students within the classroom to share files of all kinds, to conduct assessments, etc. The same kind of interactions can be achieved over distance. Besides different asynchronous systems, such as the free Moodle learning management system, there are inexpensive synchronous systems such as Adobe Connect and HotConference (aka MeetCheap) that allow on-campus classes and presentations to be simulcast to students off-campus. These systems can share live video, panel discussions, Powerpoint slideshows, prerecorded videos, and other kinds of content. There is very little that can be done in a brick-and-mortar classroom that cannot be done in a virtual classroom via web-conferencing. And the systems allow the simulcast classes to be video-recorded for later asynchronous use. Such videos can easily be embedded into Moodle, for example, as part of a package of learning activities.

Like distance learning itself, research in the field has exploded in recent years – although both the services and research on them have been around for some time. As in traditional education, a number of key interactive elements must be considered when looking at the effectiveness of distance learning: appropriateness of the curriculum, availability (for both the student and the university) of the necessary technologies, teacher qualification, and student readiness.

CURRICULUM

In order for a university's curriculum to be successful, it has to address and fit the needs of its student body. In a recent study, Indonesian students cited concerns with their curriculum as an item of high priority (Budiman, 2015). At the completion of the study, the data suggested that lack of feedback, applying theoretical lessons, understanding different writing styles, forecasting the examination materials, ability to make translations, poor vocabulary, ability to understand grammar, the ability to write compositions based on specific instructions and ability to switch between writing styles were concerns shared overall by the students. While it is possible that this is the result of the appropriateness of the curriculum, it could also be a result of the instructor's readiness to teach online.

Joo, Andres, and Shearer (2014) found in a study of students in online courses at Costa Rican National University of Distance Education that after initially teaching a course, the outcomes should be assessed and the course retooled to better suit the needs of the students. After the course they had taken was reviewed by students, educators modified the types of assignments that would be assigned, altered the frequency of fact-to-face communication sessions, and suggested facilitation strategies that would result in a better experience for the students, both cognitively and in terms of their learning outcomes. It is important to point out that the researchers did not see a direct correlation between the changes in curriculum and student grades. However, if the curriculum were permanently altered to better suit student needs, it is not unreasonable to assume that over time, this change could result in greater student satisfaction and overall course success.

TECHNOLOGY

As more universities adapt their current curricula for mobile or online use, it has become apparent that a transitional issue between the two does exist. Rogerson-Revelle (2015) performed a study to determine

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