Chapter 45

The Parental Perspective over the Use of iPads in Primary and Middle Years of Schooling:
Issues for Pedagogical and Policy Debates

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ABSTRACT

Apple's iPad and other forms of tablet are reportedly gaining increasing popularity within the academic premises. Most of the published research on this topic has highly admired the positive role and impact of iPads on teaching and learning practices, as if an exogenous technological induction in any local context would essentially revolutionize and transform the whole educational paradigm; however, some recent publications also highlight the parental and policy-makers' concerns over the undesired consequences of technological obsession in educational development. The current study aims at bringing a balanced view on this crucially important topic. The study employs mixed methods research and it uses Ajman Academy, a renowned K-12 institution in the United Arab Emirates, as a case study. This research concludes that due to the relative immaturity of these young children, they cannot be left alone to make their own technological choices. Hence, adopting an over-ambitious approach in terms of technological adoption, without properly understanding the nuances and complexities of a local context; may possibly put these children in a vulnerable situation, and thus likely exposed to many unintended and undesired consequences.

INTRODUCTION

The iPad and other forms of tablet are reportedly gaining increasing popularity within the academic premises; since the introduction of iPads into the market in early 2010. As compared to other competing tablets launched by different vendors, Apple's iPad has a certain competitive advantage over other tablets in terms of its early massive deployment i.e. the first-mover advantage backed by a powerful marketing campaign to convince the decision making authorities, policy-makers and academic administrators to adopt iPads as an essential pedagogical tool to facilitate teaching and learning activities. The UAE (United Arab Emirates) is among the pioneering nations who decided to adopt iPads into their higher educational institutions under the auspices of Ministry of Education since April 2012; initially within the cluster of 4 degree awarding public sector colleges and universities, enrolling more than 41,000 students in their 20 campuses located across the country (Cavanaugh, Hargis, and Kamali, 2012).

Many research reports and papers have been published on the impacts of iPad and other digital technologies on teaching and learning, but majority of these publications have overwhelmingly admired the observed positive impacts and improvements in the educational domain due to the adoption of iPads in academic premises. This group of previous research (Ratnavale, 2015; Clark and Luckin, 2013; Clarke, Svanaes, and Zimmermann, 2013; Clarke et al., 2013; Chell and Dowling, 2013; Pressey, 2013; Gitsaki et al., 2013; Clarke and Svanaes, 2012; Cavanaugh, Hargis and Kamali, 2012) thus seems to be a bit skewed towards highlighting only the positive dimensions; such as referring to a wide range of educational apps available in iPads, different proposed feasible payment schemes and ownership structures, and a number of diffusion strategies focused mainly on the supply-side economies of scale. It seems like in those cases, it has been predominantly presumed that an exogenous technological induction in any local context would essentially revolutionize and completely transform the educational paradigm, and hence would fully replace the prevailing traditional and conventional pedagogical and learning practices. In result, an over-ambitious approach in impact assessment studies potentially make them, to some extent, quite biased in their subsequent observations and analysis. We find that the previous research substantially misses a balanced view on this crucially important topic, particularly when it comes to adoption of these digital devices and IT (Information Technology) services within the premises of primary and middle schools, considering the age-factor and a relative immaturity of the focused user group. Hence, adopting an overshadowing attitude towards IT adoption may possibly put these younger children into a more vulnerable situation – making them likely exposed to undesirable consequences.

On the other hand, there are some recent publications (APM, 2015; Schleicher, 2015; Earp, 2015; Reid, 2015; ACARA, 2015) which rather take a balanced stance on this topic, and they have looked both into positive and negative aspects of using of these digital devices in the classroom environment and home premises. Taking this as a point of departure, we perceive the importance of a balanced research and critical study on this topic to unfold the many untold stories (Ismail, 2015a; Ismail, 2015b; Ismail, 2011) and to give voice to the parental concerns over this issue; in order to set the stage for further policy debates, and thus revisiting the adopted pedagogical practices and strategies. Diffusion and adoption of technological tools and ICT gadgets such as iPad should not be considered as capable of providing a turnkey solution on their own; hence, the policy makers, suppliers, content developers, sponsors, and school administrators cannot keep themselves dissociated and distant from the resulting outcomes and consequences of the excessive use or misuse of these gadgets; whether it happens at school or home premises. The school cannot throw all the liability and responsibility onto parents' shoulders by making them sign the declaration paper at the beginning of the school session. As children under the age of 18

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