

Chapter 4

Text Messaging to Improve Instructor Immediacy and its Role in Multiplatform E-Learning Systems

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ABSTRACT

Text messaging has been exploited for supporting learning in a variety of educational settings. However, evidence for its effectiveness and impact is limited. This chapter demonstrates how the use of text messaging can contribute towards enhanced quality of learning. In particular the chapter focuses on the use of text messaging as a means of improving immediacy between instructors and students in third-level education. Immediacy is defined as behaviour which increases psychological closeness between communicators. The results of research in instructional communication suggest that improved immediacy leads to more positive student-instructor relationships engendering positive attitudes, increased interest and motivation by students as well as improved attendance, improved retention, improved student engagement and improved learning. This chapter outlines a theoretical basis for the effect of text messaging on instructor-student relationships, provides empirical evidence for the impact of text messaging on immediacy and discusses the integration of text messaging for improving immediacy in Multiplatform E-Learning Systems.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS

The quality of student learning is paramount to the success of any educational institution. There

has been a plethora of initiatives recently in third level colleges aimed at improving the quality of the learning experience of students. Some of these have shown to be quite successful while others have not. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the use of mobile communication technologies can

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contribute towards enhanced quality of learning. In particular the chapter will focus on the use of text messaging as a means of improving communications between instructors and students in third-level education. Research has shown that the communication between instructors and students is one of the key factors in the quality of the learning experience of students (Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Christophel, 1990; Ellis, 2004).

The chapter will outline how mobile communication can be used to improve the learning experience of students, in particular third-level students, by improving their perception of instructor communication behaviour. Many benefits arise from improving the learning experience of students including improved attendance and retention. These benefits, which provided motivation for the research, will also be outlined. A theoretical basis for the effect of text messaging on instructor-student relationships will be provided, as will empirical evidence in the form of the findings of a year-long study into the use of text messaging and its effect on student perception of instructor communication behaviour. The chapter will discuss these findings and the integration of text messaging in Multiplatform Learning Management Systems. It will also give some recommendations for effective text messaging in educational settings.

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Text messaging has been exploited for supporting learning in a variety of ways and in different educational settings. New communication technologies such as mobile text messaging, known as SMS in many countries, provides a means of facilitating frequent and meaningful interaction amongst students and instructors. This interaction engenders feelings in students of being valued, leading to better attendance, student retention and deeper and more meaningful engagement in learning. Text messaging in particular is suitable

for supporting out-of-class (OOC) communication between students and instructors since it has the property of being asynchronous, as with email, whereby both parties do not have to be using their devices at the same time in order to send or receive messages. It also has the important advantage of being ubiquitous as there are very few students and instructors these days who do not own at least one mobile device capable of sending and receiving text messages.

There have been numerous examples recently of where text messaging has been used to support education. An interesting research study by Griffith University in Australia relates the experience of a female instructor using OOC text messaging as a means of staying in touch with her students and how it can be used as a way of providing connection and community for first year students (Horstmanshof, 2004). Another study by Kingston University in the UK used OOC text messaging to provide a form of 'mobile scaffolding' at a fundamental level to support the needs of first-year students, and guide students towards independent self-management (Stone, 2004). SMS text messaging may also be used to encourage interactivity in the classroom. This results in a more active learning environment, facilitating the building of learning communities. It provides greater feedback for lecturers, and aids student motivation (Markett, Weber, Sanchez, & Tangney, 2006).

The use of mobile devices in education, also known as mobile learning, is nothing new. There are numerous areas in education where the functionalities of mobile devices have been used to support learning, including interaction and learning in collaborative groups, enquiry-based learning, constructivist and socio-constructivist learning activities, peer-to-peer communication and OOC communication between instructors and students (Hoppe, Joiner, Milrad & Sharples, 2003; Houser, Thornton & Kluge, 2002; Roschelle, 2003; Sharples, 2002). However the vast majority of cases where it has been used up to now have been attempts to enhance cognitive learning among

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