

ARE IPODS REALLY EFFECTIVE IN MOBILE LEARNING?

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Abstract

There were two aims of my presentation at the Wireless Ready conference. One was to report what I found resourceful in other presentations that would convince me of podcasting's effectiveness in mobile learning. The other was to shed light on the quality assurance of mobile learning in higher education in Japan, stressing the availability of 60 credits obtainable through e-learning.

1. Introduction

The implied answer to the title question would be 'No, it isn't.' I have to explain why I was skeptical about the use of iPods in mobile learning first before referring to two aims of my attendance at the Wireless Ready event.

2. Four Reasons for my Negative Attitude Toward iPods

My life is completely removed from modern life. I have neither a cell phone nor a laptop computer in this information age, let alone an iPod. The only two things currently available for me to use as a means of communication to reach the outer world are a fixed land-line telephone at home and a desktop computer in my university office.

My personality is also a factor which affected my negative attitude toward iPods. I am the kind of person who is likely to believe what other people say is good as bad. As a result, it takes some time before I admit the value and effectiveness of what other people evaluate as good. It was not until five years after its release that I learned Titanic was a good movie.

From a more social viewpoint, it seems to me that cell phones are more popular, especially among young people, than iPods. A cell phone includes almost every function that an iPod has and could be a more powerful tool than an iPod. Cell phones seem more useful in terms of mobile equipment than iPods. The iPod could be considered rather static even if it is categorized as mobile equipment.

The most fateful reason that made me pessimistic about iPods was a rumor that an experimental class ended in failure at a university in Nagoya. An English language teacher distributed iPod nanos to every freshman in his class aiming to improve the Japanese students' listening comprehension by having them listen to podcast programs in English available from the Internet. The students, however, soon lost their interest in the audio-based programs and the teacher was forced to stop the experiment.

3. Two Aims of My Attendance to Wireless Ready

One of the two reasons for my attendance at Wireless Ready was to find an answer to the title question with my own eyes. The other was to propose some strategies of adopting mobile learning for Japanese universities to survive keen competition.

4. What I Learned at Wireless Ready

Through three keynote presentations at Wireless Ready with emphases on podcasting and mobile technology, I learned about Second Life, an effective way of giving a presentation, and a project called iPod therefore iWrite. In several other presentations in the afternoon, I learned and experienced some educational uses of podcasting, which wiped away my prejudice against iPods and convinced me that an iPod could be an educational device in mobile learning in Japan.

5. University Establishment Standards

As of April 2006, there were 744 on-campus universities and 36 correspondence universities in Japan. The University Establishment Standards revised in March 2001 enabled on-campus students to obtain 60 out of the 124 credits required to receive a bachelor's degree through e-learning. Regarding the correspondence universities, all the 124 credits can be obtained through e-learning.

The conditions imposed on e-learning by Article 25 Section 2 of the University Establishment Standards are that e-learning employing the advanced use of a variety of media using communications satellites, optical fibers etc., and integrated use of a variety of information such as written words, sound, still and motion pictures, must have an educational effect equivalent to that of face-to-face education. It does not matter whether or not the e-learning is synchronous and interactive. In this, podcasting in mobile learning holds enormous potential as a means of e-learning.

As universities are expected to react quickly to changes in society and students' needs, it has become necessary to evaluate quality assurance for academic courses

each university offers. From April 2004 onwards all universities and junior colleges including colleges of technology are obliged to undergo an evaluation by an evaluation institution either every five or seven years. Three certified evaluation organizations are Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA), National Institute for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE), and Japan Accreditation Board for Engineering Education (JABEE). Although quality assurance of e-learning in Japanese universities inspected by these organizations is currently based on face-to-face classes, it is expected that these institutions will start to specifically evaluate the quality assurance of e-learning in the near future.

6. Proposals to make use of mobile-learning

Of the 744 on-campus universities in Japan as of April 2006; 176 were national and 568 were private universities, meaning 76% of the on-campus universities were private universities. It is likely that organizing academic curriculum is easier for a private university than a national university due to legal restrictions. How each university makes use of the 60 credits obtainable by e-learning could be a unique feature of a university.

In the 60 credits, podcast programs could be used as remedial education for students considered academically underprepared for higher education, reflecting that an increasing number of universities rely on this type of education. For Japanese students studying overseas, podcast programs aired by their universities could be used to compensate for their missing classes in Japan. Podcast programs produced by

Japanese universities could attract prospective international students wishing to study in Japan.

Conclusion

Marshall McLuhan (1962) referred to an image of the Global Village in his book. In the 60's, people could know events happening at the other side of the world by radio and television. We are now facing a different type of Global Village than McLuhan's version through the Internet, experiencing events as if we were there in the same space. As mobile technology develops, one issue which may be brought up is the integration of cell phones and podcasting. Whatever the podcast program may be, whether it is games, documentaries, cooking, or language programs, we should be critical in its content and its worth as mobile learning. Bryan Alexander (2004) asks, 'Should our physically sedentary campuses embrace the digitally nomadic swarms of arriving students?' The answer is definitely yes.

References

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