Tablets in Business Education – Distraction or Different Learning Experience?

Tablet computers are being considered as a groundbreaking new technology for educational purposes: they command attention both in undergraduate and graduate classes. Large private and government financed projects are underway to provide students with tablets (e.g. South Africa with Telefunken Tablet PCs or India Aakash Tablet project) (Gernetzky 2012).

Among the variety of tablet devices, the iPad that started the recent tablet revolution is seemingly ready for prime time. The Chronicle of Higher Education has over 300 articles, blogs and reviews related to iPads in education – approximately 200 of those have been written in 2011. Authors are discussing both the content consumption and content creation approaches (Ward 2011). The availability of these devices also contribute to the discussion: in 2011 over 50 million iPads were sold (Camm-Jones 2012).

In the past decade many new instructional technologies appeared in classrooms, ranging from instructional multimedia CDs to whiteboards, and while the purpose of any new instructional technology should be to improve the learning process (Peterson, Albaum, Munuera and Cunningham 2002), not all of these devices proved to be universally successful. Many of the introduced technologies remained confined to subject areas or specific uses: either because of applicability or cost issues. Tablets differ, however, because of their versatility and accessibility. Optimal use of tablet devices requires adoption and use by both the educator and student. The distraction factor (e.g. social network messages during class time) also have to be taken into account. Thus there is a need to review both the teaching and learning perspective (Buzzard, Crittenden, Crittenden and McCarty 2011). Due to the relative novelty of the technology, there are relatively few detailed papers in academic journals: some concentrate on faculty usage (e.g. Lindsey 2011), while others reflect on the learning process, including collaboration elements (Manuguerra and Petocz 2011; Murray and Olcese 2011). In addition to the above, the literature review revealed that technology adoption models and social cognitive theory discussions are rare in this context (Ratten 2010).

This paper concentrates on the iPad and discusses its adoption and uses in graduate education. As a theoretical basis, the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis 1989; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis and Davis 2003; Venkatesh and Bala 2008), Personal Innovation (Agarwal and Prasad 1998) and Task Technology Fit (Dishaw and Strong 1999) approaches are being used.

The Central European University Business School introduced iPads in graduate classes at the beginning of the 2011/2012 Academic Year. Using a theoretical model, a survey was designed at the beginning of the academic year and completed by participants. As the iPads were used in various situations, we report about best practices and reflect on the the applicability of theoretical models to iPad adoption in educational environment.

The paper discusses implementation issues and training requirements for both faculty and students. Institutional financial decisions may affect the perception of the devices for students and policies have to be defined for usage.
Based on a variety of classes, we also list creative approaches and solutions to incorporate iPads into classroom activities. One particularly applicable framework in using information communication technology (ICT) in education is the Computer Practice Framework (CPF) (Twining 2002).

Twining (2002) introduced three core dimensions:
- **Quantity**: the quantity of computer use (as a proportion of the available learning time);
- **Focus**: the objectives supported by the computer use;
- **Mode**: the impact of computer use on the curriculum (where curriculum is used in the broadest sense).

We modify the CPF model according to tablet usage and as the tablets are primarily used as communication and media consumption devices, we incorporate the Media Synchronicity Theory (Dennis, Fuller and Valacich 2008).

**References**


