CHAPTER 2

THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPLICATION OF MOBILE LEARNING WITH iPADS: A COMPARISON OF APPROACHES FOR ENHANCEMENT

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Abstract

For the last three years the University of Southampton, through the Institute for Learning Innovation and Development (ILiAD) has been working with students as partners in developing the digital literacies skills of both staff and students. An integral part of the approach has been the use of iPads to support this development. Students working with academics across a range of disciplines have been issued with iPads to support the exploration of a variety of digital applications including ebooks, apps, interactive video, blogs, the use of Twitter for language learning and more. The initiative is part of the Southampton Opportunity project at the University and the Innovation and Digital Literacies Champions (iChamps) are one group of students who are specifically involved in supporting technology-enhanced learning. In addition, Fiona Harvey, lead for the iChamps initiative (ILiAD) and Dr. Mary Morrison (Southampton Business School) have reviewed how the MBA programme has utilized and learnt from their own experiences in issuing iPads to their students. The University has no official policy for the use of iPads but they are the mobile tablet of choice amongst most academic staff. Students have their own devices but have lately tended to bring with them laptops

1 Fiona Harvey, Education Development Manager, (Institute for Learning Innovation and Development) and Dr Mary Morrison, Education Development Fellow, (Southampton Business School), University of Southampton.
and mobile phones. The iChamps have all reported how they have not only been able to demonstrate ideas but that they have also improved their own productivity. Some had other tablets but prefer the ease of use of the iPad over their alternatives. This paper will compare experiences regarding the use of iPads within the MBA programme with their cross-institutional use by students and staff from a range of disciplines, including Health Sciences, Modern Languages, Chemistry, and History. It will examine how use of these tools has enhanced the student experience and reflect on whether the use of iPads has made any difference to student satisfaction or achievement. The research will inform future strategic plans for education enhancement at the University.
Introduction

The University of Southampton is a research intensive university, on the south coast of England. It has over 24,500 students studying a wide range of disciplines from Medicine to Art, across five campuses. At the time of the last iHE conference official figures showed that 800 iPads had been ordered between 2010 and 2013. The same data for the 2013-2016 period show that figure to be 1200. However, it is difficult to understand the effect of these purchases, so the purpose of this paper is to explore the use of iPads in two known examples.

ILiAD supports various innovations around the use of technology-enhanced learning, including the Innovation and Digital Literacies Champions (iChamps), and staff and student development sessions on the use of iPads for the Business School’s MBA programme. This was in collaboration with Dr. Mary Morrison and the MBA team. The iChamps are students who have been selected either directly by individual academics or who have been interviewed after applying to work alongside academic staff.

There are 12 iChamps working on a variety of projects and each student already had an iPad or was issued with one. Working with an academic or with a Faculty on a project throughout the semester, they are supported by Fiona Harvey to develop digital literacies skills. This is part of a range of Student Champions initiatives at the University of Southampton, within the ‘Southampton Opportunity’ programme of activities and commended by The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), during the Higher Education Review (QAA, 2016).

The MBA programme has 26 students, with diverse backgrounds, who are issued with iPads at the beginning of their programme and are required to download apps and core texts. The MBA was the subject of a study for the first iHE conference (iHE 2014) and the intention was to survey the use of iPads on an annual basis. However, this was difficult for a number of reasons. A steep increase in student numbers in the School and many staff changes, including within the MBA programme, meant that much non-essential work was abandoned, and this review is therefore of a snapshot of current practice rather than a longitudinal study.

Methods

The authors considered the nature of the two groups and their iPad usage in order to compare and contrast approaches and outcomes. Both groups were invited to take part in an online survey which explored hours of
usage, nature of usage and apps used, along with some free text comments. Data collection was expanded with some unstructured interviews with students and staff in both groups resulting in the following two case studies.

The Case Studies

The two groups are quite different in nature, background and role, as outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1
Comparison of Case Study Group Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>iChamps</th>
<th>MBA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of group</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of study</td>
<td>UG/ PGR</td>
<td>PGT with 3 years work experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domicile</td>
<td>Mostly from UK</td>
<td>All overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief given</td>
<td>To use iPad as support for work with academics or students</td>
<td>To have iPad to use as primarily organisational tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>One ‘cool tools’ session and regular group support sessions on digital literacy</td>
<td>Short session at induction, brief with key uses and apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>Up to 3 years</td>
<td>1 year full-time study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interaction</td>
<td>Work independently with opportunity to meet monthly</td>
<td>Taught/ study together on regular (weekly) basis</td>
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The iChamp Initiative and Their Use of iPads

The iChamps focus on an aspect of educational enhancement and their explicit role is to support the development of digital skills for staff and students via a collegial approach (Bovill, Cook-Sather & Fallen, 2011; Kay, Dunne, & Hutchinson, 2010). ILIaD has the responsibility to support technology-enhanced learning, so all projects have been negotiated to maximise the use of that technology, through the use of apps or websites that can facilitate this. Part of their ‘toolkit’ for carrying out these projects is the iPad, along with Open Badges and ePortfolios.

All the iChamps and their academic leads are encouraged to attend monthly support sessions led by ILIaD. These range from practical uses of apps for enhancement, productivity and communication to the use of Open Badges to scaffold the projects.

The iPad has provided a high level of quality in that the chosen apps can operate within the university infrastructure (there have been problems with network compatibility) and that the apps work well, most of which have been designed for use within the IOS platform. iPads are easy to use, with instruction only needed for enhancement and not to access the tool itself. All the iChamps have said because of this, that they have found ways of using the iPads for their personal and professional use. Students have commented that some of the apps that they have been shown for the projects they have also used in their own study, and all of the students interviewed said that they used between 20-50 apps as a matter of course. The technology is invisible to them, with that no longer a barrier to sharing ideas or showing how an app could be used. As an example, in the past students had to print off a paper-based claim form and scan it in to be sent for payment. The students now use the Camscanner app to scan in documents, and thus enable electronic completion and forwarding of the form. All of this takes a matter of minutes and costs the students nothing—a sharp contrast to the experience of many of their peers who still use the slow paper-based route. The iChamps have applied these techniques learnt on their projects to their own learning practices, choosing to read on their iPads (rather than print) and using apps like iAnnotate to record their notes. What is very interesting is how the students have applied the digital literacies skills they have developed as part of the iChamp initiative to allow for autonomous learning, blurring the lines between their living and learning at the university (Falloon, 2010).
One iChamp from a summer internship, commented that they

didn’t ever really used an iPad before so ... was initially a bit unsure about how valuable it would be as a study tool. However after using it to explore a wide variety of apps available for download I realised how useful having an iPad is/was to the extent where after the internship I ended up buying my own!

It is this ease of use, pushing the tool to the background and enabling a focus on the functionality which appears to have supported the mission to enhance and engage educational activities.

Without formal IT support, there have been few problems with the use of the iPad for education and many of the iChamps see it as part of their resources. We have not had to provide any formal introductions to how to use it, other than utilising the informal iPad Coffee Clubs (Harvey & Smith, 2013) to share good practice.

**MBA Programme and the Use of iPads**

In 2014 the paper submitted to the first iHE conference reviewed the use of iPads in the MBA programme by both staff and students.

iPads are provided within the MBA primarily as an organisational tool and have been since 2013. Students are given a user guide and have a session during induction to download the key apps and resources. They set up their university email account, download essential apps (including Bluefire with course books) and, as of this year, use iCal for their official timetable. Both the guide and induction session have been developed by the MBA programme manager, building on those first used in 2013 with input from IIIaD and the Education Development Office in the Business School.

There were no specific iPad-linked pedagogical outcomes identified for the MBA, it was intended to be a good communications and organisational tool for students, giving a ‘level playing field’ in terms of resource and information provision. It has always been expected it would also be used as a teaching and learning tool. However, pressure of work with increased student numbers across the School and University reduced the possibility of supporting its use and scaffolding the process for staff and students.

The text comments from MBA students indicate that they generally appreciate the gesture, and value receiving an iPad even if they already had one. While the use of it was variable (even within this small sample) there were three who said that they favoured the iPad as it was more
portable than their laptop, although two explicitly stated that they had seen no need for an iPad as a ‘phone and laptop’ were enough.

**Figure 2.1.** Comparison of iChamps and MBA student iPad usage.

**Figure 2.2.** Categories of apps used by iChamps and MBA students.

The figures seem to suggest that more support for the application of apps (in the case of iChamps) resulted in greater use of the iPads.
Conclusions

The aim of this research was to understand more about current practice and identify areas for development, to underpin the use of technology for educational enhancement. The use of iPads and tablet devices is on the increase. Over 2000 iPads are in use at the University of Southampton, without any formal purchase agreement, support, or enforced BYOD policy in place. This needs some attention as the use of mobile learning is ubiquitous across the institution. There is great potential for the enhancement of education by capitalising on the ease of use, and satisfaction of the students in having this technology available to them along with the now improved education functionality of the iPad. It is also clear that without support, despite ease of use, there will be very little or insignificant difference in how they are used for education and research.

Further investigation could explore how the support for devices at the university needs to be developed in order to gain best advantage of iPads. This is illustrated by the MBA programme, where time is at a premium and there is not much space for experimentation. As with most MBAs, the students pay a premium fee and have an intensive timetable. So if an app or activity fails for whatever reason, it will deter the individual and others from experimentation, and quite possibly frustrate the students. Another observation by the MBA programme manager is that all the students have their own laptops and are able to complete all activities (e.g., accessing university email, reading books and accessing the timetable) on a laptop or even on a phone.

Based on the two studies it seems that the iPads have not yet had a major impact on practice. They are most often used for activities that can also be carried out on laptops or smartphones. What has not been included here are the exclusively ‘iPad’ activities such as the creative apps, which could offer something different. However, without the space within a programme and the structure across the university to support staff willing to trial these new approaches, it will be difficult to make headway. It is essential to think about staff development in this context, in order to engage with students to enable them to use the devices given them to their fullest extent.
References


