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iTunes University: Potentials and Applications

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Abstract

This paper aims to introduce iTunes University as a service that can be used to design and distribute courses that supplement traditional print media. Besides, it purports the pros and cons of the iTunes university service such as modernizing the metarials, easy access and organization, free courses and positive marketing, and expense, training, losing control, and investment respectively. The paper also focuses on the educational opportunities attached with the iTunesU application and its connection with other apple technology and discusses how the platform can be used to create interactive learning material for students at various educational levels.

Key words: Podcasting, apple, i-tunes, i-tunes university

1. Main text

1. Introduction

Previous studies reporting that podcasting is regarded favourably, indicates the potentials of podcasting as a benefit environment for the general learning tasks. "Podcasting" refers to the distribution of digital media files series including audio and video materials, by a podcast creator over the Internet. Heilesen, (2010; p. 1064) states that "podcasting may be an answer to some of the challenges to higher education to modernize, to open up, and to develop a competitive edge." Vogele and Gard (2006) distinguish three categories of administrative podcasts, special lecture series, and classroom podcasts. This paper will focus on the classroom captured podcasts and their potentials for improving learning in the context of a new medium provided by Apple.

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Jowitt (2008) summarizes the pros of podcasting in teaching and learning as portability, flexibility, convenience, listening anywhere at any time, multitasking while moving about, easy Internet access when needed, listening repeatedly, controlling speed of playback, automatic RSS subscription, free and individual choice of what to listen to, special advantages for auditory learners, enhances services to distance and online-students. Among those capabilities mentioned above, Heilesen (2010) perceives 'replaying repeatedly' as the most obvious benefit of podcasting since there is a ground of evidence indicating that students use podcast while doing revisions and preparing for exams. Evans, (2008) claims that there is some evidence that students consider podcasts to be more reliable and effective than their own notes.

The teachers can adopt podcasting as a medium to deliver learning assets for revision and review after teaching. Besides, they may develop scheduled podcasts with updated, background information and guidance for curricular activities such as brainstorming and lecture summaries. Moreover, podcasts can serve as tools to improve problem solving skills. To exemplify, teachers may provide their students with recordings of different problems via podcasts prior to a lecture and then discuss the problems with learners. On the other hand, it is not necessary to create your own podcasts. In fact, you can incorporate podcasts made by other people into your course of teaching. Apple iTunes now features a section of their store called iTunes U which features free audio & video downloads from dozens of universities across the United States and around the world including Stanford, Duke, MIT, Arizona State, and more. Bilkent University is also involved into the project by allocating budget and staff for capturing courses from various faculties.

2. iTunes University

The advancements in lecture capture technology provided educational stakeholders with simple, substitutional recordings of class teaching (Ramaswami, 2009). Besides, open content, allowing for free way of obtaining higher education, has been used to develop alternative channels towards higher education by focusing on collective knowledge and the sharing and reuse of learning content. There has been multiple projects and organizations that promote learning through open content and some universities are making their courses freely available on the internet via iTunes University. To exemplify, Duke University initiated to deliver iPods to its intake and to populate the devices with course material and timetables. iTunes University, a website with downloadable educational podcasts, can provide students the opportunity to obtain professors' lectures when students are unable to attend class (McKinney, Dick, & Luber, 2008). As one of the most widely-accessible platforms available that can be used to supplement traditional learning material with more modern alternatives iTunes University receives digitally recorded course contents and videos from many leading universities throughout the world. It is becoming one of the most popular online educational catalogs, covering over 800 universities with over 350.000 audio and video files from educational institutions around the world. According to Apple, there have been over 700 million downloads to date of iTunes University. Created in 2007, iTunes U is advertised by Apple as a service that can be used to design and distribute courses that go beyond traditional print media. Designed to appeal to educators, the platform can be used to create interactive learning material for students at university, college or K-12 level (Osborne, 2012).

A video lecture involves recorded lectures and demonstrations which can be used to support an asynchronous learning method giving students a better ability to learn independently of time and place (Viksila, 2011). Recorded video lectures gives learners more control for their own time scheduling. The idea of educational podcasts that are easily accessible takes mobile learning, or m-learning, to the next generation (McKinney et al. 2009). Apple points out that the pros of iTunes University include that it is easily accessible 24 h per day, students can listen to the podcasts whenever and wherever they choose,

and it helps to keep the students motivated because it engages them in a way that is very familiar to them. Although these potentials seem to make educational podcasts appealing to students. The addition of iTunes University as a resource for students in the classroom is interesting because it gives students a chance to listen to a lecture for the first time or listen to a lecture that they attended in person additional times after the class session is over.

One proposed purpose of having iTunes University available to students is for them to use it as an alternative to getting notes from a friend if they miss a lecture. The student can download the exact lecture that was given by their instructor for the day they missed. In many cases, at larger universities, the podcasts even include video as well as audio. So rather than relying on notes that were taken by others of a lecture they missed, it is possible for the student to take their own notes of the lecture based on the audio (and possibly video) of the in-class lecture. What is unknown is what the students do with the lecture content they are given under these truly mobile and flexible conditions, and how these actions influence their educational outcomes. By replacing the paper with digitally stored resources, iTunes U initiates a new period in accessing to learning materials. Various types of learning materials are provided through iTunes U application in pdf files which is decided as the common format for all lecture notes in the database. The applicaiton also allws the lecturers and students to add their own content or mark the content uploaded. Since the content is provided by accredited people, the copyright is owned by the universities and is shared freely in the current time.

Some educational establishments use iTunes U purely for promotional video and public content, whereas others avoid it all together; citing the needs of training and a lengthy process of transitional which is not viable. iTunes U is one of the most widely-accessible platforms available that can be used to supplement traditional learning material with more modern alternatives. iTunes U can make the learning experience from K-12 to university more relevant, modern and engaging and appeal to a wider range of learning styles, encompassing visual, audio and kinetic aspects. Students can annotate and contribute on digital content together to improve the overall quality of material available for future studies, and teachers can make the transition from recycling PowerPoint projections and paper quizzes to interactive coursebooks. The iTunes U platform can be quickly accessed from a number of mobile devices — including the iPad, iPod Touch and iPhone. As long as the user possesses an Apple device, then the limits of being connected to a school's intranet or the need to rely on campus-based machines to access material is removed. Course providers who are using iTunes U tend to focus on promoting their material, and therefore extend their following to a wider audience and are able to gain additional subscribers. These types of organisations currently appear to be more active in utilizing the service than schools, colleges or universities. As some of the most innovative uses of iTunes University; Duke University Libraries showed AdViews, a collection of 16mm movie film which had been digitized and which included thousands of TV commercials from the 1950′s through to the 1980′s. At Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich over 10,000 PDFs are available as LMU has chosen to provide all dissertations stored in its library back to 2002 as downloads.

Although the application is free, the courses can only be accessed on an iPad, iPhone or iPod touch, and these Apple products may not be unaffordable for college students with limited financial resources, or parents of children in average high schools. Once an academic institution has spent the time and money required to train its staff in using a platform, the switch to another not only means changing learning methods, material and infrastructure, but retraining staff. This takes both time and money to achieve; something that can be difficult in the current economic climate. It may be the case that universities, colleges and schools choose not to transfer to an external provider in order to retain control over the content available to their students; including what material is available to paying students and what is available publicly. Some schools are concerned that by making material available on Apple's platform,

copyright and student privacy issues may blossom — an element of online learning not generally applicable to others on offer including Blackboard and Moodle. The crux of the matter is time, investment and whether or not to open up educational resources. By opting to create a presence within iTunes U, it can generate long-term income for a school, but often making the decision to begin the move costs time and money in training staff. Many schools find transitioning to new platforms a challenge, due to a lack of technical knowledge, training and budgetary constraints. Although Apple's mobile devices maintain a large share of the consumer market, once an academic institution makes the decision to move to a platform that requires such a device, there are repercussions for both students and the organisation itself. Perhaps if Apple introduces more extensive large-scale academic pricing agreements with schools for this hardware, then it will increase the rate of institutions adopting the practice, shifting platforms and taking advantage of services such as iTunes U. Course providers can use iTunes U in order to secure an additional, paying subscriber base by offering free courses. Once an individual begins using the service, it is more likely that they would consider going further and paying for their next course if they are pleased with the free options. However, there are bunch of institutions who have developed free learning material in order to promote their courses. An avenue the universities could pursue in order to establish a long-term gain is investing the time and training required to use these platforms. Because the iTunes software is a proprietary browser it does not afford discoverability to search engines. Apple fully accept that this has been an issue and have recently been including iTunes U in their iTunes Preview service. Audio materials can be accessed directly in the page though it is still necessary to link out to iTunes to play video at present (Osborne, 2012).

3. Conclusion

Teaching and learning through widely published video lectures is a novel phenomenon in higher education institutions (Viksila, 2011). Educational institutions are encpuraged to use iTunes U for both supporting the larger learning community and displaying their lecturers' and learners' performnaces. Hopefully, as iTunes U expands, primary level teachers will start recording/videotaping their courses/lectures/lessons and publish them through their communities. By this chance, the prestige that universities have tapped into by being able to publish their coursework on iTunes U will be promised to primary level institutions. Another noteworthy step is that Apple announced "iTunes U" and their program for digital textbooks that can be delivered exclusively through iBooks and modified by teachers (Gaskin, 2012). It's also acknowledged that many of the iTunes U professionals are having backgrounds in education rather than software engineering (Speller, 2010).

However it should be noted that evidence that students perform better at exams after having listened to podcasts is inconclusive, and most likely the positive effects claimed should be attributed to the uses made of the technology rather than the technology per se (Heilesen, 2010). Correspondingly, McKinney, Dick, and Luber(2009) posits that the results of the research in favour of podcasting are in no way an indication that audio copies of lectures could or should replace actual professors, or even regular class attendance. It is unclear how quickly other schools are moving to take advantage of the application, which still has to gain wider acceptance by the academic community. It may be a 'revolutionary' platform, however it faces opposition from a number of sources; including traditional lesson advocats, in-use management systems and educational establishments already under pressure through financial constraints and increasing class sizes.

Dissemination of knowledge is viewed as a critical remit of a university and iTunes U provides an incredible platform to accomplish this goal and reach stakeholders that could not be possible previously. The launch of iTunes U site in 2008 made Open University very successful in terms of content downloads, and if universities demands to share the content that demonstrates their expertise in a

particular subject area, there is a distribution ecosystem in place (iTunes U) that can reach a global audience over a sustained period (Speller, 2010). However, there will definitely be many questions consider before publishing to iTunes U: what makes material ready for iTunes U?, will there be a review process?, what kind of consent is needed to publish?, how will courses be managed/ updated?, and who owns the copyright of the content? By the help of video lectures the educator can possess a wide range of possible expert introductions and presentations available to use in a lecture. As pointed out by Viksila (2011), video lecturing seems to be a valuable tool to attain efficient distance learning. Thus, the actual benefits of using and publishing video lectures to students should be inquired in further research with versatile purposes.

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