Examining student ICT ownership, use and preferences towards electronically delivered learning resources in Nakhon Phanom University and Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University

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The objectives of this research were 1) to find students’ ownership of technology devices, ownership, software facility, and preferences, 2) to find out what devices instructors use in the classroom, 3) to find out how the students use the online learning that the university provided for them, and 4) to examine students’ software skills. The questionnaire and the interview instruments were designed to clarify participants’ attitudes, and used a Likert scale. Surveys and qualitative research design were developed using Qualtrics software, which is an online research survey tool that can be used for a whole range of data gathering purposes applicable to Higher Degree Research.
The samples are the students in both universities (Nakhon Phanom University and Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University), a total of 977 people. A statistical computer program was employed. The entire reliability value was 0.852 and the discrimination index was between 0.28 and 0.76.

The results disclose as follows: 1) Most of the students owned laptop (78%), followed by the smart phone (60%). The two university students owned devices up to 3 years, showed that students purchase new equipment all the time. Many students claimed that they used such devices in class (more than 60%). As well as smart phones, students used them every day and more than 2-3 times (50%). 2) The teachers used desktop computers, laptops and projectors in classrooms most frequently (> 75%). 3) Only 20% of the students accessed communication channels provided by the universities, such as eLearning system, compared to other channels, such as Facebook. And 4) the students’ software skills required for studying are only at intermediate level, whereas their social media skills were advanced. As a result, it could be seen that most of the students lacked basic knowledge in using information technology for study purposes. Therefore, the university should have ongoing monitoring and measurement in respect of information technology competency as those technologies could constantly provide students with enthusiasm and give opportunity to improve themselves which is a good basis for future work and education.

Keywords: E-Learning / ICT Technology / Online Learning
Although most online units provide student access to chat and discuss through forum facilities to encourage ongoing interaction, finding time to participate and lacking immediacy are barriers, as supported by the respondents above. Discussion forums can be an effective tool to promote student interaction by providing for shared information or exploring problem-based scenarios (Gulatee & Nilsook, 2015), since they provide a permanent record of the discussion that students can review at a later date. Discussion forums allow students to revise, review and reflect using the permanent record to refine their understandings. However, if students and instructors do not use an active participation in the discussion forums regularly, the benefits of this type of communication channel will remain less utilized. In addition, (Gulatee & Pongthanoo, 2015) indicated that even though the staff within a school utilizes a range of communication technologies such as discussion forums or bulletin boards, email, chat, blogs and wikis to encourage student discussion and information sharing, peer-to-peer communication and interaction is an issue in the online environment. More recent research in the US has revealed that one out of every four teenagers goes online using their mobile phones (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser. 2013). The research also reported that 78 percent of the teens now have a mobile phone, and almost half (47 percent) of them own smartphones. This can be seen that young people tended to use handheld devices for both study and non-study support. The situation in some Asian countries is similar. The researcher and the experiences of practitioners have highlighted the technological education environment in improving the abilities of societies to cope with changes. Similarly, the uptake of technologies at Thai higher education level has become an essential tool of students’ learning both inside and outside the classroom (Pagram & Cooper, 2012). Therefore, a variety of technologies can be seen at the instructional levels, including digital camera, laptops, and interactive whiteboards (Cassidy et al. 2011). The advanced use of the software tools in the extent of producing better quality resources and use in the classroom has been studied and resulted in positive outcomes. Taking the above into account, the researchers saw the importance of investigating how students utilized and responded to online materials that were delivered to them through their courses. Also of interest were the technologies owned by the students and the modes and places of internet access.

Objectives

1. To explore students’ ownership of technology devices, ownership, software facility, and preferences.
2. To examine the types of device that instructors use in the classroom.
3. To explore how students use the online learning systems provided for them by the university.
4. To examine at what degree students rate their own software skills.

Research Methodology

Population and Participants

Population in this study was students enrolled across all fields from both universities. The total number of students was 382 from SNRU and 595 from NPU by using accidental sampling technique. Of the samples of 977 students from both universities, 574 were female and 403 were male. NPU students comprised 58 percent female students and 42 percent male students, and SNRU students comprised 60 percent female students, and 40 percent male students. In terms of the study field of the sampled students, the number of students are mostly even across the field level. Approximately 80 percent of participating samples from both universities were between 19 and 22 years of age.

Research Instruments

To address the above research questions a survey was developed using Qualtrics software, which is an online research survey tool that can be used for a whole range of data gathering purpose applicable to HDR research. In addition, in the light of the technology focus...
of the study, the administration of the student survey being conducted online via the internet was appropriate. Moreover, the size of the participating students was also required for more efficient means of data collection. Students of both universities were informed of the survey via a link placed on NPU and SNRU websites. It is acknowledged that this method of recruiting students for the survey skewed the samples towards the more ICT proficient students. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the samples represented the middle to the upper end of students in terms of ICT ability. There were 15 questions that were grouped according to the following categories: Demographics, Digital lifestyle: your skills, ownership and access, file formats, Learning Management System (Moodle).

Data Collection

The survey was conducted by using a constructed closed-ended questionnaire. The survey in Thai language and data entry were via drop down menus and radio buttons to ensure an uncluttered layout and accurate data entry. Finally, a progress bar indicated how far participants were through the survey to encourage them to continue through to the end. Further a prepaid card was offered as a prize to a random student that completed the survey. It was anticipated that the answers to these questions would be useful to administrators, course coordinators, and lecturers in tailoring resources to student preferences and thus deliver greater student engagement and satisfaction.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using quantitative research method through a statistical computer program by displaying the number (N), the sum (∑X), the percentage (%), and the average (X̄) of the data presented.

Result and Discussion

The students’ ownership of devices was examined. The items comprised students’ ownership of personal desktop computer, Laptop, Windows Tablet, iPad, Android tablet, Scanner, Printer, Digital camera, and Smartphone. Results in Figure 1 for ownership of devices are very similar across both universities. Figure 1 indicates that more than 70 percent of participating students from both universities owned Laptops, while approximately 60 percent owned Smartphones. Overall, most of the students owned Laptops, followed by Smartphones. Numbers of students owning desktop Computers, Printers, and Android devices, Digital Cameras, iPads, Scanners, and Window Tablets were considerably lower. This seems to indicate a significant move toward mobile technologies in terms of current ownership and purchasing patterns. It can safely be assumed that the student population of the future will be armed with laptops and 3G handheld mobile devices. It also can be seen that the Laptop and handheld mobile devices have become affordable and provide students access to resources, people, and community (Companies and Markets.com. 2015). In other words, many students possess or have access to a device that can be used as a learning tool.
As an additional indication of ownership, the students were asked to rate the year length of technologies devices’ ownership. The SNRU students tended to own Desktop and Scanner for longer periods, compared to NPU students. On the other hand, NPU students were likely to own digital cameras more than SNRU students. Modern technologies such as Smartphones, IPads and Window Tablets also appear as being used evenly by both groups of university students.

The responses from both universities reported even numbers of Laptop and Smartphone use for study purposes on an everyday basis. On the other hand the SNRU students tended to use iPads for studying more than NPU students. There were some students from both universities indicating that they did use Android Tablets, Window Tablets and Desktops for study support. Most commonly, students reported that they used technologies on an everyday basis. Interestingly, the students from NPU tended to use printers and scanners, compared to SNRU students, indicating that some students may prefer paper-based learning strategies, or a blend of technologies.

In the study, it can be seen that using mobile devices for Thai teens provides greater advantages for both outside and inside the classroom. The integration of mobile devices into teaching practice would be appropriate, as young people are familiar using these technologies. The ongoing provision of technology application training is also needed for teachers and students to keep up with advances in technologies.

The scale NEVER was the highest number of responses from both universities for electronic whiteboard use for study purposes. Only half of the student groups from NPU use the devices for daily basis or two or three times a week. This figure suggests that the electronic whiteboard could be more fully introduced into the classroom (Gulatee & Pongthanoo. 2015).
The integration of technologies into the classroom revealed that SNRU teachers had the highest number of responses for the use of desktop computers and projectors, compared to NPU teachers who tended to use Laptops instead. The figure illustrates that SNRU is likely to provide more computer facilities in the classroom than NPU, whereas the limited provision of Desktop computers at NPU meant most teachers use individual Laptops for teaching practice. There were also fewer responses reporting the application of other technologies into practice, such as Smartboards and Tablets (Windows, IPad). The integration of other devices such as scanners, printers, digital cameras, DVD players, and Smartphones can be seen but with less consistent application.

Table 1 Student responses to “Do you use cloud computing?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>NPU</th>
<th>SNRU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Access to other platforms, such as cloud computing (Google Drive, Dropbox, SkyDrive, One Drive or other Cloud based solutions), was also examined. Over 50 percent of the students from both universities said they used cloud computing storage. Approximately 21 percent of students from both universities did not use or did not know what the program was or how to use it. In the study, Thai students were not familiar with the modern technology changes. Therefore the needs of developing their current skills and abilities in using the devices could be an appropriate intervention.

Participating students from both universities perceived themselves as having high skills in social networking such as Facebook. As found from the research by Gulatee & Pongthanoo (2015), more than 90% of the students at NPU University preferred to communicate with their lecturers and friends in their class via Facebook rather than the LMS system. As mentioned in Morgan & Tilley (2013) “Management system must be turned into a more social experience, delivering not just prescribed courses but also a self-driven learning experience with free and open”. This can be interpreted to show that LMS has not been fully introduced into both universities. The
participating students reported high confidence in the use of word processing. The use of word processing suggests that the students were using computers for text-based content. The figure also could be interpreted to show that the students felt confidence in using computer for word processing and social networks. The students’ basic skills from both universities showed similar results in terms of using slideshows, internet browsing, digital photography, image editing, and email. The course management software (Blackboard & Moodle) was also unfamiliar to use. The responses on the remaining items spreadsheets and file management were perceived as the lowest skills. In the study, since the students accessed the internet through their own handheld devices and Laptop, the students were able to practice and develop better technology skills at home. Consequently, the integration of these technologies into the classroom setting would be appropriate for modern classrooms as a useful adjunct to support their academic goals.

Figure 8  Percentage of students that use applications at least 2-3 times a week

Note: SS=Spreadsheet, VE=Video Editing, LMS=Learning Management System, DP=Digital Photography, IE=Image Editing, CC=Cloud Computing, EM=Email, SL=Slideshows, IN=Internet Browsing, WP=Word processing, SN=Social networking.

The questionnaire as to how often students use these technologies (Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Microsoft Excel, searching engine, digital photography, image editing, VDO management, Social network (Facebook, email), online system, and cloud computing) for study support is explored. Social network is the most popular device that both participating student groups preferred for study purposes. Word processing and Internet Browsing were also applied to learning in an even number. Half of NPU students use PowerPoint more than the SNRU students. Email, Google Docs and image editing were also used for study support of both participating student groups. Spreadsheets, video editing, course management software and digital photography were also used for study support but less than other items. These findings suggest further research may be fruitful in the application of social network strategies of content delivery and learning approaches, particularly in relation to combining other technologies in the social networking environment.

Table 2  Percentage of students indicating the Internet use of at least 2-3 times a week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>NPU</th>
<th>SNRU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3G</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University lab</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Wi-Fi</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet cafe</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For NPU students, there is a clear trend towards accessing the Internet on their smartphones and university Wi-Fi, followed by home, university labs and internet cafés, whereas the SNRU students’ usage also includes 3G, followed by home, university wireless, university labs, and internet cafes. The results show that students from both universities normally use the 3G network because it
is more convenient with the devices they own compared to the university provision of computer access. As well as, the 3G network and the World Wide Web connections via internet providers in Thailand are both relatively affordable and thus contribute to home internet access being widely used.

The question of the students’ software facilities and preferences was also conducted. Figure 10 shows that both participating student groups tended to save online material to devices rather than printing it out. The figure also shows that less than 50 percent of the students from both universities were likely to use the LMS system. It can be interpreted that the LMS system was not fully introduced into the universities’ facilities. However, the similar number access through university email of the sampled student groups appeared lower than 50 percent. From the table, 42 percent of the SNRU students tended to use the university email, compared to the NPU students.

Conclusions

Overall, the results indicate that for the most part students in both universities are not embracing cutting edge technologies; whereas computer ownership, including laptops and smartphone, is high. Students’ desire to use technologies such as Podcasting and video is low, preferring more traditional file formats such as .doc and .pdf which can be printed and do not require much interpretation. Students also tend to save and store documents as opposed to editing or interacting with them. Other evidence of Education students’ lack of technological savvy is illustrated by the low ownership levels of items such as G3 mobile phones, although the expense of these items may also be a factor. It is clear from the evidence that universities such as SNRU or NPU cannot assume that students have the higher order skills required to access and use materials deployed in more innovative ways such as podcasting/video, etc. While students indicated a desire to learn more about these formats, there is no place within their education course to learn these skills. This is likely to result in underused materials and student frustration in being unable to optimally access and use them. The authors believe that when new ways (technologies, file-formats) for distributing learning materials are introduced, some form of student support/training is required that is...
demonstrative of the manner in which the students can optimally utilise these new methods to enhance their learning. These findings are interesting in the context of training the next generation of teachers. The current study compounds this problem in that it shows that SNRU and NPU students exhibit a comparatively low uptake of new technologies. Some of the issues found were related to access, facilities and resources. At the higher education level, as an outcome of the investigation, Thai students have opportunities to access a great variety of modern technologies for study support. There has still been a substantial improvement in ability to give students a new way of learning for accommodating the students’ needs rather than the needs and limitation of the technology. Overall the study has shown an ongoing need to examine students’ use of ICT at SNRU and NPU and how this is related to the materials provided. Still, these variables constantly change and it is incumbent upon a university of the 21st century to monitor students’ technology ownership and use and have an adaptive approach to both technology and pedagogy.

Suggestions

1. For more information, the researchers should collect the in-depth interviews data with some students to provide more specific results.
2. The university should improve and promote the e-learning system to teachers and students, to use widely in the classroom.
3. The university should provide sufficient access to technology devices in the classroom.

References


