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Ken Masters (MA, HDE, FDE, ACHEM) is Senior Lecturer in IT Education in the Education Development Unit, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town, South Africa. His overall task is the integration of IT into the main curriculum. While the focus is on the use of Learning Management Systems, mLearning is becoming increasingly necessary in the Health Sciences. The challenge will be 1st-world deliverables in a 3rd-world environment.



First Steps in Implementing Low-Key mLearning in Developing Countries

Background:

An earlier paper described a model for piloting low-key mLearning in developing countries. This poster describes the project whose primary objective was to implement the model as a pilot to introducing mLearning. The secondary objective was to provide commentary on the validity of the model.

Methods:

The Pilot was implemented in the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town, South Africa. It involved the use of SMS broadcasting to meet logistic needs of highly mobile 2nd and 3rd year medical students. Statistics of messages were recorded, and an anonymous student survey conducted.

Results:

In spite of communication difficulties between staff and the SMS distribution point, the pilot was successfully implemented over a 6-month period and 43 sets of messages were sent. 54% (104) of the participating students responded to the survey. 92% agreed or strongly agreed that the service was useful. The most valuable messages concerned time-table changes & cancellation of lectures (38%), and the availability of the Learning Management System (LMS) (38%). Assignment reminders were requested by 17%. The least valuable were "none" (52%) and the availability of the LMS (29%). 70% of students forwarded information to other students, but almost never via SMS.

Discussion and Conclusions:

The pilot highlighted issues of staff communication, scalability, extra student needs, and behaviour of students upon receiving messages. Based on the feedback from the students, processes were adjusted, and the pilot's success led to a six-month extension and further evaluation. The pilot has been conducted successfully, and the model works.