

Innovative mLearning to Support Rural Low-Tech Learners in Africa: the Case of Using SMS's to Support Distance Learner-Teachers throughout South Africa

Most of our students are from remote rural areas in South Africa where there is very little infrastructure for access. The student profile of the Unit for Distance Education at the University of Pretoria's approximately nine and a half thousand students is that they generally do not have access to computers, the Internet or any other hard technology. 9% have PC's, less than 1% of them have access to email, whereas 98% of them have entry level mobile phones.

The Unit for Distance Education at the University of Pretoria started using SMS for basic administrative support during 2002 in three existing teacher training programmes for in-service teachers, of the Unit for Distance Education. SMS messages of 160 characters are sent, to each of our learner's own cell phones. Without a huge capital outlay, we have now begun to attempt to build on the successes achieved by these administrative SMS through using our student's existing entry level mobile phones for further learning interventions in their learning programme.

We are presently piloting a project (for the second time) in one of our modules in the ACE SNE programme, LPO 402, where we plan four specific asynchronous academic interventions during the six-month cycle of this module from April 2005-Oct 2005. These include all deal with important aspects of the academic content of the programme. They include: carefully designed instructive messages, students selected model answers delivered through IVR and didactically crafted interactive SMS quizzes.

Jeanne-Marie Viljoen, University of Pretoria, Unit for Distance Education, South Africa

Jeanne-Marie Viljoen's skills lie in English language and instructional design of paper-based learning materials, training of trainers (OBE learning materials and curriculum writers) and project co-ordination and management of materials development projects. She is qualified in the former and have a thorough and sound knowledge of the latter through her working experience.



Jeanne-Marie has been doing instructional design, training of trainers and project co-ordination and management for seven years. During this time, she has worked closely with experts in the field at curriculum studies and educational policy units at universities in South Africa. She is well versed in OBE and in its historical development, learning theories and didactics.

She is currently employed as an instructional designer with the distance education unit at the University of Pretoria. Here, she is in charge of managing and developing the paper based learning materials development processes for their learning programmes. She also does the quality control of their English language editing task, that are outsourced to consulting editors.

Over the last eighteen months, Jeanne-Marie has developed a fervent interest in mLearning and in particular what can be done with mobile phones and text messaging. She has been in charge of projects and have presented papers on what can be done through text messaging to enhance learning support of distance rural learners.

Jeanne-Marie is currently busy with an MA in Philosophy, which concerns what can be done with writing and she has an enduring passion for literature and philosophy.