



Mobile phones as learning devices: opportunity and challenges for digital content for students on the move

Dr Buhle Mbambo-Thata

Executive Director

UNISA Library

Pretoria

Summary of presentation

- Trends in development
- Opportunities for usage in education
- Prevailing usage in learning
- Challenges
- Survey of applications in African universities
- UNISA library limited implementation
- Conclusion

Trends in growth

- Growth exceeds fixed lines by 60 % (ITU 2006)
- Prevalence among young people
- Mobile kiosks
- Contributors to growth
 - By pass of fixed line limitations
 - Deregulation of telecoms
 - Affordability

Opportunity and possibility of usage in higher education

- *Just-in-time communication*
- *Appropriate Content*
- *Social space and educational space*
- *Students are technology able*
- *Reaching remote students*

Prevailing usage of mobile phones in learning

- United States
 - Balas (2006);Lever and Katz (2007)
- United kingdom
 - Walton et al (2005)
- South Africa
 - Ford and Batchelor (2006);Viljeon et al (2005)
- Nigeria
 - Adomi(2006)

Challenges

- ***Library Etiquette***
- ***Financial prohibitions***
- ***Network Coverage***
- ***Lack of knowledge***
- ***Size of screen***
- ***Limited memory***

Report of African Survey

- Survey objective: extent to which MP are used to support learning
- 40 University libraries surveyed
- 11 responded
 - 7 do not use mobile to deliver service
 - 3 do
 - 1 planning

Advantages of using service

- Ease of access to students
- Efficient way of reaching mobile student
- Flexibility
- Convenient for learners
- Quick reliable communication
- Improved circulation of books

Disadvantage of M-Phones

- Expensive to institution
- Expensive, not affordable by some students
- Unreliable network coverage

Application at Unisa

- ***The SMS service widely used to communicate with students***
- ***Library service***
 - ***Sms as a second layer communication to email***
 - ***Web based service***
 - ***Purchased software to configure webpage to mobile***
 - ***E-journals***
 - ***OPAC***
- ***Evaluation***
 - ***Implementation in 2008***
 - ***Roll out and evaluation in 2009***

Can it be done?

- Technology is available in both proprietary and open sources
- Is it necessary?
 - Access and support of students in distance learning is critical
- Is it affordable?
 - Private - public sector partnerships
 - Creative solutions that support learners

Conclusion

- ODL assists learners wherever they are
- Mechanism of working with what they have should be pursued
- Technology itself a tool not determinant
- Opportunity to deliver digital learning content just in time
- What informs process is philosophy, in our case social mandate

- Thank you for your attention.

– mbambtb@unisa.ac.za

