

iPods in classroom can boost academic time and resources for English language learners

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(Phys.org)—Providing English language learners (ELLs) with iPod Touches, or similar handheld devices, can increase learning time and motivation, according to a study from The University of Texas at Austin's College of Education.

To find out how ELL students and teachers would use iPods and how they would feel about using the devices for educational purposes, Min Liu, a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, examined elementary, middle and high school classes in a Central Texas school district. She found the devices might be useful tools in closing the achievement [gap](#) between ELLs and their English-speaking [peers](#). Qualitative and quantitative data gathered during the 2010-12 school years revealed that students enjoyed [educational benefits](#) from the devices' mobility, flexibility, connectivity and multimedia capabilities.

"The majority of ELL students in Texas are Spanish-speaking, and many are from economically disadvantaged families," said Liu. "[Mobile devices](#) like iPod Touches offer them an academic advantage in that they have 24/7 access to learning resources on the Internet. This can help them do their homework anywhere, anytime. What we wanted to find out is whether they would use the devices for that purpose when they had the choice to do so."

Liu's study revealed that the ELL students used the iPod Touches to extend their learning opportunities well beyond the classroom and that they also reaped what Liu referred to as a "sociocultural capital" benefit.

"Sociocultural capital" refers to the iPod being a resource that helps ELL students feel more like the English-speaking students and isn't something that sets them apart in a negative or stigmatizing way.

In Texas, ELL students begin to be integrated into regular classrooms in middle school. Using [handheld devices](#) for mobile learning could help make the transition more successful, Liu said.

For the study, Liu gathered data on students in a district that is spread over a large geographic area, where it was a challenge for students without transportation to avail themselves of after-hours learning resources at the schools.

A common assumption about students who are given mobile devices for educational purposes is that instead of using them for classwork, they focus on accessing recreational content, but Liu found that students primarily employed the devices for school-related work. Data indicated that they frequently used resources such as online translators, calculators and maps, and media creation tools such as voice recorders, still cameras and video cameras to complete homework assignments.

"The positive outcomes for the students were that they had a home-to-school connection, could engage in language learning away from school, could accomplish more content learning, were able to extend the amount of time they were able to do schoolwork and they had multimodal support," said Liu.

When surveyed, students and parents had positive responses to the iPod initiative.

"The parents and students loved the iPods," said Liu, "and the teachers were enthusiastic about helping the students use any new resource that could increase academic success. For the teachers, though, there were

some challenges to overcome."

Liu discovered that teachers needed significant training time to learn how to integrate the mobile devices smoothly into teaching. To be effective in the classroom, the teachers needed assistance in finding the appropriate iPod applications, monitoring [students'](#) use of the devices, solving iPod connectivity issues and dealing with lost devices.

"We're only beginning to look at how best to use mobile devices with English-language learners," said Liu. "For something like this to succeed, teachers and school districts must be willing and able to make a major time commitment to training. Also, you have to deal with the issue of rapid obsolescence when it comes to technology, and, as we saw in our study, the devices often are lost or broken. All of this equals financial demands on a school district. If a district adopted an initiative like this, we'd want it to be sustainable. That requires further investigation."

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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