iPads in the Classroom

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Ⅰ. Introduction

Why Apple, Inc.'s iPad? It is my personal opinion that this newly released tablet-style PC, sometimes described as a giant iPhone, will make a significant impact in how teachers teach, and how students learn. Apple's marketing strategists, engineers, and product developers are no strangers in education. They have made a classroom presence in the past with the Macintosh computer, iPods, and more recently, with iPhones. And with almost 40 billion dollars in cash, a trendsetting design team, and strong brand image, Apple is in a position to do so again with the iPad. For the record, this paper is in no way supported, endorsed, or affiliated with Apple, Inc. This paper was initiated solely by the author, and its purpose is to simply start a discussion on how the iPad can be used as learning tool and management device, and more specifically in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings.

The flow of this paper will first discuss the potential use of Apple's iPad tablet in a general education setting. The focus will then shift to specifically how iPads can be incorporated in EFL. It should be noted that as of this writing, the iPad has only been commercially available for a mere seven months (released in April 2010); consequently, not much actual research has been published on its use in educational settings or, more specifically, its use in large-scale, institutional second language learning settings. However, in addition to the pre and post-launch media attention the iPad has received, there have already been reports of this device being adopted by several reputable universities in the United States for the 2010 academic year. In Japan, several universities have also followed suit by providing incoming first year students with iPads. Once the iPad has been fully released worldwide, it will be no surprise to hear similar news in other countries.

Ⅱ. iPad-Enhanced

The iPad, like most tablet PCs, is essentially a down-sized computer 10-inches in size with a width the size of a magazine. Instead of using a mouse to navigate, some tablet PCs use either a stylus or pen-like device, and some have touchscreen panels where the users use their fingers to interact with the graphical user interface (GUI). Currently, there are several, noteworthy contenders in the tablet PC market (Hewlett-Packard's Slate; Samsung's Galaxy), but it is generally acknowledged among tech writers and analysts that Apple's iPad stands out as the leader in the tablet PC market. Moreover, as mentioned above the iPad is being adopted by schools in the US and in Japan. Such high-profile moves on the part of these early-adopting universities can be seen as either a marketing strategy to enhance the image of the institution and / or as an advance in educational policies and practices. This point is debatable; however, let's be pragmatic — offering iPads to incoming students is a high-profile marketing strategy. Offering students free pencils and notebooks as an enrollment incentive will probably generate yawns and jokes among to prospective students rather than positive comments (del Rosario, 2011). This issue of marketing and educational policy for discussion will not be discussed any further. Instead, the core of this paper will provide an overview of how iPads in particular can be used as an educational tool.

Ⅲ. Pre-iPad and The "Old New School"

Before the iPad and the current type of PC tablets, e-reading or reading from digitized text, was done mainly on desktop and laptop computers or "e" devices that resembled over-sized pocket calculators with a touch pen of some sort. As recent as a few years ago, novels and manga were available in mobile phone format in Japan. The benefit of e-reading materials is the method of delivery. Materials were created and purchased in CD-ROM. The interactivity of text allowed readers to click on hyperlinks leading to embedded audio and visual enhancements. Text came to life and provided a rich and dynamic component for the reader / user. For a time, this "virtual reality" was a revolution in educational technology. This "new way" for instruction and learning is now a thing of the past, naturally, and looks somewhat primitive to what is possible in the "new-new school." The technical capabilities of the iPad is an embodiment of very new method of content management and delivery

Systems. "He's got the whole world in his hands" is becoming more of a reality for iPad users rather than just part of a religious song.

Ⅳ．The "New New School"

The "new new approach" of tablet-style computers is on the scene and will more than likely provide a revolutionary slant in educational technology. This new school will take advantage of the fact that the people using the tools which has the capability for browsing the Internet, e-mail, audio-visual playback, producing word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation slides. There is no mouse to navigate on the desktop; users use their fingers on the touch screen. Users can slide, swipe, pinch, tap, double-tap the graphical user interface (GUI) to move about the applications just like the iPad's smaller cousin, the iPhone. Reuters news reported that Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, Japan, provided free iPhones to 550 students in the 2009 academic year as part of their educational technology program. The iPhones were reportedly used to monitor student attendance, and provide another channel for student-teacher / student-student class interaction; especially, in large classes. Currently, there are roughly a quarter of a million of software applications (or "apps") for the iPhone and iPad. Education related apps include geography, math, language arts, and science to name a few, and this list will continue to grow.

Ⅴ．General Classroom Use

The iPad has the usual functionalities for word processing, presentations, spreadsheets, Internet, e-mail, audio and video playback. The iPad also operates as an e-Reader (iBooks, Kindle) where users can download digital versions of popular books, magazines, as well as files in PDF format. Textbooks are also quickly becoming a part of the iPads content catalogue. Publishers Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Kaplan Publishing, McGraw-Hill Education, and Pearson have all released iPad versions of college textbooks in the United States. The fall 2010 academic year will be the first time when iPads will be used on a large scale at several American universities.

Ⅵ. Specialized Applications

There are also subject-specific applications available (science, art, geography, etc.) that were developed with rich and dynamic content. Regular text is combined with graphics, audio, and video. For example, the *Pocket Body* app is an anatomy resource with detailed 3D graphic images of the human anatomy.

There are also many specialized software applications (often referred to as apps) for the iPad that really take advantage of its functionality. For instance, "AudioNotes" is a program that is a notepad with a built-in audio recorder for lectures, meetings, etc. The user can type class notes using the ipad's keyboard or write in longhand using the virtual pencil. Above the virtual notepad is a record button which records audio using the iPad's microphone. Users can save the audio for later use or share the recording via e-mail or wifi.

Goodreader is a file management program for the iPad (iPhone and iPod Touch) that reads commonly used computer files including PDF, Microsfoft Office, iWork, saved web pages, audio, video, etc, Users can store files from cloud-computing servers including iDisk and Dropbox, as well as from e-mail programs and access them from Goodreader. Users will no longer need to rely on USB memory sticks to store and transfer files. The iPad and Goodreader combination makes it one step closer to a paperless environment.

Ⅶ. iPads in EFL

There are many English language learning apps for the iPad, which makes it an ideal tool for the EFL classroom. Translators, dictionaries, idiom and phrase banks, listening applications, pronunciation helpers, etc.; the choices are enormous and the list is expected to steadily grow as the iPad becomes more and more widespread. There are, of course, applications for other foreign languages, but for the sake of this paper, I will be focusing primarily on EFL.

iPads can essentially be personal-mobile language labs. They have the capability of providing a wide-range of practice tasks for the four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. iPad applications are multimedia enhanced incorporating the latest technologies of Web 2.0, e.g. social networking services (SNS) and the like. Students and teachers are now able to collaborate, share ideas, organize and distribute information with much more ease than before. Of course, a laptop

computer can do such things as well, however, the point of the iPad is its footprint; it's small and lightweight without the need for a mouse. The user is literally connected to the GUI.

For the record, the iPad will not make students fluent in the target language overnight nor will it replace human-human interaction in the EFL experience. It was not developed for such a task, and should not be expected to do so. iPads are not the cure-all for the challenges that language teachers face today. Some teachers might expect iPads as a miracle tool, but ultimately, it's what the teachers and curriculum, among other things, can offer. Just like any other gadget, the iPad can simply assist in the delivery of materials and potentially create additional channels of communication and interaction among teachers and students.

Skeptics might point out that iPads and ／ or other digital devices in the classroom will distract students from staying on course assignments. Yes. This is obviously true just as students in the past used to (and probably still do) doodle on desks, throw crumbled papers at fellow classmates, or simply sleep during class.

There are two ways to reduce distractions from iPads: 1) put students in bare, WIFI-proof room; 2) provide students with projects that they will increase their motivation, engage the students with topics that are meaningful to their immediate life. We see the latter happen so often. Whenever people are "into" an activity, it's difficult to pry them away from it. "Distractors" are normal. Classroom management and student motivation ／ participation are perennial issues in education and should be addressed, however, this topic is beyond the scope of this paper and will not be discussed any further.

Ⅷ．Discussion

Are iPads necessary for learning? Absolutely not. Civilizations have evolved and flourished without digital technologies; a quick look back into history will easily illustrate this point, e.g. The Seven Wonders of the World, music, art, science, philosophy to name a few. Humans have discovered, invented, and created wonderful things without the use of computers or iPads. When one considers the magnificence of such things as the pyramids in Egypt or the impact Galileo had on astronomy and how we view the world, it is without a doubt safe to proclaim that societies and people can function without the Internet or iPads. However, we must not forget that it was with technology, however crude, that paved the way for such

development.

Is it necessary to use an airplane to travel between Tokyo and San Francisco or any other destination for that matter? Of course not. However, without such technology it will probably take some time to get from one side of the Pacific to the other. When we consider impact of digital technologies and the effect it has on collecting, organizing, and synthesizing new information, one can not help but think of the following quote:

"On an average weekday the New York Times contains more information than any contemporary of Shakespeare's would have acquired in a lifetime."

– Anonymous

What more can be said about the Internet and its enormous role in how new ideas are generated?

We have been living in a paper-based environment where every year school administrators and teachers type, print to hardcopy, then photocopy tons of memos, guidelines, agendas, syllabi, reading packets, etc. This process works, but undoubtedly is more time consuming and labor intensive than if the information were sent directly from the author to the receiver's inbox or screen. The use of technology is simply meant to make the process of communication and information gathering, organization, and distribution easier. At this point in the evolution of technology in education, the iPad seems to be a viable solution for schools. Computer labs, language labs, audio-visual centers all rolled up into a small device with an interface that's easy enough for a toddler to operate

Do students learn better with iPads? Yes and no. Do students learn better with books and typewriters? Again, yes and no. As with any tool, it's what students and teachers make of these tools. Add to the equation factors such as student motivation, curricula, instructional styles, financial and digital divide issues and we arrive to a very complex problem. Instances of "success and failure" in education can generally be assessed by looking at the world today. This paper does not argue that iPads are better than books or vice versa, or that technology will put teachers out of jobs. This paper simply explores the functions of the iPad and its feasibility of use in a school setting.

IX. Conclusion

There once was a time when "iPods in education" was the buzz phrase in

educational technology circles. So were terms such as *the Internet*, *personal computers*, and even *cassette tape recorders*. iPods don't make headline news anymore （unless a new type is released）, and its integration into the classroom seems to be a mere echo these days. Personal computers in the classroom also are no longer a topic for research and discussion because they are so ubiquitous that they are a given in our daily lives － just like refrigerators or clocks.

According to pencils.com, the modern pencil traces its roots to ancient Rome. We still use pencils today. Likewise, personal computers have proven their value and contribution to education, so they have essentially become "future proof," i.e., computers will not become outdated anytime soon and we will probably continue to see them in educational settings for a very long time.

Is the iPad the successor to desktop and laptop computers or will they soon be replaced by a new super gadget? I personally believe that it will be around because of the appeal that it still has. iPad 2 is rumored to be released in April 2011, and this is already creating chatter on news reports.

The One Laptop Per Child （OLPC） program spearheaded by Nicholas Negroponte and the MIT Media Lab aims provide children in developing countries with the XO-1, a low-cost laptop computer. It was announced that the XO-1 will be replaced in 2012 by the XO-3, a tablet-style PC. Why the jump from *one* to *three* in the model numbers? The answer is because the XO-2 was a laptop style design, and tablet PCs are seen to be a more viable solutions for ease and use. This is perhaps yet another indicator of how tablet-style PCs like the iPad are setting standards in education.

As of this writing, Apple recently released the MacBook Air; a thin laptop computer weighing only 1.06 kg. According to Elmer-DeWitt, 2010, the MacBook Air is showing strong sales, and is also cannibalizing Apple's iPad sales. Could this mean a quick and sudden shift in the life expectancy of the iPad? I doubt it. Although the iPad and the MacBook Air are in a different device category, the pace of new product development illustrates the rapid change and fluctuation of technology, and will have a ripple effect on education as well. Whether or not iPads will be adopted in educational settings in the next two years remains to be seen. Moreover, what impact it has on EFL is another issue and will be an area for future research.

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