Exploring the Use of Mobile Technologies in Schools in Oman; Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract : When students bring mobile devices into the classrooms, they are frequently viewed as distractions from their daily educational practices rather than developing the twenty-first century skills. Such skills may involve sorting and extracting information, solving problems and evaluating results. Mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, have great potential for learning. Currently, schools and universities are embracing these devices with the aim of enhancing education. In Oman, mobile technologies have been introduced in the last ten years in two private schools to keep pace with the technological advancement. The researcher set out to examine the benefits and challenges of employing mobile learning in these two schools with the aim to inform the implementation of mobile technologies in more schools in Oman. The total of 16 teachers and 237 students responded to questionnaires, and 7 teachers and three student focus groups (of 13 students) were involved in interviews to explore how mobile technologies are used in these two schools. The questionnaires indicated that 87.5% of the sample teachers considered mobile learning helpful for learning and teaching. The teachers believed that mobile learning could promote learning, help teaching, offer vast resources, motivate students and save lesson time. Moreover, interviews with the teachers showed that mobile learning could offer several benefits like immediacy, saving lesson time, supporting differentiation, opportunities to learn anywhere, showing understanding, and offering vast resources. Most of the sample were also facing technical and classroom management challenges when employing mobile technologies in their lessons. In the interviews, most teachers complained of the difficulty to control their classes when they had mobile devices, which distracted their attention and understanding. They reported that their students were distracted by games and they needed to be trained to use mobile technologies for educational purposes. Most teachers recommended that certain parameters or restrictions should be established in any mobile learning project that restrict the usage of mobile technologies to educational purposes. In addition, teachers also emphasised that students needed to be trained on the advantages and limitations of mobile technologies. Teachers were also recommending that pedagogical training for using mobile technologies should be considered when implementing mobile learning in schools. These findings reveal that although of the challenges of managing their classes, teachers believe that mobile learning has great potential for learning. These results imply that mobile learning can be effectively implemented in school in Oman if certain factors and restrictions are considered.
Keywords : effective implementation, challenges, mobile learning, opportunities
Conference Title : ICSRD 2020 : International Conference on Scientific Research and Development
Conference Location : Chicago, United States
Conference Dates : December 12-13, 2020