

Full Length Research paper

The impact of ICT on students' study habits. Case study: University of Buea, Cameroon

Tah Babila Mbah

Fon's Street, Bamenda, P. O. Box 422, Bamenda NWR, Cameroon. E-mail: prazbabs@yahoo.ca.
Tel: +237 770 662 32.

Accepted 19 September, 2010

This research aimed at investigating the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on students' study habits. The research was conducted with two main purposes; Firstly, to investigate students' familiarity and attitude towards ICTs, and secondly, to examine the possible relationship between students' use of ICTs and study habits. The results revealed that students have a positive attitude towards ICTs as such use them to facilitate learning, although male students are more favourable toward ICT usage and likely to find that ICT's help them at their studies. As such students constantly change their study habits based on the type of ICT they use to ease studies.

Key words: Teaching, learning, study habits, information and communication technology (ICT).

INTRODUCTION

The impact of ICT on learning is currently in relation to use of digital media, primarily computers and internet to facilitate teaching and learning. ICTs are the technologies used in conveying, manipulation and storage of data by electronic means, they provide an array of powerful tools that may help in transforming the present isolated teacher-centered and text-bound classrooms into rich, student-focused, interactive knowledge environments. To meet these challenges, learning institutions must embrace the new technologies and appropriate ICT tools for learning.

The direct link between ICT use and students' study habit and academic performance has been the focus of extensive literature during the last two decades. Some of them help students with their learning by improving the communication between them and the instructors (Valasidou and Bousiou, 2005).

Leuven et al. (2004) stated that there is no evidence for a relationship between increased educational use of ICT and students' performance. In fact, they find a consistently negative and marginally significant relationship between ICT use and some student achievement measures. In support to these, some students may use ICT to increase their leisure time and have less time to study. Online gaming and increased communication channels do not necessarily mean increased achievement.

On the other hand, Abdulla Y. Al-Hawaj, Wajeih Elali, and E.H. Twizell (2008), state that ICT has the potential to transform the nature of education: Where and how

learning takes place and the roles of students and teachers in the learning process.

Karim and Hassan (2006) noted the exponential growth in digital information, which changes the way students perceive study and reading and in how printed materials are used to facilitate study.

Based on the extended usage of ICTs in education the need appeared to unravel the myth that surrounds the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as an aid to teaching and learning, and the impact it has on students' study habits and academic performance. Therefore, the present paper aims to examine how familiar are the students of the department of (Curriculum Studies and Teaching) CST/Biology in the University of Buea, Cameroon with the ICT use. The research conducted also aims to reveal the possible relationship between the use of ICTs and students' study habits intended for improved academic performance (Table 1).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was based on survey research design. As such, the research was divided into two main parts: The first part included the research questions that tend to investigate students' familiarity with ICTs and how they use them to support their studies, while the second part of the research examined the possible relationship between gender and ICT use, in relation to study habits. As such the following research questions were examined:

1. Do students use ICTs to support their studies?

Table 1. Internet access off campus.

Place of internet access	Number	Percentage (%)
Home	9	11
Internet café	53	62
Mobile phones	8	9
Home and internet café	6	7
Internet café and mobile phones	9	11
Total	85	100

The results on Table 1 show that more than half (62%) of students have access to the internet off campus at internet cafés.

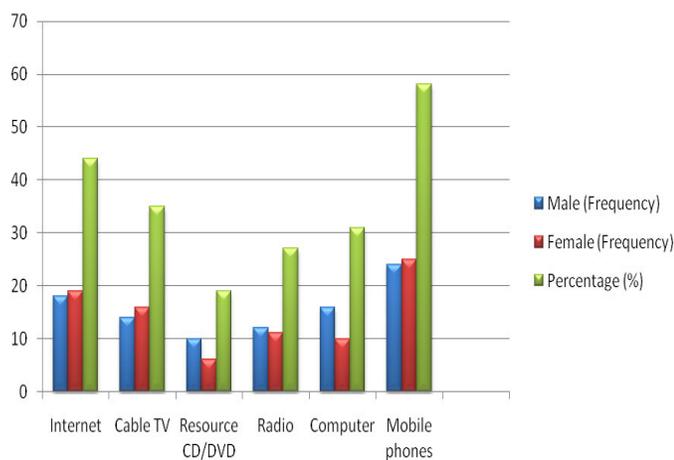


Figure 1. Histogram showing the ICT accessibility to students. This shows that university students have access to a variety of ICTs mostly mobile phones, internet and cable TV.

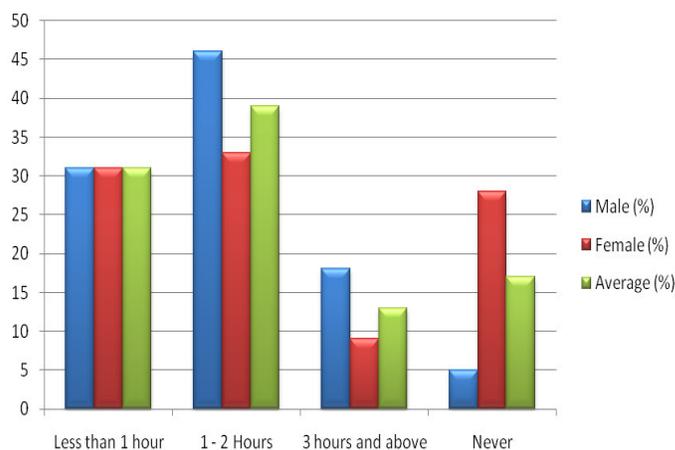


Figure 2. Histogram showing student use of computers per day. This shows that 83% of students use a computer daily to facilitate learning. 39% use it for about 1 to 2 h, while 31% use it for less than an hour, and only 13% use it for more than 3 h on a daily basis.

- 2. What are the students' attitudes towards ICTs?
- 3. Does gender impact on the use of ICTs?
- 4. Does ICT usage impact students' study habits?

The sampling technique used here was the proportionate stratified random sampling technique and consisted of 100 CST/Biology students for the 2009/2010 academic year, out of 186 students in the department of CST/Biology, faculty of education.

The direct delivery method was used to administer the questionnaires so as to have a high return rate of questionnaires.

RESULTS

According to the findings of the research, students are of the view that ICTs have a positive impact on their study habits (81%), although 90% of male students support this view with regard to 73% of female students. In addition, 83% of students say they use a computer daily to facilitate learning (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

On the basis of computer availability and internet connectivity, 44% of students have computers at home and only 20% of these computers have regular internet connections. Most students, 64% have internet access off campus, particularly at cyber Cafés (62%). It was also found out that more than half (58%) of students prefer to

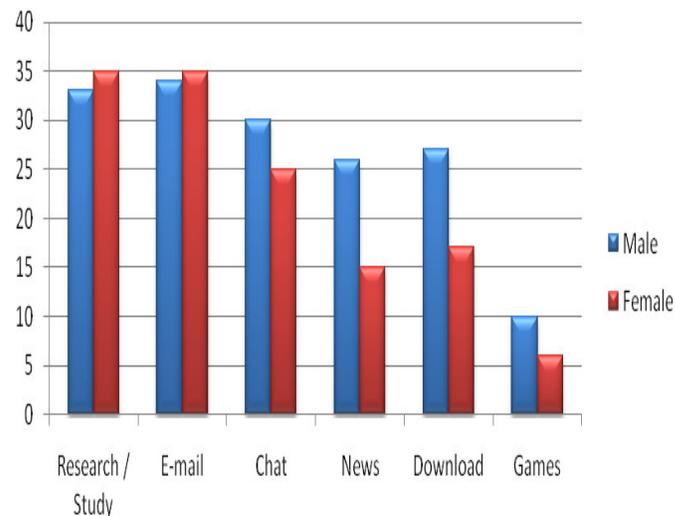


Figure 3. Histogram showing student internet browsing activities. The result shows that male students use the internet generally more than the female students, although female students would use the internet for research/study and e-mail faintly more than the male students.

browse the internet during their free periods, while 24% browse the internet during weekdays, and only a few (15%) browse during weekends. Statistics also showed that, 61% of students spend 1 to 2 h on the internet per browsing session. Almost all students 82% have e-mail accounts, but only 61% of students with e-mail accounts, like to communicate with their teachers using the e-mail.

Regarding the students' study habits, 55% prefer to seriously study during the weekdays, with most 47% studying for not more than 2 h although 36% study from 3 to 4 h. Data also revealed that most students (36%) read the subject that appeal to them at time of studying, while 34% study using reading time tables. Students prepare their own timetable, which indicates the course or subject to read at any particular time, and they read at home in their rooms (25%), and in quiet places (21%). Only 13% use the library, and 12% read anywhere.

DISCUSSION

What are the students' attitudes towards information and communication technologies?

The research findings revealed that more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the students (81%) have a positive attitude towards ICTs, although, male students (90%) are of greater support than female students (73%). This is supported by Schumacher and Morahan Martin (2001) who argued that females are less experienced with ICT's and are more likely than males to have negative attitudes towards computers.

Moreover, Shashaani (1997) examined some males and females about their interest in internet use and discovered that there was a great difference on the interest level between the two groups. Male respondents showed to be more interested in internet services and use more than female.

As such, students feel that appropriate use of ICTs would have a positive impact on their study habits, and can help them improve on their academic performance since;

- I. ICTs facilitate information access.
- II. They enhance study/reading habits.
- III. They accelerate academic success by making information easily available.
- IV. They improve managerial and professional skill.

Do students use ICTs to support their studies?

Data reveals that University students daily use ICTs to support their studies. With regards to student daily use of computers to support studies, 83% say they use the

computer daily to support their studies. As such study habits are actually improving because of the advent and wide use of the internet, hypertext, and multimedia resources (Liu, 2005).

In terms of internet access on and off campus, the research revealed that very few students (36%) prefer to have internet access on campus at the University IT center, while a vast majority of students (64%) have internet access off campus, particularly at cyber cafés (62%).

Liu (2005) and Ramirez (2003) report that students print material from the internet in order to study and read later on.

Garrison and Kanuka (2004) compared blended learning environment and traditional learning environment and observed that more effective and efficient learning occurs in blended learning environment and that the success level of students is raised. This gives students a wide range of material to get information to help them study.

Does gender impact on the use of ICTs?

Data from the research revealed that more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of students (83%) use ICTs to facilitate learning, although specifically male students (95%) use ICTs than female students (72%). As such, gender has an impact on the use of ICTs.

This is supported by Morahan Martin (1999) who found that women college students get internet access less often, spend less time online and don't surf for different purposes as often as men. Furthermore, male students prefer to study courses that require computer use more than female students and show interest in programming and games playing. They are also more experienced at the ICT's use than girls, apart from e-mails where no significant differences were reported.

Does ICT usage impact student study habits?

The research findings showed that the students use of ICTs, can positively impact their study habits.

Firstly, 83% of students use computers daily to facilitate learning. This is supported by Bataineh and Baniabdelrahman (2005) who pointed out that computers can be used as a supplement but cannot fully replace the teacher's job. Thus students use computers to download and save relevant information from the internet so as to facilitate learning.

Secondly, 80% of students go on the internet mostly to send e-mails, and research/study, so as to get information from the internet which is not available in the school library, while 65% go to the internet to chat with family and friends.

Northrup (2001) indicates that as students' level of interaction raises their level of learning increases. Thus, students can easily interact with one another using the e-mail and chat to improve on their academic performance, thereby adding the use of computers and the internet to their study habits.

Finally, 55% of students prefer study during the weekdays. On the content of studies, 36% read the subjects that appeal to them at time of studying while 34% use reading time tables. They mostly prefer to read at home (25%) while others read in quiet places (21%). With regard to study duration, 47% say they don't read for more than 2 h, while 36% read for 3 to 4 h. This is supported by Nneji (1998) who explains that reading for 2 to 4 h has been described as favourable to intrinsic organization. Timing is an important indicator for effective studies in the universities. Both period and duration of studies are of serious considerations in the student's ability to manage his or her time and cope with the volume of studies expected at this level.

Conclusion

Students of the University of Buea have a positive attitude towards the use of ICT to support studies and facilitate learning. As such, they use computers and the internet on daily basis to communicate through e-mail and chat, and also for research/studying.

ICT is considered to exploit the flexibility of training. The rhythm of study, the allocation of time and the availability of teachers can allow better articulation between private life/professional life (studies) as well as a better allocation of time between the various uses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, my special thanks go to God almighty, the giver of life. Secondly, my profound gratitude goes to my lovely parents, Mr. and Mrs. Tah for all the moral and material support throughout my life. I would always love you. I also want to appreciate Mr. Patrick Fonyuy Shey, who took his time to supervise my research project, my sisters

Louise and Daniel, my brothers Ndap, Muki, Teche, Goody, Fidelis, Fobo and Peter, who have always been there for me. "Thank you" is not enough. I will not forget my lovely friends, Eseme, Marcellous, Jude, Brunes, Vera, Rhodriques, Anu, Barika, and especially Pamela, whose love, ideas, and enormous contributions, made not only this work a success. And lastly Rev. and Mrs. Fomuso, Pastor and Mrs. Nyamnyah and to all my family. God would reward you for all you have done for me.

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