

Title: How do medical students utilize mobile handheld devices in learning?

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Introduction. The phenomenon of increased and ubiquitous use of mobile handheld devices by medical students triggered the interest to explore how these students utilize their devices while learning.

Methods. This study was conducted at the Medical College of University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates during the period February to April 2012. A total of 463 students participated in the study.

A mixed methodology was employed where an initial survey provided the necessary preliminary data and purposively sample the subjects, followed by two focus group discussions to explore this phenomenon in depth.

Results. The survey results demonstrated that vast majority (95.9%) of students possess at least one type of mobile handheld device. Most of these students (90.1%) used their handheld device while learning. Students used these devices in different contexts, varying between Lectures, Problem-Based Learning (PBL) sessions, Hospitals and other contexts were identified (32.4%, 30.1%, 20% and 13% respectively). Majority of students (83.2%) use their handhelds when learning individually on their own time, whereas about half of them (48.3%) use it in learning with friends i.e. collaboratively.

Focus group discussions revealed several aspects of how students utilized their mobile handheld devices while learning. Five themes were identified, which demonstrated the resources and accessed content, contexts of use, activities that involved learning, with whom students learned, and what made them learn or not learn while using these devices.

Conclusion. Mobile handheld devices facilitated students learning “on-the-move” on and off-campus in different ways. Students utilized their devices mostly to complement and augment their learning in different contexts. Students believed that a huge gap exists between themselves and their teachers in terms of mobile learning.