

CAFÉ: A SUPPORTIVE EDUCATIONAL ARENA

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ABSTRACT

The Internet Café is a resource for possible learning opportunities and dependable access to a global source of information. Thus, this study was conducted to assess the Internet Café of Cebu Technological University Moalboal Campus, Moalboal, Cebu as venue for an extended learning environment. A validated researcher-modified questionnaire was used to gather data from the 755 identified respondents. The students were selected randomly as samples from the different course offerings of the university. Findings disclosed that 343 or 45.43 percent of the respondents had been using the Internet for more than 4 years now. There were 439 or 58.15 percent who went to the Internet Café for twice or thrice a week and around 286 or 37.88 percent spent an average of 3 hours per day. A majority of the respondents preferred to use Face book, YouTube, Yahoo mail, and Wikipedia, for the purpose of research, then communication and to access library materials. Moreover, they perceived that using Internet is time-saving, more informative and more updated than using conventional documents. Problems had also been encountered in the use of Internet facilities of the university Internet Cafe. Among those, slow connection was rated as the major problem. However, majority of them were satisfied in the Internet Café facilities of the university. Consequently, almost all of them agreed that the Internet is a vital venue for education and learning. Hence, the Internet Café has the capacity to become an extended classroom for a variety of educational activities wherein students can benefit from.

Keywords: Academic Use of Internet; Quality of Learning; Extended Learning Environment; Digital Access; Learning Classroom

INTRODUCTION

The Internet Cafes has grown tremendously in number worldwide and users today are generally becoming, well-educated and adapted to the concept of information sharing. The use of Internet at universities now is common among students for social, entertainment and education (Furuholt, B., and Kristiansen, S. 2007).

Universities, as centers for knowledge and information, have a tremendous impact to transform Internet Cafés as active and essential venue for education and learning. In the present economy of global information, it will ultimately best serve the university's thrust and the personal goals of the students. Hence, the university Internet cafes are commissioned to transform its services in such a way to become more challenging to the ordinary, less educated people.

Many publications describe incidental educative experiences in the Internet Café, but little that examines the potential use of this valuable resource

(Lee, S. 1999; Laegran, A. S. 2003). According to Haseloff, A. M. 2005, the Internet Cafe can essentially be a valuable center for support to learning with new tools. It helps people overcome their insufficient skill to access information with new technologies. It is commonly obvious that students seek out Internet access away from home or school that it is practically affordable to visit an Internet café for the economic time saving reason and favorable access speed. This contradicts to the study conducted by Sharma *et al.*, 2006 on the trend of Internet use by medical students, where majority used internet at home than in the college. Moreover, most of the respondents still prefer being at the cyber café. Similarly, the findings of Hobbs, J., and Bristow, T (2007) show that those who have Internet access at work, home or in school also use the Internet cafes to supplement their insufficient access due to limited access in their workplace and at a much cheaper cost than at a home connection. In a similar study conducted by Tegegne and Chen, 2003, a great number of students do not own personal computers but this doesn't mean they do not use the Internet. The findings reveal that most of the students use the Internet café to accomplish their tasks.

In our study, we confirm that Internet cafes today provide main access points to the educational use of computers and the Internet for people in developing countries such as the Philippines.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Knowledge continuously grows and evolves and what is currently imperative is our capacity to learn what we need for tomorrow rather than what we already know. However, when knowledge is needed, but not known, it is our ability to plug in to vital sources in order to meet the requirements that becomes an essential skill. Hence, access to what is needed is more important than what the learner currently possesses, as the pipe is more important than its content.

This study is anchored on the theory of connectivism which uses new tools to alter the way people work and function. It presents a learning model that acknowledges a paradigm shift in society where learning is no more internal and individualistic. Connectivism provides a way into learning specific skills and tasks needed to prosper in a digital age as the field of education has been sluggish to recognize the Internet shops that cater to students who want to spend hours playing games can instead actually help students learn, Internet cafés will no longer just be havens to e-mail, play computer games and hang out, but can allow students to further their education through academic-related activities. The idea was raised in an effort to extend school services to popular computer cafés, making such shops as partners to further the reach of education. On the other hand, instead of seeing the Internet shops as notorious game arcades that lure students and promote bad study habits, schools should maximize the resources of these shops to address the quality of education. "School officials should not treat these computer shops as enemies but as potential partners in education. In this day and age, our schools should experiment more with different means of learning to promote interactive and alternative learning at a low cost. Our use of the Internet café has the characteristic feature of a constructivist learning environment. (CLE) namely, students are kept active, constructive, collaborative, intentional, contextual,

conversational and reflective (Jonassen, 1999). According to M. Dunne; M. Smith and A. Epitropova, there are now a vast number of Internet Cafes but still a constant heavy demand suggesting the use of this alternative educational setting.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey method is employed in this study utilizing a researcher-modified questionnaire used to gather data on (i) Level of Internet Use (ii) Internet Access Point (iii) Websites and Search Engines (iv) Ways to Browse Information (v) Academic Utilization (vi) Methods of Learning Internet Skills (vii) Quality of Learning Comparison of Internet and Conventional Documents (viii) Satisfaction with Internet Café Facilities (ix) Problems encountered (x) Satisfaction with Internet Facilities. The data gathered was statistically treated using the frequency and simple percentage formula. Findings based on results were interpreted and presented using descriptive statistics from which conclusions and recommendation were formulated.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows 45.43 percent of the students using the Internet in more than four years. This simply shows that by doing Internet activities prior to college years, the students have become equipped with sufficient online skills. The frequency of using Internet revealed that 58.15 percent of the respondents avail of the Internet services from two to three times a week suggesting that students regularly update their access to information more so in doing research related to their studies. Findings show that 37.88 percent of students spend from two to four hours a week on the average. This explains that most of them spend less time in using the Internet and they still devote more time doing other things. This further explains that they are not being addicted on the use of Internet though few of them or 4.24 percent usually spent over 20 hours a week doing Internet-related activities.

Table 1. Level of Internet Use.

Experience	F	%
Less than 6 months	65	8.61
6 months -1 year	44	5.83
1-2 years	144	19.07
2-4 years	159	21.06
More than 4 years	343	45.43
Any other		
TOTAL	755	100

Length of Use	F	%
Daily	132	17.48
2-3 times a week	439	58.15
2-3 times a month	153	20.26
Once in a month	31	4.11
TOTAL	755	100

Table 2. Internet Access Point.

Time Spent	F	%
Less than 1 hour a day	189	25.03
2-4 hours a day	286	37.88
5-6 hours a day	126	16.69
7-9 hours a day	66	8.74
10-20 hours a day	56	7.42
Over 20 hours a day	32	4.24
TOTAL	755	100
Place of Access	F	%
At college or work	219	29
At home	214	28.34
Internet Café	322	42.65
TOTAL	755	100

Table 2 for Internet access point of the students shows a frequency of 42.65 percent at the Internet Café. In the light of the findings, students reveal that they have no access to personal Internet connections, thus their online access available at the Internet café. Similarly, the findings of Hobbs, J., and Bristow, T (2007) show that those who have Internet access at work, home or in school also use the Internet cafes to supplement their insufficient access due to limited access in their workplace and at a much cheaper cost than at a home connection. It is commonly obvious that students seek out Internet access away from home or school that it is practically affordable to visit an Internet café for the economic time saving reason and favorable access speed.

Table 3. Websites and Search Engines.

Preferences	<i>f</i>	Rank
Blogspot	217	10
Flicker	163	11
Gmail	521	2
Google Drive	356	5
Google Maps	353	4
Google Scholar	234	8
Slideshare	272	7
Twitter	290	6
Wikipedia	501	3
WordPress	231	9
Youtube	555	1

Table 3 shows that respondents most popularly visited YouTube being ranked first with a highest frequency of 555 followed by Gmail and Wikipedia. This suggests that students are fond of viewing video-sharing tutorials related to their lessons as provided for in the website. Students' preferences in using search engines instead of e-libraries to review literature related to their project have been reported by some studies. Brophy and Bawden (2005) compared google with academic library resources as an internet search engine and concluded that using them together is important for their many unique item (Sahin, Y. G., Balta, S., and Ercan, T. (2010). The students generally search with Google to find web pages for journals citation, training and to search for more information. Several related studies also show the increasing use of the Internet for academic activities among a great number of student populations. John Lubans (1998), Matthew Ciolek (1998).

Table 4. Method of Information Search.

Problems encountered while using Internet	<i>f</i>	Rank
Slow access speed	689	1
Difficulty in finding relevant information	370	3
Overload of information on the Internet	333	4
It takes too long to view/download pages	510	2
Privacy problem	227	5
Any other	13	6

Majority of the respondents say they type the web address to browse information from the Internet, while some prefer to use search engines and only a few of them by using subscription databases. Lazonder (2000) also investigated the training needs of novice users in their search for information on the www, and noted that it is easier to locate a website compared to locating information on a website.

Table 5. Academic Use of Internet.

Purposes for Browsing Internet	BEED	Rank	BSed	Rank	HM	Rank	IT	Rank	BSIE	Rank	Total	Rank
Research	216	1	132	1	113	1	196	1	68	1	725	1
Entertainment	161	4	115	4	86	4	111	4	58	3.5	531	4
Education	159	3	126	2	91	3	125	3	65	2	566	3

Internet hosts has tremendously grown and the Internet use at universities now is common among students for social, entertainment and educational purposes Muniandy, B. (2000). Findings on Internet use for academic purposes is somewhat varied. Students are good users of information and the academic activities they mostly engaged in are research and finding information from web, communication and education. As the Internet is full of potentials and rich source of other functions, it will be remarkable to consider the extent of its use by the students for educational reasons. The Internet is basically a part of college students' educational experience. They use it for research, communication, and to access library materials. For most of them, the Internet as a tool has functionally changed the way they interact with the people in the information highway as they go about their studies. (Pew Internet and American, 2002).

Table 5 reveals that the most common use of the Internet among its users is research which ranks the highest for a total of 725 respondents followed by 597 responses for communication then for a total of 566 students who said that they use the Internet for education. Only 531 respondents say they use the Internet for entertainment. User patterns however seems to change overtime as the novice users start using their Internet for entertainment then socializing, like online chatting and playing games. After sometime, more significant utilization follows, like retrieval of information, communication and research activities would eventually take over.

Actual stated usage show that Internet is used for research or study purposes which strongly indicates primary usage of the Internet as a tool in information gathering and communication. This suggests that students nowadays are convinced on the benefits derived from using the Internet as they can now accomplish their school work through research, interact with other students and their teacher and learn everything without limitation of time and space.

But this contradicts to the study of Chen and Pen which examined the relationship between Internet usage and academic performance of students

showing that occasional Internet users earned better academic performance. University students on the other hand seem generally positive about the impact of the Internet on their educational experience in spite limited for educational purpose than social activity.

There have been several studies reported on students' use of Internet for academic reasons. George *et al.*, (2006) accounts the results of a study conducted for graduate students of Carnegie Mellon University in the USA on their use of the Internet. Results show that information search at the university was mostly through the Internet and Intranet facilities. Contrary to the study of Chen, Y. F., and Peng, S. S. (2008) in literature there are many other studies related to Internet use in many different fields in education. In these studies have been investigated the effects technology use on students' academic performance and educational value. These studies present a common point that Internet use can have a positive effect on students' performance if it is properly used. (Furuholt, B., and Kristiansen, S. (2007)

Enormous efforts have been initiated by educational institutions to consider information and communication technology as a main ideology of the university teaching and learning however despite all these, the fact still remains that students only make limited formal use of computer technology for academic purposes Selwyn, (2002). The author suggests some reasons for this situation, such as inadequacies in the operational process on the part of students and the university.

Table 6. Methods of Learning Internet Skills.

Method	F	Rank
Trial and error	66	3
Guidance from friends and colleagues	110	1
Training from college	64	4
Self-instruction	95	2
External courses	31	5

Respondents have different methods in learning Internet skills. Among these methods, guidance from colleagues and friends is the most preferred. Most of the respondents say they learned their Internet skill from colleagues and friends. This means that Internet goers usually have somebody to accompany them especially for the beginning users. This result is similar to the results obtained by Maheswarappa, B. S., Tadasad, P. G., Ebnazar C, E., and Alur, S. A. (2003).

As revealed in Table 6, only a few of the Internet café users learned the skills in using the internet in school from some formal method of instruction. Most of their training took place in the Internet cafes where they earned the skill by themselves with the assistance of their colleagues and friends together with the café staff as supported by a similar study of Furuholt,

B., and Kristiansen, S. (2007). As reported by J Hobbs T Bristow (2007) there is indeed a necessity for skills training to be offered at the cafes, although a number of owners are still hesitant to consider the offering of formal training, since it still definitely costs less for users to undergo informal learning at a café than take a formal training course.

Table 7. Quality of Learning.

Influence on Academic Efficiency	<i>f</i>	Rank
Use of conventional documents has decreased	217	4
Dependency on the Internet has increased	351	2
Expedited the research process	267	3
Improved professional competence	397	1

The Internet stores a voluminous amount of information provided across various disciplines, as well as in education. The abundance of resources available to students is rich and it grows exponentially every day being significant to students for searching, identifying, evaluating and using these information sources for their educational purposes. (Muniandy, B. (2000). Using these academic resources, especially the method and ability to scan articles of information is very important for academic research Sahin, Y. G., Balta, S., and Ercan, T. (2010)

People in varied age groups and jobs, the students and academicians doing scientific research and doing preparations for projects prefer to use the Internet because they find it easy, cheap and a much faster way to access necessary information.

Table 8 shows that most of the samples feel the increase in quality of their references enabling them to find information from around the world, making them globally at par with other students. Many students believe that Internet resources are up-to-date for educational purposes and that they are free from bias. The use of Internet has a great influence in one's educational experiences, the reason for their increased dependency on the Internet. Survey results show that it has improved professional competence among the highest number of respondents.

Students have an optimistic perception on the value of quality education with the Internet resources as these are unbounded by time and space. A majority of them feel that their work improves with quality when using the Internet and that their reading is updated with the latest kind of information available.

Respondents prefer to use the internet than conventional documents for varied reasons. Based on the results, the top reasons were "more updated", more informative" and "time saving". With these reasons, it can be inferred that research work nowadays are mostly done with the Internet and more than the use of conventional documents.

Many students prefer using the Internet more than other conventional resources. Results are in the same direction with the study of D Esposito and Gardner, showing that while students recognize library resources as reliable still many of the successful ones rely more on the Internet than the library resources available.

As mentioned by Sahin, 2010 that university students prefer to use the Internet in their studies than in the library. Furthermore, he cited the works of Chen and Huang, 2005 stressing that it is an important tool in the teaching learning process.

Table 8. Comparison of Internet and Conventional Documents.

Comparison of Conventional Documents and Internet	<i>F</i>	Rank
Time saving	605	3
More informative	637	2
More expensive	360	5
Less expensive	147	6
More updated	639	1
More accessible	504	4

Table 9. Problems Encountered While Using Internet.

Problems encountered while using Internet	<i>f</i>	Rank
Slow access speed	689	1
Difficulty in finding relevant information	370	3
Overload of information on the Internet	333	4
It takes too long to view/download pages	510	2
Privacy problem	227	5
Any other	13	6

There are many roadblocks using the Internet. First and most is speed, limited access of educational websites. Similarly absence of integration of Internet into the curriculum is also a factor that inhibits the use of Internet for academic purpose. (Asfaw, T. T., and Bo, C. C. (2003).

Among the problems met by the respondents as shown in Table 10 in using the Internet, is "slow access speed" ranked first followed by "it takes too long to view and download pages". These results agree with the results gathered by Benolirao, 2014. This implies that these problems call for immediate attention especially in the Internet café to satisfy the clients. These common problems by the users might be the cause to discourage them in using the Internet because their expectation on the service is not met.

Dunne, M., and Epitropova, A. (2004) suggests that excellent Internet connection speed provided by the Internet café eliminates issues with slow connections or slow loading web pages and difficulty in finding relevant information be given important consideration.

Table 10. Satisfaction with Internet Facilities.

Satisfaction Level	<i>f</i>	%
Very Satisfied	108	14.3
Satisfied	357	47.3
Partly Satisfied	210	27.8
Less Satisfied	80	10.6
TOTAL	755	2.43

The café operation has been extremely successful from a client service and commercial perspective with a full percentage of the profits returned to the university. Clients appreciate being able to eat and drink in the area. The level of equipment, including the availability of a high-speed network and printing facilities was also appreciated by 47.3 percent of the respondents who were satisfied as shown in the table. A number of respondents equivalent to 27.8 percent say they were partly satisfied while 14.3 percent were very satisfied and only 10 percent were less satisfied.

The results suggest that the users are contented with the services offered corresponding to the charges made by the Internet Café. Furthermore it implies that there is a need to improve and extend better opportunities for access and dependable resources which could be provided through the initiative of university administrators. One probable solution to address concerns regarding Internet access is to provide permission students with permission for Internet connection to academic resources at the Internet Café thus equipping them with ability to use resources for related courses.

J. Hobbs T Bristow posits that the increase in internet café use among its audience could be encouraged by the following factors:

1. improved computer accessibility
2. enhanced appropriate design
3. awareness of relevant digital services

A wide range of users have shown their perception on the suitability and economical acceptability of the Internet as a source of information and knowledge as perceived by 78.42 percent. The cafes can be used to a great degree, as supportive arena for advancing the development of human resources through research and the use of the Internet for related professional purposes, and that users are eager to shoulder the charges they will make on Internet café fees.

In a similar study of Dunne, M., and Epitropova, A. (2004), students perceive themselves as highly skilled on Internet usage skills as they have person computers and laptops available at home. Many of them also subscribe and have access to various Internet and WIFI services either in the university or outside. For most of the students the internet Café is most practically their easiest access to Internet facilities.

It will be clear that our pedagogical approach is informed by the desire for active engagement, communication, social interaction (including cooperation and collaboration) challenge and the belief that the process of education should not be confined to the classroom and that a multitude of contexts exists in which this can occur.

In this paper, the Internet café is described as a “learning classroom”, to encompass the use of computers for information and communication and to obtain access to relevant information on the global networking sites. As shown in our study, the Internet cafes serve as Internet training schools providing venues for learning with a great possibility to spread out this training opportunity to a considerably wider extent of knowledge with improved capability and contributions from the attending staff at the Internet café.

Furuholt, B., and Kristiansen, S. (2007) found out that Internet Cafes are progressively playing a significant role in the distribution and dissemination of information as well as being centers of communication. They also found some Internet Cafes offer a considerable extent of educational use through e-learning. Furthermore, the value of socially embedded experience provided by this alternative educational environment such as one appropriately matched and corresponding to the teaching and learning foci, should be recognized. A complementary but slightly different view of this type of educational experience is the “situated learning approach by Brown, J. S., Collins, A., and Duguid, P. (1989) which recognizes that meaningful learning will be effectively stimulated by a socio-cultural approach that is active and embedded in meaningful contexts of the real world.

Observations indicate the educational capacity of Internet café techno spaces as not only recognized but also very likely to be rapidly growing. Our own experience suggests that the Internet café offers considerable potential as a legitimate and relevant context in which to provide focused training events of the type described.

The Bulgarian host made the inspired decision to locate the training event in an Internet café and its value, as an alternative learning environment. This context had an influence on the structure, content and mode of delivery of the training session according Dunne, M., and Epitropova, A. (2004). The combination of demand, competition and cheap access and the high costs of getting a PC for personal Internet home connection have facilitated the emergence of a kind of self-regulating and informally sophisticated industry like the Internet Café to fill this gap Sahin, Y. G., Balta, S., and Ercan, T. (2010). The establishment of the Internet café is the vital answer to the expensive cost of Internet access from a personally-owned PC and the phone line requirement in some areas (prohibiting home-based access) Hobbs, J., and Bristow, T. (2007).

As the Internet café potentially offers a lot of things beneficial to a wider audience, it likewise provides an advantageous learning experience with the

assistance of available IT to support discovery of online information. It must continually provide seamless services and conveniences which support the continuing transformation of the learning experience in the contemporary way as the integration of blended learning into teaching practices is shifting the pedagogical landscape. (Anderson, G., and Rigby, A. 2000).

CONCLUSION

The Internet café has the capacity to become an extended classroom for a variety of educational activities delivered outside of formal structures and system. Students in higher education could all benefit from this relatively cheap, expanding and reliable resource.

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