

iPads and tablets in the classroom

Since the introduction of the iPad to the global market in 2010, there has been a large uptake of iPads and similar tablet devices in schools. There is a widespread belief that the use of such technology is a key component of education in the 21st century. As a result of this popularity, a growing body of research has developed around the impact of iPads and tablets on educational practice and student learning, with some key findings.

iPad use is linked to improved student engagement, but not improved content knowledge

There is some variability in the findings of research on the impact of iPad and tablet use in the classroom. However, research has consistently found that iPads and tablets have a positive impact on student engagement. These devices can enable knowledge exchange, provide opportunities for autonomy, facilitate class work, and make learning more flexible by alleviating pressure to work in schools' computer rooms. Research has found that iPads have been used to support collaborative learning opportunities and personalised learning experiences, and to enhance deep learning. The touch screen interface can motivate and engage students, maintaining student interest in the content, and allowing groups of students to interact with the device simultaneously. Moreover, teachers, students and parents report that the communication features, and in particular the availability and accessibility of iPads in the classroom and in students' homes, facilitate communication between teachers and students, supporting home-school partnership. Overall, the research suggests that iPads and tablets provide new ways for teachers and students to interact with each other and to access information.

However, it is important to note that, while iPads and tablets may be helpful in increasing student engagement, research demonstrates that use of these devices are not associated with an increase in content knowledge. Teachers must keep in mind that iPads and tablets are not consistently linked to improvements in academic proficiency.

For iPad and tablet use to be effective, students need autonomy and scaffolding

For successful deployment of personal devices in the classroom, schools should have a clear reason for adopting this technology as well as a well-developed implementation plan. Successful implementation requires careful planning before, during, and after iPads or other tablet devices are introduced. At an organisational and administrative level, teachers must be prepared for the time commitment required for tablet use outside of teaching, including keeping the devices charged, keeping track of who was using each device, and troubleshooting problems with the technology.

Teaching practices should accommodate the learner in a more autonomous role. However, it is important that teachers balance this with support that scaffolds students with the skills and knowledge to become effective users of devices – it is not fair to assume that all young people growing up in today's world are competent technology users. Teachers require professional development opportunities to learn how best to integrate this technology into their teaching practice but, most importantly, they must be aware that it is their pedagogy and not the technology itself that is most important for learning.

Prepared for The Education Hub by Julianne Viola

References & Further Reading

- Attard, C., & Curry, C. (2012, July). *Exploring the use of iPads to engage young students with mathematics*. Paper presented at the 35th Annual Meeting of the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia (MERGA), Singapore.
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