

The Next Big Thing in Education Technology

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The next big thing in education technology is tablets – and it won't be the iPad. Not that the iPad is inferior in any way but because the education budgets across the world, barring the US and Europe, cannot afford it. US bloggers and tech writers tend to dominate education technology sites and news, so the iPad might be what you read about the most but there is a world outside of the US. At this stage I also doubt whether Windows based tablets are going to make the grade. I want to make a bold prediction and say that Android based tablets are going to be the device of choice for those looking for ways to use the power of technology to improve education.

Tablets have an advantage above eReaders in that they are more versatile. They can be used as eReaders – although eReaders do have certain advantages when it comes to electronic books – but they can also play video and run various educational apps. It therefore has more to offer in the form of mixed, interactive media. Tablets, especially Android based tablets, are generally more affordable than other mobile computing devices. They are also more portable than laptops and even netbooks. They are less distracting (debatable, I know) than their more glamorous cousin – the Smartphone. Although there is convergence in the mobile computing department, I think that tablets have the edge over other devices in the educational field. They are mobile and yet offer enough screen real estate to make the viewing experience not too straining and provide for more hand space for inputting of information and interacting with the device. Their battery power should also be enough to outlast a school day.

The case for Android: Android has taken the mobile phone world by storm. It has been slower on the uptake with tablets but that is because tablets have been seen as consumer devices, mostly. Those who could afford a consumer device would rather go for an iPad – and who blames them? However, more and more Android tablets are coming out and they are improving in usability with improvements to the hardware and OS, not to mention the apps. Android is Open Source and developed by the Tech Giant Google. It has been welcomed by the Open Source community of developers. Many apps are actively being developed (using Java BTW). It's not going to go away tomorrow. Windows has been lagging in the mobile computing (think Smartphone and Tablet) field. It is still an open question whether they will be able to make a comeback, but consumers have become weaned from Microsoft and the psychological barrier of "only Microsoft Windows" has been removed. Android is Open Source and is distributed freely. The devices running it can potentially be more affordable.

There will be barriers to the uptake of Android tablets. Some I can think of are the possibility of the tablets being damaged or stolen, as well as the possible abuse of tablets for non-schoolwork. There is also the distractibility factor, however – that is an issue teachers will have to deal with in today's technological world.

Follow the debate on Tablet Computers in Education and other topics related to low-cost ICT initiatives for educational systems in developing countries here: <http://edutechdebate.org/tablet-computers-in-education/>