TABLETS SHOULD REPLACE PRINT-TEXTBOOKS IN THE
PHILIPPINE K-12 CLASSROOMS

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Tablets, according to its proponents, are supported by most teachers, parents, and students as they are proven to be more efficient tools in the learning process than textbooks. The media has elated the public with the fact that tablets can hold hundreds of digital textbooks while remaining much lighter and cheaper than print textbooks (“Tablets vs. Textbooks,” 2013). However, there is much more to tablets than a mere light and nifty electronic book (e-book) reader (“Better reasons,” 2011). Tablets pave the way to a wider and unlimited source of learning which improve students’ cognitive capacity and increase their interactivity and creativity. As the use of tablets has been proven effective in facilitating and improving students’ learning, schools must take advantage of this advanced learning tool. Thus, the Philippine K-12 classrooms should switch from using print textbooks to utilizing interactive, digital textbooks and other educational applications on tablets.

The most obvious benefit of using tablets in schools is that it solves the problem of backpack-related injuries. Backpacks, which are bags loaded with varied books for school use carried by a strap on the back or shoulder, has developed spine problems to school children at such a young age (“Avoid bad back,” 2012). Thus, the use of tablets in the K-12 classroom solves the dilemma, as a tablet filled with 3,500 e-books weighs only around 1-2 pounds. The same number of physical books would weigh about two tons – four thousand (4000) times heavier than the weight of a tablet. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. There is more to tablets which makes it worth procuring.

In the continuous effort of the government to address the problems the education sector faces, it is aiming to eventually use tablet-based reading materials in place of traditional textbooks (Aquino III, 2012). Apparently, the government recognizes the efficiency of tablets in making learning in the classroom more engaging. Tablets can also solve the patent lack of books and resources in the Philippine education system.
This innovation in education gained support from publishing houses, organizations, and other firms around the country. Vibal Publishing House, Inc. for example, has partnered with Microsoft Corporation to run open source applications for secure, fast and flexible delivery of digital learning tools (“Vibal Publishing chooses Microsoft”, 2013). Vibal also introduced two low-cost tablet models which will be loaded with interactive Math and Science application modules as part of the initiatives of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) to improve public education in those areas (Villavicencio, 2012). Lifeware Technology, another digital service provider, launched an Android-powered tablet for children aged 3 – 8 called as the Enlight KiddieTAB. The KiddieTAB is preloaded with 100 educational applications like language and literacy, math, art and music, and Filipino which children can learn with fun. (Magdirila 2013; Bernabe 2013).

The effective impact of learning from interactive applications and digital textbooks loaded on tablets is discussed in an article written by Janet Maragioglou (2012) entitled “IPads Boost Math Scores, Benefit Education.” The article explains the claim of publisher Houghton Mifflin Harcourt that students who used iPad (one of the many tablet brands) in learning Algebra 1 scored extremely higher on all math class and standardized tests than those who used print textbooks. Thus, it is a proof that the use of tablets enhances education by engaging, motivating, and making students eager to learn.

However beneficial tablets may appear, there are others who are not convinced with its effectiveness. Pessimists claim that using tablets is more expensive than using print textbooks. Others even argue that tablets have too many distractions for classroom use. Finally, they claim that it is an additional task for the teacher to learn using these devices which is most of the times difficult for them to master (especially the old ones).

The opposition argues that “implementing tablets in K-12 schools requires purchasing hardware (the tablet) and software (the textbooks), setting up new wi-fi facility, and training teachers and administrators how to use the technology. Implementation costs for e-textbooks on iPad tablets are 552% higher than new print textbooks in an average high school (“Tablets vs. Textbooks,” 2013). This concern was raised with optimism by President Aquino (2012) when he
said at the launching of K-12 educational program that the government is just waiting for the prices to go down; and as it is, they’re already close to target. It appears that tablets’ price is inversely proportional with the demand for it, thus increasing its favorability for classroom use.

The opposition argues that tablets have too many distractions for classroom use. Students may pay attention to applications (more commonly known as “apps”), e-mail, games, and websites instead of their teachers and the lessons being discussed in the class. (“Tablets vs. Textbooks,” 2013). Fortunately, in Buffalo, New York, it was found that the best solution was to implement device management software… (Sheridan 2013) By the use of software management, educators (teachers) can manage the programs that students use and access through the tablets – the educational applications installed at tablets provided by Vibal and Lifeware as it has been discussed earlier (Villavicencio 2012; Magdirila 2013; Bernabe 2013). Thus, proper management of the devices will ensure that the aim and purpose of providing them in schools will be maintained. In addition, in case errors are found in the materials, information can be easily corrected through internet servers (Aquino III, 2012).

PNoy (2012), as we call the Philippine president, is well aware of the situation teachers will face in this era we live in which we call the digital or information age. Teachers must be in possession of a wider range of knowledge to cope with the innovations the modern technology provides. As the government aims at providing today’s youth with better opportunities to acquire information and to learn, educators must be adept with these technologies and continuously update themselves with the latest trends. In response, the government will provide teachers the proper training aside from the personal studies they must undertake to fully grasp this leap on our education system. Thus, the success of the program relies on everybody’s hands and concern. Teachers must attract the interest and sustain attention of the students by carefully facilitating or utilizing interactive and engaging learning materials in the classroom – learning tools that are provided by the government and other institutions.

Looking at the current situation of education in the Philippines, one might argue that the Philippines is not yet ready for replacing textbooks with tablets due to the cost it may incur for the government. The readiness of teachers in using the innovative device is also in question. However,
our stand is that it is the proper time now to start the changes in the Philippine classrooms. We have already taken the first step of changing the educational curriculum by introducing K-12. Soon, books should be provided for the students of K-12. Therefore it is the proper time to introduce the use of tablets in the classrooms which can foster and contain the new book editions for the K-12 classes which are more interactive and best facilitate learning.

The replacement of textbooks with tablets addresses not only the financial capability of the Philippines to purchase these digital devices for learning but also the readiness of the teachers in utilizing them. However, whether you’re a technologically adept teacher with all the latest devices or a stereotype who barely manages to keep up with a vintage mobile phone unit, technology has proven itself to be a force for change. Therefore teachers of this milieu must learn to adapt and be adept with the use of these innovations brought by the advanced technologies. As today's classrooms undergo a technological makeover and computer programs become fundamental to the learning process, we foresee students of the Philippine K-12 program spend less time turning printed book pages and more time tapping tablet screens.

REFERENCES


