

Transforming University Mass Lectures Using Students' Smartphones 2: No Tablets? No Problem!

Prof. Yumi Kubota, College of Bioresource Sciences, Nihon University, has used a combination of students' own smartphones and LoiLoNote School to revolutionize her mass lectures by making them more interactive and streamlined - all without purchasing tablets.

Background to Introduction of LNS

In Japan, a government-backed program is currently underway to equip all elementary school students with a tablet as part of its "Future School Promotion Project". This is a wonderful idea, but unfortunately not a viable option for the vast majority of universities. Unlike state schools, many universities, even private ones, simply do not have the budget or government assistance to introduce tablets on a wide scale.



However, smartphone penetration among young people in Japan is extremely high. For example, one source reports that 77% of 18-34 year olds in Japan own a smartphone, and the rate is likely even higher for younger members of this age group.*

Since LNS is compatible with multiple devices and operating systems it can be adapted for use even in non-tablet equipped settings. This means that lack of budget for tablets does not necessarily have to be a barrier to introducing cutting-edge technology into university-level lessons.

Although many teachers and lecturers feel strong resistance to permitting students to use their smartphones in lessons, worrying about negative effects on discipline, concentration or efficiency, Prof. Kubota reports only positive effects after allowing it as part of an attempt to solve some problems she was facing in her undergraduate mass lecture series.

LoiLoNote School's Application

Prof. Kubota has been using LNS in "Theory of Food Services", her weekly 90 minute class for third year students in the Food Products Business Department. The class is a mass lecture held in a large lecture hall; on average 100-300 students attend each time.



Before the class, Prof. Kubota uses LNS to instantaneously distribute class handouts and lesson materials. Among enrolled students, 60-70% use iPhone while the others use Android. There is one student who does not own a smartphone, so she has simply continued to use existing paper handouts instead.

During class, Prof. Kubota mainly uses LNS to collect Cards containing students' reactions and comments. Each time, she allocates about 60 minutes for an "interactive lecture", and in the remaining 30 minutes, she has all students write and submit a short essay of their questions, thoughts and opinions regarding the lecture content.

Once students have written their essays, they submit them to a central “pot” where they can be viewed by Prof. Kubota and their fellow students. Subsequently, the students are encouraged to read and respond to other students’ comments using LNS’s built-in feedback tools. They are able to view, copy, and edit other students’ Cards, underlining, circling, and writing comments before returning them to the author.

A Voice from the Classroom

Prof. Kubota said, “It makes me happiest when my students say, ‘Her lecture’s really worth attending.’ Many students’ goal is just to get their credits as easily as possible, so I’m very happy that they say that. Thanks to their enthusiasm, we can enjoy mutual communication and share our desire to explore new topics together each time.



Even if it’s a bit difficult to pass the microphone around and get student’s comments directly, if students share their comments with each other in writing, then we can carry on with the lesson while constantly bouncing ideas off each other. Together, we have created a space where each student is connected to the others, and each and every student is participating in the lesson rather than leaving it up to the others.

If I hand out printouts of the handouts then the students think they can relax just because they have them in their hand. But just because they do, doesn’t mean that they’re actually looking at them properly. But when the same handouts appear on their smartphone, which is familiar and accessible, they naturally start scrolling through and taking a closer look.

It’s difficult to incorporate active learning into mass lectures, but it’s possible with LNS. I enjoy the look of satisfaction on students’ faces after they submit their feedback Cards at the end of the lesson. Rather than just another presentation tool, I am using LNS as a powerful information distribution tool.”

By cleverly leveraging students’ own smartphones, Prof. Kubota was able not only to tackle some key problems in her mass lectures, but also to create a more lively and effective classroom environment, to her students’ ultimate benefit.

*Source: Pew Research Center, “Smartphone Ownership and Internet Usage Continues to Climb in Emerging Economies” <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/02/22/smartphone-ownership-and-internet-usage-continues-to-climb-in-emerging-economies/>