A STATE OF THE STA Using the Wimba Classroom to Support a Remote **Campus** September 1 **A Pilot Project** S S Report A STATE OF THE STA Mareena Ilyas Student ID: 10918213 December 2010 A STATE OF THE STA **Evaluation of eLearning for Effective Practice** September 1 A STATE OF THE STA

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## **Executive Summary**

A need analysis was carried out to find out about the type of language learning support services which can be provided online to remoter campus students at an institution, and formatively evaluate the use of the Wimba classroom. The purpose of this evaluation was to determine whether the Wimba classroom was a viable option to meet the needs of the target audience and the strategic direction of the institution.

The evaluation model used was the mixed method-eclectic-pragmatic approach and the instrumentation comprised of a student survey, an Expert Reviewer, a short student poll, lecturer feedback and the evaluator's reflection.

The findings revealed learners' positive perceptions of Wimba applications as language learning tools. The study also highlighted that the Wimba classroom option is in line with strategic plans. Despite this there is a need to motivate and engage with lecturers so that they can support and guide the students with the transition to e- learning. Wimba class can make learning more accessible to all learners regardless of the physical location, with institutional systems and processes that support e-learning use.

The evaluator has made recommendations based on the analysis of the information collected. Orientation is essential for staff and students to realize Wimba class' full potential in language learning and teaching. Higher levels of coordination and collaboration with the faculties and departments may possibly result in increased opportunities for the implementation of the project. Overall, successful e-learning opportunities may be provided through Wimba class ensuring both the engagement of the learner and motivation of the lecturer.

# **Introduction and Background**

A formative evaluation has been carried out to find out how effective and useable the Wimba classroom was for ESOL students. This report describes the background, Purposes, Questions, Methods, Results, Discussion and Recommendations.

The evaluator planned to do a Wimba project to support ESOL students in general and the remote campus students at the institution. The researcher's role at the Learning Support Centre is to give language support to all students, mainly ESOL. Students who need extra academic/language support can access learning support centre service outside their class time. Students can come to the Learning Support Centre individually or with a group depending on their need. Lecturers can also send referral to learning advisors when they identify students needing additional support. Learning Support Centre staff also support academic staff by providing contextualised workshops on specific subjects at the lectures' request.

Learning Support Centre records show that remote campus students hardly ever access the Centre's services because getting transport to the main campus is a barrier. Travel time and scarce resources are the main factors that limit the learning advisors themselves from going to the remote campus more frequently. Facilitating the learning of students via a Wimba classroom is a 21<sup>st</sup> century solution to this problem and the researcher started the pilot project.

Wimba is a live virtual classroom with audio/video application enhanced with content sharing facility. "Wimba Classroom has been carefully architected to give learners access to teachers, courses, and content beyond the four walls of a physical classroom or campus" (Wimba, Inc., 2009).

Using computer as a supplemental teaching tool is not a new concept in the field of education. Computers can not only provide a rich learning environment but also "can incorporate various learning strategies as well as accommodate a variety of learning styles" (Ybarra, & Green, 2003).

A range of studies have proven that effective use of technology can facilitate and reinforce language learning such as reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary development, speaking and

pronunciation skills (Kang and Dennis, 1995; Lewis, 1997; Liaw, 1997). According to Case and Truscott (1999), cited by (Ybarra, & Green, 2003) students have been able to improve their sight word vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension using computer as a tool. Cromley (2000) argues that "Technology can tap different skills than do textbooks and group work".

Although the advent of Wimba is relatively new, the impact of using Wimba in language teaching has already been proved (Ward, 2005; (Lafford & Lafford 2005). A study done in University of California, Los Angeles (Kudyma, Aoki, & Liu) illustrates a wide variety of creative uses of Wimba and explores its benefit to language instruction. The study demonstrated that "the use of Wimba adds a new dimension to existing language instruction and can bring about a great impact on language learning".

Wimba tools allow teachers to create different types of questions such as multiple-choice, short answer questions and true/false etc and arrange them into assessment. Teachers can then view the answers, grade them and give individualised feedback. Teachers are also able to use multiple mode of teaching using pictures, animation, videos and audios to make the lesson fun and exciting.

Based on this wealth of potential benefits that computers and technology can offer to the ESL students the proposed Wimba classroom was piloted to facilitate language learning to the distance student population.

Wimba sessions were delivered to selected classes during the teaching hours so that the lecturer could observe the session. A technology staff was made available in the computer lab to troubleshoot problems if the students encounter any.

## **Purpose and the Questions**

The purpose of this project was to conduct a need analysis about the type of language learning support services which can be provided online, and formatively evaluate the use of the Wimba classroom.

The evaluation focused on the following questions. Further sub questions were also addressed within the main questions.

1. What type of online learning support services do ESOL students need to assist them with language learning at a distance?

#### **Sub-questions**

- What sort of language support do students want to access online? How
- many students used the remote service during the pilot? What are the
- reasons for a high or low turnout of students?
- 2. How appropriate is synchronous online support using the Wimba classroom for ESOL students?

#### **Sub-questions**

- How suitable is the Wimba classroom for online interaction and support? What
- is the response of students to the Wimba class?
- How effective do students find the Wimba classroom for language learning?
- What barriers did the students encounter during the process? Were
- the problems easily rectified? Why/why not?
- 3. What type of skills (technological, learning, communication) do ESOL students need for online language learning?

## **Sub-questions**

- How do students use the tools in the Wimba classroom for language learning? What
- skills (technological, learning, communication) do students [believe they] require to use the Wimba classroom?

# Methodology

This study used a need analysis survey to establish the needs of the students and then formatively evaluated during one month trial using multiple type evaluation method. According to Weston et al (1995) (cited by University of Colorado, 2010) "the purpose of formative evaluation is to validate or ensure that the goals of the instruction are being achieved and to improve the instruction, if necessary, by means of identification and subsequent remediation of problematic aspects."

Multiple type evaluation method was used to evaluate this project using Eclectic-Mixed Methods-Pragmatic Paradigm. Green et al. 1989 (cited by Neto, 1997) highlight that different use of instruments provides consistency of findings and adds richness and detail to the study. "The use of mixed-method is likely to increase the quality of final results and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of analyzed phenomena" (Neto, 1997). This will also enable triangulation of data ensuring validity and reliability of findings (Hedberg & Reeves, 2003).

# Types of data collection devices

As part of the mixed method approach, the evaluator used five data collection methods to collect relevant information.

- Student survey: A pre survey was used to find student demographics, establish their language needs and to find out if they have the technology skills to access online language support services. The questionnaire link was posted to the students through the eMIT interface and then students completed them online
- A short [student] poll: At the end of the each Wimba session students were asked to complete a short poll to see their response to the session. The poll consisted of four statements with a rating scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (yes, completely).
- Staff feedback: Lecturers' feedback was also collected as their cooperation and support is key to this project. The lecturers of participating classes stayed with the students in the computer lab and after the sessions, the lecturers were approached with a set of questions for their overall feedback (please see Appendix 2).
- Expert review: The Learning Technology Centre (LTC) Manager was involved as an expert reviewer of the project. Apart from ongoing consultation, a list of questions was also sent to her as email attachment to get some insight into the project. Please see Appendix 4 for the questions.
- The Evaluator's documentation: The evaluators notes and reflections were also drawn on for additional data

## **Results**

The results of qualitative and quantitative data were compiled and analyzed according to the research questions. Student survey and the short poll gave quantitative data while the lecturers" feedback, expert review and the evaluator sown documentation provided qualitative data. Overall, the information collected through qualitative and quantitative methods support one another.

## **Analysis of survey**

A survey was used to find student demographics, establish their language needs and to find out if they have the technology skills to access online language support services. The questionnaire link was posted to the students through the Blackboard-eMIT interface and then students completed them online "http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DRK5T39"

Please see appendix 1 for a copy of the survey.

#### Participants & Context

Total of 92 students took part in this survey and majority of them were female. Over 10 countries were represented in student samples and majority of them were Chinese. Their ages range from 16-46 and above. Pease see Table 1 for participants' county of origin and the figure 1 for their profile.

Table 1: Country of Origin (n=92)

Country of Origin	Number of students
Bulgaria	1
China	42
Ethiopia	1
France	1
India	9
Iran	2
Korea	14
New Zealand	1
Samoa	8
Saudi Arabia	1
Sri Lanka	1
Syria	1
Taiwan	2
Thailand	3
Vietnam	5
Total	92

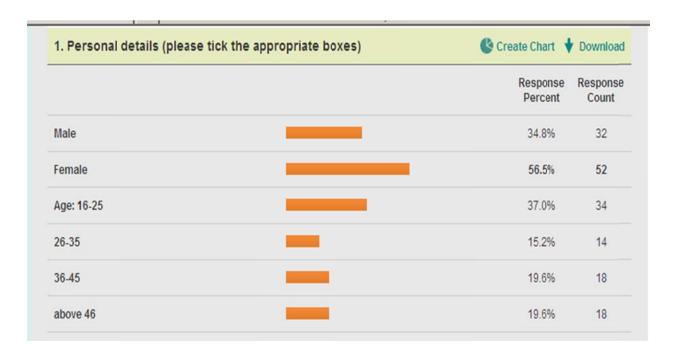


Figure 1: Participants' profile

The Figure shows that majority of the participants were female and a significant number falls under the age group of 16-25. Interestingly, age group 36-45 and 45 and above represent equal numbers. In total over 50% of the student population are above 25 years of age.

## Computer availability, familiarity and usage

It was apparent that respondents were high users of the computer, as 98% had a home computer with Internet connectivity, and used the computer for a variety of reasons. For example, the participants indicated that they use the computer for variety of things such as email, chat, play games, Skype, listen to music, study English etc. While majority of the participants mentioned that they use the computer for emailing 4% reported that they do nothing on the computer. Since 96% of the participants stated that they were at varying degrees of confidence, and only 4% reported that they were extremely nervous in using a computer, it appeared that technology would be only a minor barrier in the trial.

5. Overall, how confident ar	e you in using computer/Internet?	Create Chart	Download
		Response Percent	Response
extremely nervous	1	3.4%	3
Just ok		46.6%	41
confident		35.2%	31
extremely confident	_	14.8%	13
		answered question	88
		skipped question	4

Figure 2: Participants confident level in using computer

All participants mentioned that they want to get help online except for one. Almost equal number of participants indicated that they need help with vocabulary, grammar, writing and speaking and a few mentioned listening. Therefore it was likely that students would access the extra support provided in the form of the Wimba classroom.

There was no agreement shown with regard to preferred day and time for Wimba sessions. Preferences were shown across all week days from Monday to Friday, though Wednesday seems to be the most preferred day. And afternoon is the preferred time for majority. This could be related to their time tabling as School of English classes normally ends at 11.00 am on Wednesdays and most of the students access Learning Support Centre services on Wednesday afternoon to seek extra support for learning.

The questionnaire provided some very interesting results which indicate that the students were ready for the Wimba class trial. In general, male and female students reported similar exposure to technology. However, there was no significant gender, age, or ethnic correlation to the use of computer. Although high numbers of participants were "just ok" computer users, confident and extremely confident users appear to form the majority and this was favourable to the Wimba classroom.

## **Analysis of Student poll**

At the end of the each Wimba session students were asked to complete a short poll. The poll consisted of four statement with a rating scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (yes, completely). Total of 65 students took part in the short poll after the Wimba class (Table: 2).

Question	No, not at all	No, not really	Yes, a bit	Yes, completely
The lesson was interesting	1	6	21	37
The lesson helped me understand the topic		1	34	30
I am comfortable using the Wimba classroom	1	6	25	34
I would like to see more ESL Lessons through Wimba	4	3	20	38

Table 2: Student Poll

The student experience is as mixed as the student body itself. Overall, the poll results show that the majority of the students were positive about their learning experience and would like to see more lessons through Wimba class. It is also clear that the Wimba class has the potential to generate higher levels of student participation overall.

## **Analysis of Lecturer feedback**

Lecturers' feedback was chosen for feasibility as their cooperation and support is key to this project. When the whole class Wimba sessions were offered to selected classes the lecturers of those particular classes stayed with the students in the computer lab to see students' response to Wimba, and the usefulness of the project.

After the sessions the lecturers were approached for their overall feedback. Although the following questions were sent as an email attachment to prompt them, they were not restricted to just the questions given but asked to write their comments freely. Four lecturers sent their feedback. From the analysis of the information gathered, all lectures perceived that the introduction of Wimba was positive and useful to students. They all agreed that the navigation was simple but some help needed at the beginning to take them through the process. One lecturer mentioned "a teacher was definitely needed to assist logging in and getting them underway". The importance of guiding the students in the use of Internet resources is emphasized in other research as well (Paulsen's (2001). This corroborates our belief that teachers' guidance was necessary for the programme to be effective. Therefore, a face to face orientation to the lecturers and the students demonstrating the possibilities and operation of the remote support via the Wimba classroom appears to be an essential part of the process.

With regard to up skilling in ICT, lectures were again uniformed in their opinion that students were fine with general ICT technology, but they just need a few pointers for Wimba, and sign in sequences to access the service. One lecturer mentioned that "the majority of students, particularly the younger ones should be computer savvy enough to cope".

In terms of difficulties, "technology can let us down" was the main concern of all. There were issues with microphones; some worked and some did not. Many students had to rely on the chat function to talk, that was frustrating for both the students and the staff. However, satisfaction with the lesson outweighed dissatisfaction due to technical difficulties/shortcomings.

The advantages, according to the lecturers, include the bonus of being able to get help from distance because there are no geographic barriers to online learning through Wimba. The feedback also stated that students can receive focused and individualized instruction rather than self-studying on the Internet.

The lecturers all agreed that in terms of engagement, the learning activities were clear and justifiable overall, and were appropriate for independent study. The responses received, demonstrate that the Wimba class can be successfully implemented with the support of the lecturers.

#### **Analysis of Expert Review**

An expert review was chosen for validity and useful quantitative data was produced through ongoing consultation and discussion with the Learning Technology Centre (LTC) manager as an expert reviewer. The discussion and consultation allowed the evaluator to gain information to understand the strategic importance behind the move towards e learning delivery method and it is in line with the overall strategic plans and philosophy of the polytechnic.

At the end of the pilot programme an email was sent to her with a list of questions (Appendix 3) to get her view on the project. Her feedback confirms that Wimba is a cost effective and practical way of providing academic services to remote campuses. It is the way of the future – no travel costs, and it saves time as well.

Her feedback also helped the evaluator to clarify the role both Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the Learning Technology Centre (LTC) within the polytechnic specifically for e learning. It is clear that ICTS are charged with keeping the technology system working for all of MIT. They constantly monitor the network and the use of Blackboard and its associated tools. On the other hand, LTC keeps investigating emerging technologies and implementing them where educationally appropriate. It is confirmed that the infrastructure is up to date, and secure. The LTC also provides scheduled and just in time support to staff on the use of any aspect of learning technology.

From the analysis of the information gathered, it is apparent that the polytechnic has a reliable, secure and up-to date information technology infrastructure that allows for the continuation of Wimba online support to satellite campuses.

#### **Analysis of documentation**

The evaluator's documentation shows that the project offers great promise but also poses significant challenges to both staff and the students. The following are some challenges and problems that arouse in the process:

#### Materials development

The process of delivering a range of Wimba classes online requires considerable planning, preparation, forethought, and skill which initially require significant allocations of time to develop as a result of introducing the online technology. The Wimba sessions demanded more preparation time by the LSC staff member than the traditional face to face classes. The material

had to be prepared in a different format, uploaded to the Wimba classroom and the quizzes prepared and pre-checked. The materials once created can be reused though. Currently, balancing preparation time with teaching and other administrative responsibilities is challenging.

#### Additional administrative requirements

The normal booking LSC process could not be used and this put additional administration tasks onto the evaluator. She had to personally arrange bookings, Jasper records and follow up for the pilot.

## The importance of lecturer buy in

Another challenge was getting support and cooperation from the teaching staff at the remote site who do not routinely promote the LSC with or for their students. Lecturer enthusiasm appears to be necessary to overcome student passivity or lack of motivation to embrace this unfamiliar means of getting academic help.

Wimba class was advertised and orientation was given to targeted classes, yet no bookings were made for individual appointments. In total, 92 students had Wimba sessions, all through lecturers during their class time. Although majority of the students were positive about the learning experience, and wanted more sessions through Wimba, they did not come back on their own. After so much persuasion from the staff, one booking was made for a small group session. After the session when prompted the students mentioned that they did not come on their own because they did not have enough time to access the programmes because they were busy doing their homework and preparing for end of Semester Exams.

One possible interpretation of this finding is that students place work assigned by their teachers ahead of learning on their own. They were probably "not aggressive enough" in their learning of English. These findings suggested that students attitude towards self-learning is somewhat passive. It also confirms the earlier research (Burgess & Trinidad, 1997) that the teacher enthusiasm is one of the factors that influence students use of technology. Another, interpretation could be that this student population is not familiar with "getting online help" when needed. Therefore, lecturer buy in essential to implement the project.

#### Technical issues

There were complexities related to some of the LSC software packages in the Wimba environment and the student images and hardware in the computer labs were an issue. Frequently audio could not be used on the machines as although headsets with microphones were supplied, the microphone did not work plugged into either the front or the back connection when in the Wimba classroom itself.

Additionally the current LSC environment is not conducive to teaching remotely in this fashion. There is currently no soundproof venue from which to conduct these sessions. The Learning Technology Suite was used for the pilot. Technical support staff were also essential for this approach to teaching and learning.

#### **Discussion**

From the analysis of the information gathered, Wimba class was used to support a good learning experience. Overall the design and learning activities were favoured positively, but some encouragement and guidance by the lectures is necessary in the initial stage for starting the programme.

While there was no significant gender, age, or ethnic correlation to computer use, it was found that those who were encouraged and supported by the lecturers were more likely to make use of e- learning.

The benefits were seen as students being able access the service in their own time and at their own pace, and the drawbacks were related to students' attitude; it is perceived by both the lecturers and the evaluator that the students are unlikely to access the service unless they are assigned by the lecturers. However, this is an area that needs further investigation. The convenience and flexibility of e-learning provides improved access to Learning Support Centre for those who want to participate. It is certainly possible to realise the benefits of Wimba class, but examples of e-learning disasters are also not difficult to come by.

There were a number of other limitations including time constraints, lack of motivation and resistance to technology from both students and the staff. Although these limitations should be recognized and considered, they do not have to thwart those who want to use technology

to improve their learning. High levels of coordination and collaboration by all parties: ICTS, LTC, faculty Deans and administrators, programme leaders, lecturers and students are important to make this project a success.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The pilot has proved the concept of providing Wimba online learning support to remote campuses. The implementation of this particular set of Wimba classroom sessions shows assisting ESOL students' academic success even at remote campuses is a possibility.

There are great opportunities here that allow flexibility, and with the right conditions, the Learning Support Centre staff can offer assistance on a range of subjects to students no matter where they are.

The following recommendations have been made therefore to ensure the success of such a service and to eliminate the issues identified.

The evaluator believes supporting remote campuses in this way can be achieved if:

- There are high levels of coordination and collaboration by all parties: ICTS (managing the images and infrastructure), LTC (or its replacement support service) faculty Deans and administrators, programme leaders, lecturers and students.
- ICTS ensures that all student images at MIT support the Wimba classroom, and that audio is working on all machines via the front access point in the classroom environment.
- Heads of School and the Programme Leaders encourage the teaching staff to utilise the service as lecturer engagement is key to the implementation and success of this approach.
- A face to face orientation to the lecturers demonstrating the possibilities and operation
  of the remote support via the Wimba classroom is followed by a trial Wimba class with
  them present.
- The orientations should include:
  - o Services that can be offered to students and staff
  - o Suggested lesson topics

- o Navigation to the site
- o Classroom basics and netiquette
- o Processes staff are to follow to book sessions
- o Arranging a trial session for their classes
- Lectures make or prompt referrals for their students, negotiate time for Wimba sessions and follow up with both the learning advisors and the students.
- Learning advisors from the LSC establish personal communications with the lectures using the service and collect feedback to make improvements.

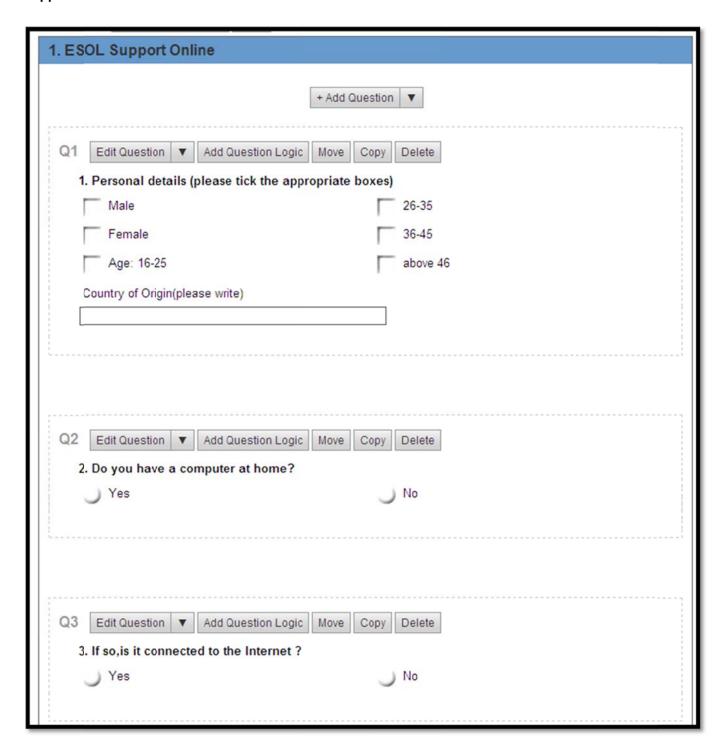
Providing the above processes are followed, the service can be expanded to all remote campuses. In addition, other support centres could be confident of implementing similar remote support mechanisms.

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## **Appendix 1: Questionnair**



	Question Logic   Move   Copy   Delete	
4. What do you like doing	on the computer?(please tick the appropriate boxes	)
chat	browse the net nothin	g
email	play games	
Other (please specify)	• 1 1000 1000000	
Other (piedes speedy)		
-		
Edit Question ▼ Add	Question Logic   Move   Copy   Delete	
5. Overall, how confident	are you in using computer/Internet?	
extremely nervous	confident	
Just ok	extremely confident	
06 Edit Question ▼ Add	Question Logic   Move   Copy   Delete	
	Question Logic   Move   Copy   Delete	
6. Would you like to get h	nelp via the internet to improve your English?	
6. Would you like to get h	nelp via the internet to improve your English?	
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6. Would you like to get h Yes  7 Edit Question ▼ Add	nelp via the internet to improve your English?	)
6. Would you like to get h Yes  7 Edit Question ▼ Add	No  Question Logic Move Copy Delete	
6. Would you like to get h Yes  7 Edit Question ▼ Add 7. If yes, What type of hel	Question Logic Move Copy Delete  p do you need? (You can choose more than one item  Writing Readin	
6. Would you like to get h Yes  7 Edit Question ▼ Add 7. If yes, What type of hel	Question Logic Move Copy Delete	

9-10 am	11-12 pm	1-2 pm
10-11 am	12-1 pm	2-3pm
9 Edit Question V	Add Question Logic Move Copy Del	ete
	Add Question Logic Move Copy Del	
9 Edit Question ▼	Add Question Logic Move Copy Del	ete

#### Appendix 2: Questions for Lecturer Feddback

- What is your opinion on the introduction of Wimba class to ESOL students?
- How easy is it for the students to navigate and find the Wimba class on emit?

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- Do you think the students need to up skill in ICT to use the Wimba classroom?
- What are the drawbacks or difficulties of using the online support programme with ESOL students?
- What advantages are there?
- Do you think that the technologies employed were helpful for the students to participate and learn?

## **Appedix 3: Questions for Expert Reviewer**

- Do you think the use of Wimba classroom is the best way to support our remote students?
- What ICT support is in place specifically for e-learning and is this support regularly reviewed?
- Does the institution provide a reliable, secure and up-to date information technology infrastructure that allows for the continuation of this programme?
- What on-going support is available for people new to eLearning?