

The mLearning Project

Life-Changing Biblical Training Delivered on a Mobile Phone

Emmanuel faces a difficult challenge. With more than 20,000 new churches in his part of the world, his seminary in Nairobi cannot effectively equip all the pastors needed to lead these churches.

Brad is a missionary who lives in a rural environment, similar to most of the pastors who need this training. He lives in Tanzania, and it takes him an hour to drive from the closest paved road to his village of 2,000 people. He runs his refrigerator on a kerosene engine, collects rainwater for drinking, and he uses solar panels to provide electricity. Yet he has mobile phone coverage at his house.

There is a solution to Emmanuel's challenge. We can now provide life-changing Biblical training to people like Brad, all delivered on a mobile phone!

How would this work? A pastor attends a short orientation course at the Nairobi International School of Theology (NIST) where he receives a mobile phone (like an iPhone or Motorola Droid) pre-loaded with videos, audio lectures, class notes, and all of the electronic books he needs to complete the course.

He returns home, continues his ministry and job, and studies through the course while he goes about his usual life. When he takes quizzes, the program on his phone sends those results back to NIST over the inexpensive mobile phone network in a text message. He continues working on the course at his own pace until he completes the curriculum. During his study he interacts with other students and with the course instructor using his phone to send text messages and make voice calls.

The course, including mobile phone, costs less than if he took the in-class lecture series, and once he has the phone he can download and take other classes as well. If the course requires tuition, that can also be paid using his phone.

Using this model of Biblical training, NIST can deliver training at a sustainable cost and at a rate that can keep pace with the growth of the church across Africa. If this model works in Africa it may also work in East Asia and South Asia and anywhere else where the growth of spiritual movements outpaces the availability of Biblical training.

The mLearning Trial – February through December 2010

The mLearning Trial will conduct four mobile phone-based learning courses (Institute of Christian Leadership Levels 1, 2, 3, and Old Testament Survey) alongside the same classroom-based learning courses. Between September and November 2010 in Nairobi, Kenya about 40 students will participate in each type course (mobile phone and classroom-based). Comparison and analysis will follow the completion of the courses.

Objectives for the Trial

- Compare mobile phone-based learning to traditional classroom-based learning.
- Determine if the mobile phone technology can adequately deliver training curriculum.
- Determine the costs of using mobile phone-based learning for an existing NIST course.
- Determine sustainable pricing for future mobile phone-based learning courses.
- Learn how students feel about using mobile phone-based learning courses.
- Learn what changes would improve future mobile phone-based learning programs.