

Chapter 21

University Students' Perceptions of Personal Mobile Devices in the Classroom and Policies

Ieda M. Santos

Emirates College for Advanced Education, UAE

Otávio Bochecho

Federal Institute Catarinense, Brazil

ABSTRACT

This chapter discussed the results of a study that explored students' perceptions of personal mobile devices in the classroom and suggestions for policies. Thirty-four students enrolled in two undergraduate courses taught at a Brazilian higher education institution took part in the study. Data collection consisted of a survey and focus group interview. Quantitative data suggested an overall tendency to rare use of the devices for content and non-content activities. Qualitative results, however, showed that students may have used more often their devices in class. The results discussed several policies recommended by the students ranging from allowing the devices for content and emergency to not using social media for off- task activities. The study suggested that inappropriate use of mobile technology in the classroom may be minimized if students participate in the development of policies, and instructors integrate the devices in class to promote engagement and interest among students. Recommendations for practice and future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile technology ownership among university students continues to grow, with more students owning smartphones (Dahlstrom & Bichsel, 2014). Students are increasingly bringing their personal devices to the classrooms. This trend known as “bringing your own device” or BYOD is expected to be progressively adopted by higher education institutions (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2015). Institutions adopting a BYOD model will allow students to use their own devices for learning (Kobus,

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Rietveld, & Van Ommeren, 2013). Research has discussed the educational benefits of a BYOD model in the classroom (e.g. Al-Okaily, 2015; Kong & Song, 2015; Lundin, Lymer, Holmquist, Brown, & Rost, 2010). It is common knowledge, however, that students' devices can potentially disrupt lectures (Sharples, 2002), which is a wide shared concern by many instructors (Graham & Gillies, 2016; Kuznekoff & Titsworth, 2013). Common disruptions discussed in the literature include, for example, phone ringing or vibrating, use of social media such as WhatsApp, and sending or receiving messages (Santos, 2015).

Approaches to manage mobile devices in the classroom are varied ranging from adding guidelines to course syllabus to banning the devices (Bayless, Clipson, & Wilson, 2013; Langmia & Glass, 2014). In addition, many universities may not have a campus-wide BYOD policy (Fulbright, 2013). Without clear policies, students may be uncertain about the appropriate in-class use of their devices (Jackson, 2013). Researchers have investigated BYOD in the classroom with the purpose of understanding disruptions, and exploring policies for appropriate practices (e.g. Jackson, 2013; Tindell & Bohlander, 2012). More research is needed to examine the combination of BYOD usage and policies (Jackson, 2013) to advance knowledge in this field of inquiry. In addition, researchers recommended policy development that considers student and instructor viewpoints (Synnott, 2013).

This book chapter aims to discuss the results of a study that explored students' perceptions of classroom use of mobile devices and recommendations for policies. The study is based on two undergraduate courses taught at a Brazilian higher education institution in the academic year of 2015-2016, and builds on previous work by Santos and Bochecho (2014a). The chapter expects to make a contribution towards the development of BYOD policies for the classroom.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Although the BYOD concept can have different meanings (Sharples et al., 2014), this chapter refers to the practice of students using their own mobile devices to support teaching and learning (Johnson et al., 2015). A BYOD model encompasses smartphones, digital media players, personal digital assistants and tablet computers. These smaller devices are distinct from computer laptops for their high flexibility and mobility (Pegrum, Oakley, & Faulkner, 2013). BYOD can potentially support new forms of learning and teaching opportunities (Sharples et al., 2014). It enables:

...students and educators to leverage the tools that make them most efficient. In many cases, their devices are already populated with productivity apps...helping them to better organize their notes, syllabi, and schedules on campus and beyond. Furthermore, instructors can leverage this mobile device use by implementing polling and other interactive features during class. (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 37)

Despite the learning opportunities afforded by a BYOD model, it also brings challenges to institutions and classrooms that can hinder its effective implementation. It is out of the scope of this chapter to discuss all the challenges. The reader can refer to Santos (2015) who presented a comprehensive review of the challenges while discussing potential solutions. Other researchers like Graham and Gillies (2016), Traxler (2016) and Dahlstrom and diFilipo (2013) further discussed BYOD issues and concerns. This chapter is concerned with students' personal devices that can threaten the "carefully managed environment of the classroom" (Sharples et al., 2014, p.19). Research has shown that students use their devices in the classroom to perform non-content related activities. For example, they can send or receive text

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