Chapter 18
Proactive, Preventive or Indifference?
Reaction Modes of Faculty towards Use of Personal Mobile Devices in Courses

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ABSTRACT

Students enter classes with mobile devices and use them for learning; however, these are also distracting devices. Some teacher educators display positive attitudes; others display negative attitudes, depending on their perception of the advantages and disadvantages of mobile technology for learning. This paper represents findings of a study that examined teacher educators' attitudes towards the use of mobile technology in classes, and their reactions to its use. The study identified three types of reactions: proactive, preventive and indifference. Findings show that teacher educators perceive the benefits of using mobile technology in their classes as outweighing the disadvantages. However, the majority is indifferent, e.g. do not initiate new uses of mobile technologies in class, but do not prevent its usage. A correlation was identified between the lecturers' reactions to uses of mobile technology and the familiarity with its possibilities and potential in class.

INTRODUCTION

The hype of mobile personal devices worldwide has taken in recent years a turn as mobile has extended personal capabilities in ways that were only a couple of decades ago considered science fiction, e.g. wearables. More young people depend on their personal mobile devices for handling their daily tasks. Hence, immediate accessibility to personal data is becoming vital to our personal as well as academic

functioning (Johnson et al., 2014). Higher education students have identified the advantages of mobile devices not long thereafter. Utilization of these devices includes features such as instant and non-instant messaging, searching information via the Internet, multimedia consumption and production, app downloading for personalization of the device etc.; moreover, some devices are relatively affordable, in addition to their portable nature. Hence, all these facilitate their usage in class as well as beyond (Mueller, Wood, De Pasquale & Cruikshank, 2012). In a federal higher education mobile learning initiative, the large-scale deployment of devices was related with high faculty engagement in professional development activities (whether formal and informal) as well as with active student-centered pedagogy. The program also stimulated alternative approaches to the development and evaluation of digital content (Hargis, Cavanaugh, Kamali & Soto, 2014).

In recent years a growing number of local students also use mobile technologies in classes, e.g. laptops, tablets of all sorts or smartphones; these are used as substitutes to the traditional means of taking notes in class (Kurtz & Meishar-Tal, 2013) academic institutes supply infrastructure (i.e. Wi-Fi) that allow free access to the Internet throughout the campuses. Usage of mobile technological means in class enables several advantages to students, such as immediate knowledge organization, access to online information that supports in-class learning, or student communication. These may empower and support the learning process altogether (Sharples, 2000; Traxler, 2007).

This new situation is beneficial for the institute itself: the fact that students arrive with personal mobile devices to class saves a vast amount of resources as an alternative to expenses for the construction of computer labs and their maintenance. In fact, this new situation turns all spaces within the organization into potentially capable of becoming ICT-saturated zones (Emery, 2012; Hamza & Noordin 2013; Nykvist, 2012). For faculty, this may serve as an advantage, since students' accessibility to online information via mobile technologies enables lecturers' usage of these devices in their lessons, thereby creating interest and a variety of learning modes, as well as allowing constructivist pedagogy and active learning) Campbell & Pargas, 2003; Meisha-Tal, 2014).

The literature presents several examples for effective usage of mobile devices for in-class learning, e.g. active learning through interactive surveys (Kohen-Vacs et al., 2012), or using the built-in camera in some mobile devices as well as the microphone and recording devices for documenting learning processes (Benedict & Pence, 2012; Zadok & Meishar-Tal, 2014). Research shows that the implementation of mobile technologies within learning processes by faculty has positive influence on motivation for learning (Rau, Gao & Wu, 2008), as well as on the level of active learning in the lessons (Barak et al. 2006; Melton & Kendall, 2012).

Aside of the advantages of using mobile technologies in class, some disadvantages can be identified as well. The main drawback is the distraction issue: mobile technologies distract the students by creating diversions from the main course of the lesson and creating temptations for students (Barkhuus, 2005; Gehlen Baum & Weinberger, 2012). In a study that examined uses of mobile technologies in lessons, findings suggest that these not only do not contribute to the learning process, but may also harm or hinder it (Fried, 2008). The reason for this finding is the possible difficulty in carrying out multiple cognitive tasks simultaneously (multi-tasking) (Kraushaar & Novak, 2010).

Hence, it is not surprising that many faculty members in higher education hold negative attitudes towards students using mobile devices in their lessons. They see students' uses of these devices as a nuisance, since they pose a competition for their students' attention. Students turn to the screen, instead of focusing on the lecturer, thereby impairing his or her control of the lesson. Students using mobile devices in the lesson are considered by their lecturers as rude and a distraction to themselves and to others

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