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Effects of Use of Mobile Phones on Learning Activities and Social life among University Students in Kenya

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ABSTRACT: The mobile phone is perceived as a useful and important communication tool and has become integral part of our society. Use of mobile phone has gained widespread popularity among university students. Due to the rapid development of mobile phone technology, the device appears capable of contributing to students learning activities and social life. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of use of mobile phone on learning activities and social life among university students in Kenya. The study employed descriptive research design and the questionnaire was used to get required information from the students. The research was carried out in selected universities in Kenya. A total of 120 students having mobile phone were sampled and gave their views regarding the usage of mobile technology in relation to learning experiences and social behavior. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results indicated that mobile phone usage has both positive and negative effects on students learning activities and social lives. The findings of the study may provide information and create awareness among decision makers and education practitioners about the impacts of mobile technology on social life and education outcomes among university students.

KEY WORDS: MOBILE PHONE, NEW TECHNOLOGY, LEARNING ACTIVITIES, SOCIAL LIFE.

I INTRODUCTION

Mobile phone has emerged as one of significant communication technologies of our time (Castells, 2007). Mobile phone plays an important part as a new form of communication technologies in an individual and social life of human and is an integral part of everyday events such that it can be claimed that for many people living without it, is not desirable (Noshahr, Talebi & Mojallal, 2014). Mobile phone usage has had an influence on changing the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours of people. Mobile phone are getting smarter and their usage becoming popular in that university students are using mobile phone as part of their life (Dos, 2014). All the same, mobile phone also referred to as cell phone or cellular phone could be instrumental in incorporating information technology in education because of their ability to aid certain learning styles, ease to use and being inexpensive for the learners who already own the gadget. The mobile phone provide students with immediate, portable access to many of same-education enhancing capabilities as an internet- connected computer such as online information retrieval, file sharing and interacting with lecturers and fellow students (Tao & Yeh, 2013).

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Mobile phones have a variety of features and support services and functions such as texting, messaging, email, internet access, social media, business applications, gaming and photography. Mobile phone provides students with access to these features and as such mobile phones have the potential to reduce the attention students pay to classes when used in the learning settings (Beland & Murphy, 2015). Due to the rapid development of mobile phone technology, the device appears capable of contributing to students learning and improved academic performance. But recent research suggests that many college students perceive the mobile phone primary as leisure device and most commonly use mobile phone for social networking, surfing internet, watching videos and playing games (Lepp & Barkley, 2015). If mobile phones are utilized for leisure rather than education, then cell phones may disrupt learning within academic settings (Levine, Waite & Bowman, 2007).

Mobile phones play a significant role in the development of human civilization and have become an inevitable part of our lives. As an integral part of students daily lives, mobile technology has changed how learners communicate, gather information, allocate time and attention and potentially how they learn (Seilhamer, Chen & Sugar, 2013). The mobile platform's unique capabilities including connectivity, cameras, sensors and GPS have great potential to enrich the academic experience (Seilhamer *et al*; 2013). Mobile technology gives students a collaborative platform in which to brainstorm ideas and document their work using text and images. The ever-growing mobile landscape thus represents new opportunities for learners both inside and outside the classroom (Chen, Seilhamer, Sugar & Jin, 2013). The mobile phone can be a remarkable powerful educational tool in that it can alert students to study, provide instant, on-demand answers and provide great way to record and capture information.

While mobile phones may be a powerful learning resource, mobile technology still has negative influence on the students' psychological mind and social communication. Mobile phones are being used to violate privacy, bully and harass others. The other possible negative outcomes of mobile phone use includes that users may encounter sleep disturbances, decreased attention, shortness of temper and symptoms of depression. Consistent use of phone can cause a chain of reaction, affecting one aspect of users' life and expanding to contaminate the rest. It usually starts with social disorders, which can lead to depression and stress and ultimately affect lifestyle habits such as sleeping and eating right (Thomee, Harenstam & Hagberg, 2011). Also Turkle (2011) in her research observed the change on conversation style from face-to-face to text based conversation that trigger to social behavior change regarding communication. Increased use of mobile phone can lead to increased time on mobile communication, increased restlessness, adverse effects on relationships, more careless lifestyles and anxiety if separated from mobile phone.

According to Rich Ling (2003), the mobile phone has fundamentally affected our society, accessibility, safety and security, coordination of social and business activities and use of public places. Awaz (2008) also found out that mobile phone affects the social life and health of all society members as well as university students like increase in decline of moral values and free relationships in the young generation. According to Fortunati (2002), cell phone not only changes aspects of social life but alters even the framework that society functions under. The mobile phone allows students to actively carry on their life outside university while still physically in university like communicating with friends and relatives, coordinating plans and activities or simply distracting themselves from boring lectures.

In spite of all the criticisms and negative connotations, mobile phone are very effective in education in that they can make a lot of positive contribution to education (Kaufman, 2009). Mobile phone usage in education enables new learning opportunities and ensures supportive activities like sharing educational materials, connect to academic resources and interaction among learners without any significant cost. While there is important evidence in the developing world that mobile phones impact educational outcomes by facilitating increased access, much less evidence exists as to how use of mobile phone impacts on learning

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experiences and social behaviour among university students. Thus the study aimed at investigating the effects of use of mobile phones on learning activities and social life among university students in Kenya.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Mobile phone use such as texting, surfing the internet, playing games and using social media has become the norm within university classrooms and during academic related activities. Mobile phone is viewed as vital for conversation, entertainment and preserving memories. Despite the extensive use of mobile phone by university students and the heated debate over acceptable use policies and standards, the effects of use of mobile phone on learning activities and social life has not yet been academically studied. Hence this study investigated the effects of use of mobile phone on learning activities and social life among university students.

1.2 Objective

The objective of the study was to examine the effects of use of mobile phone on learning activities and social life among university students in Kenya.

II METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey research and in particular descriptive research design. The survey research is often used to assess thought, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, feelings and behaviours trends (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Jeanne, 2011). Survey research is used because it allows researchers to gather accurate information about a large number of people using a small sample. It is also an effective, cheap and efficient method for systematically collecting data from a broad spectrum of individuals and educational settings.

The actual sample size was 120 university students that were purposefully sampled in selected universities in Kenya. The 120 university students from the four years of study were surveyed for the purposes of data collection. The instrument used in the study was questionnaire which had three sections. The first section included students profile, section two sought information about use of phone in learning activities, and section three sought insights about the learners' social behavior in relation to mobile usage. The questionnaire was administered to the students by the researchers.

All the information from the students' questionnaire was summarized and analyzed before being interpreted. The analysis and interpretation focused on the objective of the study. The data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The results were tabulated and summarized in graphs and tables.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents research findings in line with the objective of the study.

3.1 Profile of the Respondents

Information obtained on demographic variables of the respondents focused on their gender, age and marital status. Out of the 120 students who participated in the study half of them (50%) were male and the other half were female. This depicts the presence of gender balance with regard to the respondents in the study. The respondents' age ranged from 18 years to 26 years and the mean age was 21 years. A total of 78% of the students' age was between 19 years to 23 years. On the marital status, 94% of the students were single while 6% of the students were married. None of the students indicated that he or she had divorced. This implies that the students are using mobile phone as a means of communication to increase the opportunity to maintain, organise and nurture their relationships in building their social relations. This is consistent with findings of the research by Kibona and Mgaya (2015) whose participants were of age between 20 and 25 years and mostly were still not

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married so they use the mobile phone to strengthen their relationships or find relationships through social networking sites.

A total of 72% of the students reported that they have owned the mobile phone for longer than four years. Out of this, 38% of the students were students in their fourth year of study. This may be due to the fact that they have stayed for more years after completing secondary school. On how the students acquired the mobile phone, 66% of the students indicated they bought for themselves while 21% of the students reported they were bought by the parents. This suggests that the students find the importance and value of mobile phones. The students perceive the mobile phone as useful and important communication tool. When the students were asked how often they top up the credit in the mobile phone, 46% of the students indicated just one day. A total of 17% of the students stated that they top up or bill up in less than a day. This means that the university students frequently top up their mobile phone meaning that they use their mobile phone quite often.

3.2 Use of Mobile Phone in Relation to Students' Learning Activities

The students were asked whether they make or receive calls when studying and the response are shown on the figure 1.

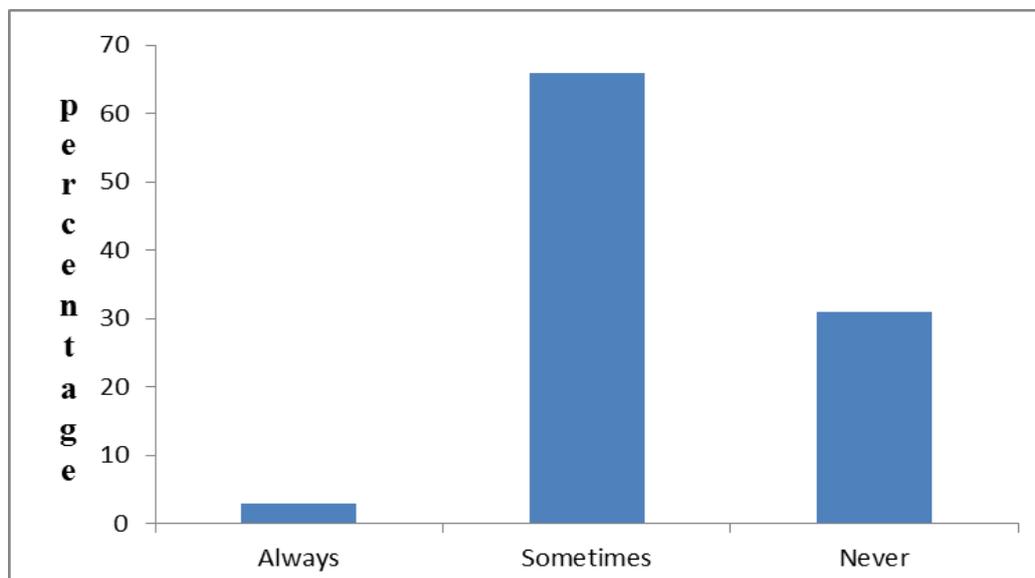


Figure 1: Students Responses on whether they Make or Receive Calls when Studying

Majority of the students (66%) indicated that they sometimes make or receive calls when studying while 31% said they never do that and a small percentage (3%) always make or receive calls during study time. The students who sometimes make or receive calls, 29% of the students are those in their fourth year of study. A total of 26% of students reported that the calls they make or receive are not related to learning activities. This alludes that the students neglect their learning activities as they make or receive calls yet educational activities should be their priority.

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When students are in class, 83% of the students reported that their mobile phones are in silent mode, 12% of the students put off while 5% of the students keep the mobile phone normal. This implies that especially those students who keep their mobile phone normal, it reduces the attention to learning activities and there may be no effective listening. Regarding to what the students do to their mobile phone while in self-study, 53% of the students keep their mobile phone in silent mode, 37% of students keep normal while 10% put off their mobile phone. Among the students who keep their phone normal, 54% are students in their fourth year of study while 27% of the students are in their first year of study. This insinuates that the learners especially those who keep their phones normal may have divided attention. The results agree with the findings of Hatch (2011) who posits that as one get immersed in mobile technology, all activities associated with it become a constant distraction from other important activities such as self-study in that the learners focus on many things at one time without paying full attention on any single thing.

A total of 72% of the students stated that they do send or receive text messages as they study while 28% of the students do not. Around 42% of the students reply the text immediately they receive them while 58% of the students do not reply the text messages immediately. This suggests that the students especially those who send or receive text messages during self-study do not pay full attention to their studies or ignore the major task of self-study.

Regarding to whether the students respond to text messages while in lectures, 30% of the students indicated they respond while the majority (70%) of students stated they do not respond. For the 30% of the students who respond to texts messages while in class, it implies that mobile phone reduces their sustained attention to learning activities due to uncontrollable use. The findings of this study resonate with the findings of Wei, Wang and Klausner (2012) who asserted that the texts potentially come to the expense of learning, as texting during class reduces students' ability to self-regulate and give sustained attention to classroom tasks. Tindell and Bohlander (2012) in their research argued that college students frequently use their mobile phone during class time despite rules against doing so. Also Strivastara (2005) noted that students often receive text messages during their classes. The usage of mobile phone in lecture room may cause the students to either not pay full attention in lecture or to miss some instruction from lecturers. Jacobsen and Forste (2011) confirmed that it is common behavior for university students to bring mobile phones to the learning institution and use the phone while studying or listening to the lecturers.

About the number of calls the respondents receive per day, 87% of the students indicated they receive 1 to 10 calls while 13% reported they receive 11 to 30 calls. Out of these who receive 1 to 10 texts 26% of students were students in their first year of study and 25% were students in their second year of study. When the students were asked how many text messages they receive per day, 37% of the students receive above 50 texts, 15% of students receive 31 to 50 and 23% receive 11 to 30 texts. A total of 70% of learners receive 11 texts and above per day. In comparison, it is evident that students mainly use text messaging as a preferred medium of choice of communication. There is reduced use of calls but very high use of text messages which may be due to the fact that the text messages are cheap, simple, precise and instant yet distinct. The results concur with the findings of research survey conducted at the University of Colorado and several other universities in 2010 that found out that text messaging and emailing are two of the most commonly used functions in mobile phone among college students (Dean, 2012). Jordaan and Surujlal (2014) reported that participants in their study found it easier to express their feelings better by texting than by voice mails.

The participants were asked which categories of applications they use most frequently, 33% of the students indicated they use social media, 30% of students surf the internet, 16% of students listen to music, 9% of students read the e-books, 4% of students photography while 8% of students are involved in gaming. The highest percentage of students uses mobile phone on social media more than any other application. This insinuates that the students keep their social life active communicating to friends through social media which

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may lead to social network addiction. There is also evidence that the students use mobile phone to surf internet for research and academic materials for educational purposes while others read the e-books. Engel and Green (2011) confirmed that students used their mobile phone to look up information on the internet as and when the need arose in class. Thus some students have embraced the educational power of mobile phone and may result to positive impact on learning activities. Also majority of the respondents indicated they use their mobile phone for leisure while 32% of students reported they use their devices for academic activities. The findings concur with Lepp, Li and Barkley (2015) who revealed that many college students perceive the mobile phone primarily as a leisure device, and most commonly use phones for social networking, surfing the internet, watching videos and playing games.

Majority (89%) of students use the short form words when writing text message while 11% indicated they do not use. Around 65% of students confirmed that the short word form that they are used to do not affect them in examination, 20% of students are sometimes affected while 15% of the students acknowledged that they are affected in the examinations by having the tendency to write words in examinations in non-standard language. The short word form erodes the students' ability to use and write proper language hence promote poor grammar and hampers development of language skills. It was also observed that use of texting as a form of communication erodes the learners ability to write sentences that communicate real meaning and inhibit the art of dialogue. The results are also in line with the empirical findings of the study by Amin, Rashed and Umair (2014) who asserted that use of short language during SMS texting had much negative impacts on writing mechanics such as grammar, syntax and punctuation. Quraishi (2008) also noted that students write the abbreviations while messaging to others and when the habit has been developed they use the same abbreviations in solving the papers in examinations.

The students revealed that they use their mobile phone to contact their lecturers and classmates to discuss the educational matters. Out of the students sampled, 54% of them indicated they sometimes use while 46% reported they always use their phones to make contact their lecturers or classmates for useful information concerning their learning activities.

A total of 69% of students revealed that sometimes the mobile phone disrupts, 27% of students said that mobile phone never disrupts while 4% of students pointed out that the mobile phones always disrupts them in their study activities. The responses of the students to whether mobile phone disrupts their study activities according to their year of study are shown on Figure 2.

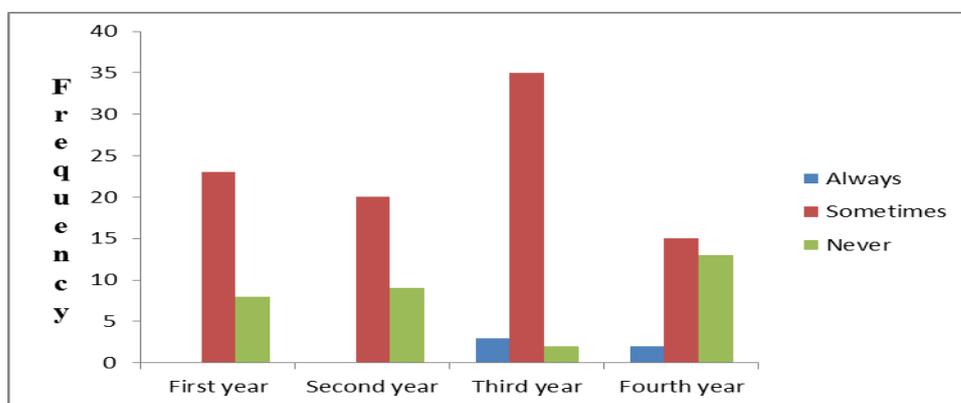


Figure 2: Students Responses to whether Mobile Phone Disrupts their Study Activities

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Out of those students who are sometimes disrupted by mobile phone, 30% of them are students in their fourth year of study, 24% in their third year of study, 18% in their second year of study and 28% of them were students in their first year of study. This indicates that the mobile phone reduce the attention of students need to pay in their study activities for the phone engages the student. It implies that mobile phone have a negative impact on students through constant distraction and may compromise their study activities. The students lose focus on study and also lose track of time on important responsibilities.

The students highlighted several ways in which the mobile phones make it hard for them to focus on their studies such as wastage of time on social media, disrupts them when on self-study, distracts them in class as they receive and attends to text and calls. The mobile phone also lowers the students concentration span and divert their attention from the academic programs. This implies that the student focus their attention to mobile phone usage while their academic activities are neglected. The findings of the study coincides with Ansari (2007) who found out that mobile phone has a number of negative and unhealthy impact and effects on students' performance at the university level, including wastage of time and money. Hayat, Arshad and Hussain (2014) provided evidence that mobile phone has several disadvantages to students such as wasting time, surfing illegal sites and spending time on watching immoral materials.

3.3 Use of Mobile Phone in Relation to Students' Social Life

The students were asked whether mobile phone disrupts their daily routine like sleeping late at night or waking up very early. A total of 62% of the students established that mobile phone disrupts their daily routine while 38% of the learners were not disrupted. The responses for the students in the various years of study are given on Table 1.

Response	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
YES	16	22	17	23	19	25	22	30
NO	15	33	13	28	10	22	08	17

Out of the students who are disrupted, 30% of them were students in their fourth year of study while 26% of those students are in their third year of study. this implies that a majority of students (62%) lack sleep or wake up early as a result of mobile phone usage in that some students tend to change their sleeping habits. the results resonate with the findings of Nathan and Zeitzer (2013) who observed some behaviours associated with nocturnal mobile phone use that might be linked to prolonged fatigue, such as staying up late to use the phone. Anderson (2003) also noted that some young people's sleep is disturbed when friends call them on mobile phone to talk or when a text message is deposited.

Majority of the students (70%) stated that they feel anxious when they are not receiving replies from their friends while 30% of the students indicated they do not feel anxious. When students were asked whether the absence of mobile phone cause the students stress and anxiety, the responses of the students are shown on Figure 3.

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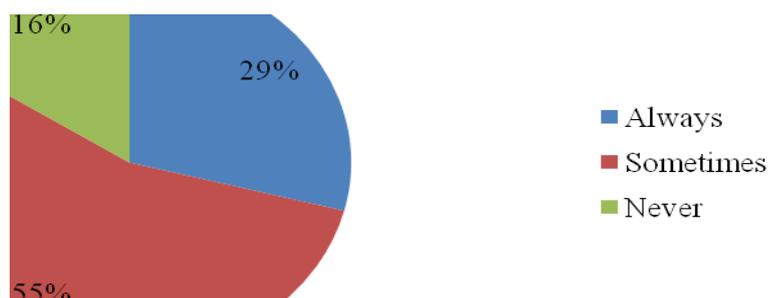


Figure 3: Students Responses to whether Mobile Phone cause them Stress and Anxiety

A large proportion (55%) of students stated that sometimes the absence of mobile phone cause them stress and anxiety. this implies that the mobile phone has impact on the learners feelings. A high percentage of students (77%) of students reported that their lives cannot proceed normally without mobile phones while 23% of the students revealed that their lives are unaffected and will proceed normally without mobile phone. This alludes that some students are dependent of the mobile phone in that they are addicted to it so they feel and believe that the phone are part and parcel of their lives. Lep *et al* (2015) showed that high frequency mobile users tended to have high anxiety and lower satisfaction with life relative to their peers who used the mobile phone less often. Also Jones (2014) contends that students provided evidence of feeling disconnected, naked and stressed when they did not carry their mobile phone due to the fact that students liked being in touch and receive information within seconds.

Around 53% of the students highlighted that they have ever received threatening or hostile text messages while 47% acknowledged that they have never received any intimidating message. The mobile phone may have impact on the social interactions among the learners. Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) noted that bullying using technology is a phenomena which children and adolescents seem to be increasingly using to harm others. Shibly, Riswan and Irfan (2014) further notes that students tease others by sending missed calls and messages from unknown or private numbers. Also the students waste their precious time and money in talking and gossiping on meaningless topics with their friends. Haste (2005) had the same opinion that peer-to-peer mobile communication may include acts of malice and intimidation.

Finally, when the students were asked to reveal the effects of mobile phone to their learning activities and social life they pointed both positive and negative impacts. The positive effects of mobile phones were like communication is easier, keeps one busy and avoid boredom, a source of useful information and new ideas, storing educational materials, sharing information and also scanning academic materials. The negative effects of mobile phone included time consuming and wasting productive time, disruption during lecture and self study, reduce concentration in learning, texting, chatting and gaming are addictive, uneconomical due to spending a lot of money topping up, being absentminded especially when on social media, procrastination of study activities, causes anxiety, too much interruptions among others. Since the mobile phones may be useful or

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distractive to the students, there is need for the learners to be cautious so that they use the mobile phone to enhance their learning activities and social life.

IV CONCLUSION

The mobile phones have positive and negative effects on students learning activities and social life thus learners need to create a felicitous balance between mobile phone usage, attention to their learning activities and their social lives. Educators can explore the potential contributions of mobile phone for academic work for effective learning and instruct students on areas such as surfing the internet to access educational materials, reading e-books and photography to promote learning. Due to the variety of features that the mobile phones have such as calculator, storage, dictionary, thesaurus and clock, the students can use it as an effective and powerful educational tool in learning to impact educational outcomes. Instead of the learners engaging in antisocial behaviours, the students may use the mobile phone to improve the social interactions among themselves in order to strengthen their social lives, heighten social awareness and enhance social contacts.

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