

## REFEREED ARTICLE

### Changing our Mindset in Regards to Cellphones in the Classroom

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#### **Abstract**

*Cell phone use is on the rise with teenagers, and is causing some educational issues that are concerning. Students are suffering from nomophobia, which leads to attention issues and stress and anxiety, as well as poor decision making in regards to cellphones. Educators must recognize the problems that cell phones are causing and work to find ways to solve these problems. Educators need learning opportunities that will change their mindset on cell phones. Eventually, educators will understand the educational benefits of incorporating cell phones into the classroom. Updating school policies and classroom expectations will ensure appropriate use of cell phones.*

As students prepare for a school day, they pack their books, lunches, and most importantly their cellphones for the day ahead (Schreiner, 2018). On average, adolescents spend approximately eight hours a day on devices with access to media (Tang & Patrick, 2018, p. 34). I have noticed in my own classroom that students have become increasingly dependent on their phones, which is causing the students to be distracted during class lectures. It appears that students are dealing with a modern phenomenon called nomophobia. Nomophobia is the fear of not being able to use one's phone or the many apps that these devices now offer (Tams, Legoux, & Léger, 2018). Nomophobia leads to other issues, including the inability to focus, stress and anxiety, and the inappropriate use of cellular devices. The adults who work with these students need to change their mindset on cellphones, and look at ways to incorporate these phones in class, rather than banning them. Schools should consider updating their policies on cellphone use, and teachers should set their classroom expectations very early in the school year (Harriman, 2017). Teachers must become familiar with cell phone technology and find ways to incorporate phones as academic tools (Christenson & Knezek, 2018).

#### **Problems That Arise From Nomophobia**

Cell phone dependency and use are facing students with a variety of problems, including inability to focus, stress and anxiety, and the inappropriate use of cellular devices. One major concern for classroom teachers is that cell phones may threaten classroom learning because of the effects they are having on students' ability to focus (Mendoza, Pody, Lee, Kim, & McDonough, 2018). In order to have optimal attention, students need to focus on one task at a time. However, the younger generation has become more accustomed to multitasking in their daily lives and in the classroom setting. Although multitasking appears as completing multiple actions at once, realistically it is better described as task switching (Hayashi & Blessington, 2018), which has tremendous cognitive costs (Mendoza et al, 2018). When students are distracted by their cellphones, they begin multitasking between classroom activities and addressing the phone. Poorer academic performance and lower cognitive control are two ways in which students who are distracted by cellphones are being affected (Hayashi & Blessington, 2018). In studies that tested the proximity of a cellphone and its effects, the results showed that the closer the cellphone was to the students, the poorer cognitive functioning was (Watson, 2017). Hearing a phone ring or a notification signal, regardless to whom the phone belonged, was also found to distract students in the classroom (Mendoza et al., 2018). In summary, if the

presence of phones or a notification signal can so easily distract our students, then there will be real harm to their academic success (Watson, 2017).

Another area of concern is the stress and anxiety of students who experience nomophobia. This phobia leads students to believe that they are losing access to information, connectedness, or communication (Tams et al., 2018). They therefore experience anxiety or distress when they are without their phones for long periods of time. The reason these strong emotions occur is that students have become socially dependent on having their phones (Mendoza et al., 2018). They are uncertain when they will get to look at their phone again or they feel as though they have lost control, which causes them great stress (Tams et al., 2018). It takes approximately 10 minutes for students to begin to feel anxiety in these situations, which is about the capacity of their attention span (Mendoza et al., 2018, p. 53). The dependency they have on their phones is explained as FOMO: “fear of missing out” (Mendoza et al., 2018, p. 53). Overall, the stress and anxiety these students are having in regards to their phones will cause negative consequences, including reduced mental well-being and diminished productivity (Tams et al., 2018).

Interestingly, students are aware that texting or being on their phones during class may have negative consequences because it is inappropriate, unprofessional, rude, and distracting (Hayashi & Blessington, 2018). The reason they choose to be on the phone, despite knowing the consequences, is that there is an instant gratification to it. This gratification is what they focus on, rather than looking ahead into the future and thinking about the good grades they might earn on an exam if they focus in this moment on classroom materials (Hayashi & Blessington, 2018). To these young students, the cellphone is their key to friendship, social status, or self-image (Ong, 2010, p. 69). Society has led them to believe that immediacy in response is critical to their social standing, dependent upon their being reachable no matter the time or place (Ong, 2010). Feeling the need to respond immediately has detrimental effects within the classroom setting (Tatum, Olson, & Frey, 2018). First, students are not developing relationships with students within the classroom because they are so focused on connecting with the outside world. Second, they are choosing not to engage fully in a classroom lecture, which hinders their learning process. Students ultimately believe that their phones are not interfering with their classroom experience, but in reality the interference is happening (Watson, 2017). Students will continue to choose texting at inappropriate times rather than listening to a lecture because of the instant gratification it provides (Schreiner, 2018). Lack of focus, extreme stress and anxiety, and inappropriate use of devices are all problems resulting from student dependency on cell phones.

### **Changing Our Mindset To Prevent Nomophobia**

Recognizing that there is a present phenomenon called nomophobia, teachers need to change their mindset and incorporating phones in class, update policies and classroom expectations, and find ways to use phones as academic tools, in order to reduce the negative effects caused by it. Older teachers, especially, need to adjust their mindset to focus on the fact that cellphones offer flexible learning and collaboration, and work to incorporate these phones into the everyday classroom (Christensen & Knezek, 2018), because having cell phones for personal use does not mean that teachers know how to use cell phones effectively in the classroom. If proper training is offered to teachers, they will become comfortable with the phones, and will be more likely to change their classroom instruction to include cell phones (O’Bannon & Thomas, 2015). If teachers move away from the lecture style of teaching, and instead roam around and constantly engage with students, these students are more likely to engage in academically related cell phone use (Harriman, 2017). Given time and training, teachers may see the benefit of incorporating cell phones, and have a changed mindset.

If cell phones are to be included as an instructional tool, it is important to update school policies and lay out clear classroom expectations for students. Although most schools have policies in place that ban cellphones, teachers find them are ineffective because most students

use their phones throughout the school day regardless of the policy (Gao, Yan, Zhao, Pan, & Mo, 2014). Therefore, it is in the best interest of schools, teachers, and students to lift the bans and reassess the policies (O'Bannon & Thomas, 2015). When making changes to a school cell phone policy, it would be in the best interest of school staff to include students in the discussion (Ormiston, n.d.). Including students in the planning process will alleviate stress because they feel more in control, which will help prevent nomophobia (Tams et al., 2018). Once a new policy is developed, a contract should be created for students to sign. This contract should include the consequences students will face if they break the new cell phone policy (Harriman, 2017). As this new policy is implemented, students should be reminded daily what appropriate cellphone use looks like and the consequences of rules being broken (Ormiston, n.d.). Students are more likely to respond positively to policies if they perceive that teachers are on board with the school policies and classroom expectations being enforced (Tatum et al., 2018).

With a changed mindset and improved policies, teachers can begin to plan how they will incorporate cell phones as academic tools. Teachers will now have the ability to differentiate and personalize learning opportunities (O'Bannon & Thomas, 2015) with cell phones whose features are already familiar to the students (Ormiston, n.d.). These personal devices can assist in student organization, overall participation, and the flexibility to connect to information in any setting (O'Bannon & Thomas, 2014). Teachers should encourage students to use their phones to record important dates so that they remember their homework, assignment, test, and project deadlines (Harriman, 2017). There are several organizational tools on phones, including calendars, clock/alarms, and downloaded homework apps (O'Bannon & Thomas, 2015). Student engagement can be improved by allowing students to use their phones to respond to questions, polls, or website quizzes (Harriman, 2017). Audio/video recording lessons, using the camera, accessing the internet, or downloading educational apps are also ways to engage students (O'Bannon & Thomas, 2014). These phones also offer flexibility because teachers can connect with students both inside and outside the classroom setting (Christensen & Knezek, 2018). In my own classroom, all students are on Google Classroom, where I upload assignments, rubrics, and test dates. If they download this app on their phones, they will receive notifications when I update classroom, or they can turn in their assignments from wherever they are. These academic tools are a quick snapshot of the many beneficial uses of cell phones in the classroom. With a changed mindset about incorporating phones, updated policies and classroom expectations, and an understanding of the many academic tools that phones offer, it is likely that teachers can alleviate the problems resulting from nomophobia.

## **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, inappropriate cell phone use in the classroom obstructs the focus of students, which leads to poorer academic outcomes (Hayashi & Blessington, 2018). If cell phone use is limited or monitored, students feel that their freedom is being threatened (Tatum et al., 2018). Limitation, in turn, leads to high stress and anxiety because students feel the need to respond immediately so that they do not ruin their social status or connections with friends (Ong, 2010). Students also fail to recognize the consequences of their actions and will continue to use devices inappropriately (Schreiner, 2018). The impact that negative cell phone use is having on students is a major concern. It is crucial that educators consider solutions to these problems while being aware of nomophobia and the strong emotions it causes for students. Teachers are the ones who control technology integration in the classroom, and they need opportunities to become more familiar with the features of a phone. Familiarity and comfort with technology may change their mindset and encourage them to create lessons that incorporate cellphones (O'Bannon & Thomas, 2014). If teachers are planning to include cell phones in their daily practice, schools need to develop effective policies that regulate negative behaviours and maximize the positive impacts of phones (Gao et al., 2014). Several features on phones can be used as academic tools in the classroom if they are used properly. With careful planning and

integration of phones as a learning tool, schools and teachers have the ability to prevent the modern day phenomenon, nomophobia, from affecting their students.

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