Impact of Whatsapp Messenger on the Performance of Students at Tertiary Institutions in Southern Sierra Leone

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ABSTRACT

It is now evidently clear that with the emergence of social network and advanced technological messaging functionalities, students in Njala University Department of Physics and Computer Science are more likely to rely on WhatsApp messenger application for their day-to-day communications than any other social networking sites (SNSs). Because of some of the advantages WhatsApp messenger has like cost efficiency, effective, quick and easier mode of communication, confidential, and convenient usage are some of the major factors which might influence their decision to use it. Thus, the objective of the study was to investigate the impact of WhatsApp messenger on the academic performance of students in tertiary institutions (A study of Njala University Department of Physics and Computer Science, School of Technology) in 2014/2015 academic year. Both primary data and secondary data were used. A structured questionnaire was employed to collect data from a sample of 50 students in five different programs within the School of Technology in which 40% were male and 60% were female. The study revealed that majority of respondents used WhatsApp messenger for making friends and chatting. In addition, majority of respondents experienced negative effects such as poor grammar and spelling, less study time and poor academic performance due to the heavy participation on social media networks. Furthermore, there was a high addiction rate among students in the usage of social media networks especially WhatsApp messenger. Nevertheless, there were cases where others experienced improvement in their readings skills as a result of participation on social media networks. Also, respondents shared ideas, discussed and shared examination questions among themselves on WhatsApp messenger. The study recommended the stringent enforcement of the administration of Njala University rule on electronic device usage in schools, promotion of social media usage for academic purpose, counseling for addicted students and the use of the right grammar and spelling when participating on social networks.

Introduction

The 21st century is the revolutionary period where in technology does not really matter when it comes to accessibility and cost. It is a rare phenomenon where we cannot go or do without technology. Every day comes with its own advancement in terms of variety of tools or gadgets in using technology. It is now like a fundamental right to every individual to have access to such facilities in that when you deprive people of their right to live in dignity, to hope for a better future, to have control over their lives, when you deprive them of that choice, then you expect them to fight for these rights.[2]

In education, technology can be a life-changer, a game changer, for kids who are both in school and out of school. Technology can bring textbooks to life. The Internet can connect students to their peers in other parts of the world. It can bridge the quality gaps [3]. Using the social media as a tool of technology, the research tries to see the impact of WhatsApp messenger on the performance of students in tertiary institutions; a study of Njala University Department of Physics and Computer Science, School of Technology, as a case study.

WhatsApp is one of the changes in technology that is commonly used on specific mobile phones and computers [4]

Social media is a catalyst for the advancement of everyone's rights. It's where we're reminded that we're all human and all equal. It's where people can find and fight for a cause, global or local, popular or specialized, even when there are hundreds of miles between them. With the emergence of sophisticated devices like android phones, smart phones, tablets, WhatsApp messenger has potentially been dominant in terms of usage amongst students. The service is free for one year and after that a very small amount is charged yearly 99.5 percent of the people that walk around and say they are a social media expert or guru are clowns. We are going to live through a devastating social media bubble [5]. This means there is no monopoly in the technology world that a person can boast of being the know-all.

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Background to the Study

E-learning aims to deliver instruction to students not present in the classroom. It provides access to learning resources when the instructor and students are separated by time, distance or both [10]. E-learning is considered to be a new concept covering a variety of applications, learning processes and learning methods [11]. It includes a variety of technological applications, processes, audio and video. The e-learning process designed and developed by online instructors is the node of the e-learning system [12]. A well-structured learning environment must facilitate the user in connecting different tools to build, share and improve his/her level of knowledge with a variety of learning models [13]. Learning is the outcome of social interactions between students in collaborative learning activities. Activities can include sharing through mobile devices, such as discussion forums [14], which can be used for knowledge construction sharing [15]. The construction of knowledge is based on social interactions between online students [16]. Learning can also be influenced by multiple variables, including the cognitive and psychological state of the learner, teacher professionalism and nature and complexity of the pedagogical approach.

This research aims to explore the impact of WhatsApp messenger on the performance of students in tertiary institutions; Njala University Department of Physics and Computer Science, School of Technology.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Study Area

Njala University (NU) began as Njala University College (NUC) in 1964 as an Agricultural based university, with its first set of students admitted in 1965. It was part of the University of Sierra Leone until in 2005 when the promulgation of the University Act,[source] the College together the Bo Teachers College, the School of Hygiene and the Paramedical School in Bo, constituted Njala University as an autonomous body. It has other tertiary institutions that are affiliated with it such as the Bonthe Technical Training College (BONTECH), Institute of Accounting, Management and Technology (IAMTECH). It is now comprised of two campuses; the Bo Campus and Njala Campus. [source]

Population, Sample selection and Sample size

The population for the research work was drawn from the Njala University in Southern Sierra Leone, using the School of Technology at the Main Campus in Njala. A total sample size of fifty (50) was selected at random. From the School of Technology, 10 students were drawn from each of the programs. These programs are: Business Information Technology, Computer Science, Higher Diploma in Data Processing, Hardware & IT, Ordinary Diploma Data Processing, Hardware & IT and Energy Studies).

Method of Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected. The descriptive analysis tools in the SPSS were employed to develop tables and frequencies which were constructively analyzed. Data collected from the interview was also analyzed and organized under the objective of the study. These were merged with related responses from the questionnaire during the analysis.

FINDING: RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Frequency of Internet Usage

	Frequency	Percent
Very Often	16	32.0
Often	20	40.0
Seldom	14	28.0
Total	50	100.0

On the use of internet among the respondents, the table above shows that 16 of them (32%) very often use the internet; 20 of them (40%) often use the internet; 14 of them (28%) seldom use the internet.
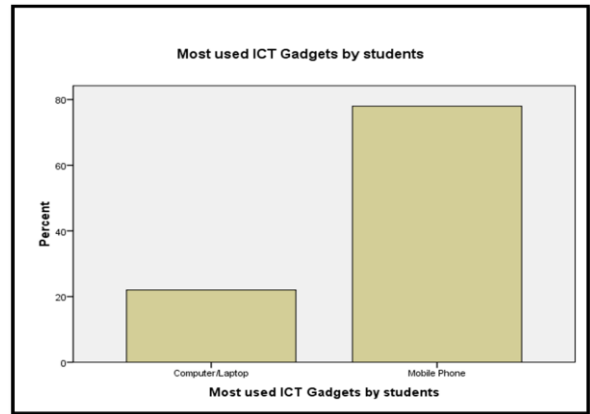

Figure 1. Most Used ICT Gadget by Students.

We can see from fig 1. that only 11 students used computer/Laptop to access the internet especially social media which accounts for 22% whilst 39 students used mobile phones which is 78% of the total respondents. Meaning, students used mobile phones more than computer/laptop to access the internet when they want to use the social media especially WhatsApp messenger.
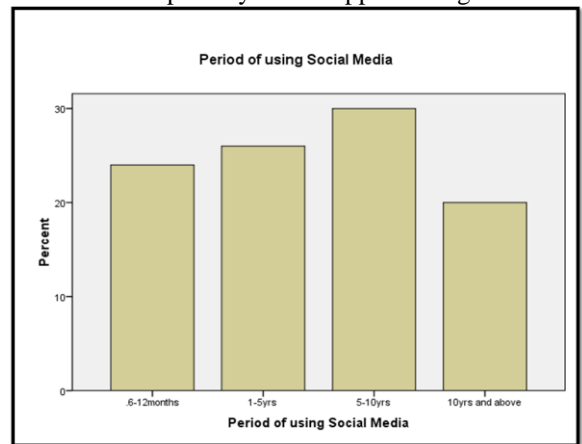

Figure 2. Period of Using Social Media.

Figure 2 demonstrates that 24% of respondents have being using social media for the period of 6-12 months; 26% for the period of 1-5 years; 30% for the period of 5-10 years and 20% of respondents using social media for the period of 10 years and above.
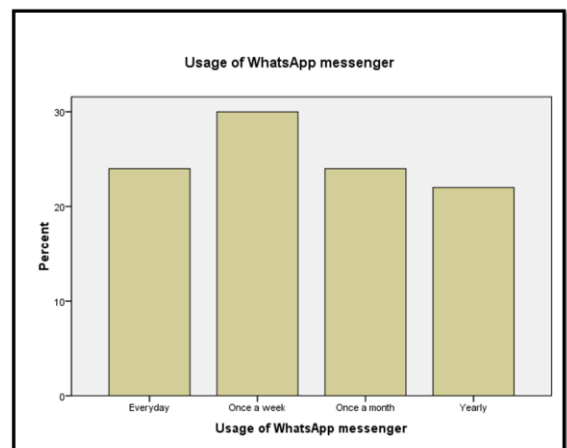

Figure 3. Usage of Whatsapp Messenger by Students.

Figure 3 shows that 12 students used the App everyday which is 24%; 15 of them used it once a week which is 30%; again 12 of them used it once a month which is 24% and

11 of them used it once a year which is 22% of the students. This shows that the use of WhatsApp messenger amongst students is habitual
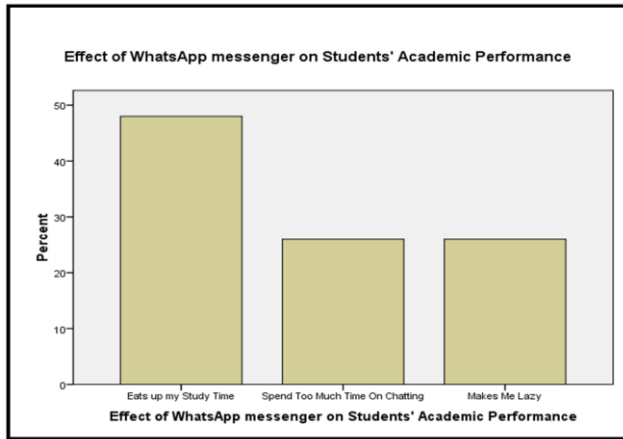

Figure 4. Effect of WhasApp messenger on students' academic performance.

Effect of the use of WhatsApp messenger on students' academic performance is portrayed in figure 4.2.15 above which shows that 24 (48%) of students say WhatsApp messenger eats up their study time; whilst 13 (26%) say they spend too much time on chatting and also, 13 (26%) says it makes them lazy.
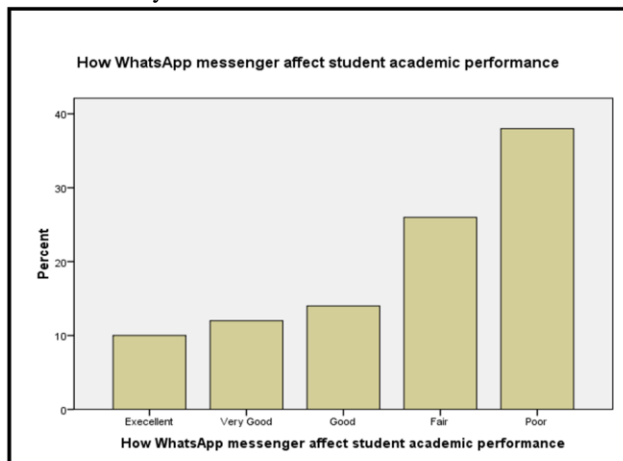

Figure 5. How WhatsApp messenger Affects Student's Academic Performance.

We can see from figure 5, which clearly shows that out of 50 respondents for this research work, 5 (10%) of them perform with excellence in their academic work; 6 (12%) were very good; 7 (14%) were good; 13 (26%) fairly perform and 19 (38%) poorly perform in their academic pursuit.

Conclusion

Most students within the School of Technology Njala University Department of Physics and Computer Science have access to internet which is the gateway to social networking sites like WhatsApp messenger and WhatsApp messenger is an easy and cheaper way to interact with friends and family. Students normally use this site during lectures and study time which creates distraction for them leading to poor academic performance.

This medium negatively affects their grammar and spelling because, short words like HW r u? (for 'how are you'?), Gud mornin' (for 'Good morning') etc.

Students spend most of their precious studying time in 'sapping' as they call it instead of reading which brings a serious setback in their academic performance because they cannot create a set of scale between the WhatsApp messenger usage and their academic pursuance. Most students use their mobile phones to access this social media networking site more frequently within the university campus which is the main cause of academic distraction.

Anything that has an advantage also has a disadvantage in life. After all the findings and deliberations at the Njala University Department of Physics and Computer Science School of Technology, it is crystal clear that the use of social media in regards to WhatsApp messenger has being a focal problem solving medium, like making it easier and faster to communicate whilst to others it is a way of retrogressing their inner self ability to develop academically like the use of broken grammar, less study time and time for unnecessary materials as seen in this research piece. It is therefore prudent upon the students to wisely take the good part of WhatsApp messenger and try to improve their learning skills.