Student Usage and Perceptions of Digital Devices in the Classroom and while Driving
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Introduction

In the age of technology, the use of electronic devices in our day to day lives is nothing unusual. However, its use isn't without controversy, as in the case of laws restricting usage while operating a motorized vehicle or university and professor policy on use during classroom activities.

A previous study looked at student usage of electronic devices such as laptops, cell phones, and tablets in the classroom, focusing on six universities in the Midwestern United States (McCoy, 2013). The survey found that most students admitted to using their devices during lecture, while also illuminating their opinion on its effect on their performance, the distraction it caused, and what policies professors should have in place regarding use.

This study sought to determine the attitudes held by Central Washington University students towards the usage of electronic devices, while also looking at their usage in a second area of contention: their cars. Student answered questions about their perceptions and usage in both areas. In the classroom, many students felt device usage had no effect on their learning. In the vehicle, however, over half found it to be a safety threat and only a third felt it was not a safety threat for them to use their electronic devices while driving.

Survey Information

- 378 participants were administered an online survey.
- 75% female, 25% male
- Average age of 21.9 years, with a range of 18-56

References


Digital Distractions in the Classroom

Usage
56% of students say they use their electronic device at least once per lecture, with 32% using it more than 4 times per lecture and 10% saying they never use it during class.

For What?
- 53% check social media
- 77% are texting or sending emails
- 78% are checking the time
- Surfing the web, games, and homework for another class were the least common reasons to use electronic devices.

Distractions
Most students surveyed found the use of devices to be visually distracting to them, but audio distractions being less common.
- Students generally agreed that others using digital devices for non-classroom purposes provided little to no distraction to their learning.
- When asked about its impact on their individual learning, most noted that personally using a device was 'somewhat' distracting.

Variations in Usage Due to Lecture Type & Length
Students reported differences in device usage depending on the length of the lecture, engagement, and perceived difficulty, but little difference due to major versus non-major courses.

Effect on Learning
Of those who use devices for non-classroom purposes, 17% felt it had a negative effect on their learning while 66% felt it had no effect.

Discussion: While Driving

- 56% of students admit to using electronic devices while driving.
- 28% say they do so multiple times per trip.

For What?
- 75% use GPS
- 62% are listening to music
- 52% are making or answering calls
- 53% are texting or sending emails
- 35% are checking the time

Perceived Influence on Performance
Of those using electronic devices while driving, 28% of all participants felt it has no effect. 69%, however, stated they find it distracting.

Safety Concerns
94% of respondents felt it is unsafe to use devices while in motion, but 70% felt it was safe to use them at a stop light.

When asked if they felt these devices posed a real threat to their safety, most were more concerned when it was someone else:

- Is it dangerous when OTHERS use devices while driving?
- Yes: 86%
- No: 9%
- Undecided: 5%

- Is it dangerous when YOU use devices while driving?
- Yes: 11%
- No: 84%
- Undecided: 5%