TECH-FREE ZONES ESTABLISHMENT AND DUMB-PHONE UTILIZATION AS DIGITAL DETOXIFICATION PREDICTORS OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENTS IN UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the establishment of tech-free zones and dumb-phone utilization as digital detoxification predictors of students' academic improvements in universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted the correlational research design. The population comprised 3680 students from the Department of Educational Management of the three public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. A sample of 1,472 students, representing 40% of the total participants were drawn using the stratified random sampling technique. The instruments for data collection were: Tech-Free Zones and Dumb-Phone Utilization Scale (TFZDPUS) and Students Academic Improvement Scale (SAIS), designed by the researchers in a modified 4-point Likert scale model. The reliability coefficients of the instrument using Cronbach alpha methods were 0.73 and 0.89. Simple regression was used to answer research questions and in the test of hypotheses, t-test associated with simple regression was used. The findings of the study revealed that tech-free zones and dumb-phone utilization as digital detoxification variables predict students' academic improvements in areas of maintenance of work-life balance, fosters emotional intelligence, fosters academic breakthroughs, reduced smartphone addiction, restores natural rhythms, enhances academic relationships amongst others. The study concluded that tech-free zones and dumb-phone utilization as digital detoxification strategies are strong and viable predictors of students' academic improvements in universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Hence, the study recommended amongst others, that school authorities and students should continue to utilize the different digital detoxification strategies in detoxifying students from digital technology devices in order to increase the tempo of their academic improvements.

KEYWORDS: *Tech-Free Zones, Dumb-Phones, Digital Detoxification, Academic Improvements*

INTRODUCTION

University education is critical to the socio-economic and political development of any nation. It has been proven that universities, as citadels of learning, supply the majority of skilled manpower for the economic growth and development of any society. Society depends on university education for tackling emerging societal problems and meeting new developmental aspirations. Thus, the main activities carried out in the universities, which are teaching, research, transfer of worthwhile knowledge and values, commercialization of research findings, community development, and generation of highly skilled personnel to serve the industries and society towards a better future, are geared towards finding a solution to the problems of the society.

Nations that record great outcome of graduates have greater advantage of welcoming creativity and innovative practices that will position it for better economic growth, greater innovation and labour market flexibility while creating avenues for individuals to profit from high earnings, reduce unemployment and increase productivity. In Nigeria, university education, as emphasized by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014), is referred to as the education a person gets after a successful completion of secondary education. It is the final level of education in the current 9-3-4 structure of education in Nigeria (Yahaya, 2019). The 9-3-4 consists of a 9-year Universal Basic Education (UBE), 3 year period of secondary education and at least 4 year time of higher education.

In a bid to ensure that university products (graduates) are equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills that are essential to meet with the economic and global expectations, it is paramount that university students be given every available opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for results yielding competition globally. As the world embraces technological boom being infused by daily advances in technology, the cell phone technology also continues its rapid development, the device enhances students' learning and

improves academic performance due to its ability of high-tech connectivity (Scott, 2019). In every aspect of life's endeavour, manufacturing, business, engineering, transportation, hospitality, law, education and training, arts, entertainment, among others. The makers of mobile devices which were introduced in the last decade, have played tremendous role in introducing certain features and applications (apps) that were only possible on computers and desktops into mobile phone devices which can be carried about easily. Business men and women record outstanding profits through online sales and marketing. In several other fields of human endeavour, the mobile phones have played outstanding role in yielding positive results (Uche, 2006).

Conversely, researchers and leaders in the education industry have raised alarm over the misuse of mobile phone devices by students, especially, university students. This may be explained in the fact that students tend to spend more time fiddling with the phone which has adversely affected their academic performances. Jocobson and Forste (2011), in their research, suggest that students perceive the cell phone usage as a leisure device and most commonly, use mobile phones for social networking, surfing the internet for pleasure, watching videos, playing games, taking inappropriate photographs engaging in non-academic related activities among others. Again, Morgan (2017) posits that students are becoming dependent on their mobile phone devices usage as a 'quick fix' for issues and information and it can keep them from developing the ability to 'think on their feet' in work situations. Stakeholders and educators have raised concern over the increased use of mobile phone devices by students during lecture periods on non-academic related matters. Frequent use of cell phones by university students have also inspired destructive behaviours. Four out of five university students experience panic, isolation and stress when attempting to unplug from their phones or engage in digital detoxification for one day (Morgan, 2017).

Digital detoxification refers to a period of time when a person refrains from using technological devices. It is a process of temporarily taking time off one's mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, computers, televisions and social sites. Digital detoxification which can also be called digital detox or detoxing is often seen as a way to focus on real-life situations without distractions. By temporarily foregoing digital devices, people can let go of stress that stems from constant connectivity and avoid getting addicted to their mobile devices. By welcoming and engaging in digital detox, university students can stay focused on their academic activities without getting distracted by their technological devices, especially their smart phones. While technology addiction is not formally recognized as a disorder, many experts believe that tech and devices overuse represents a very real behavioural addiction that can lead to physical, psychological, social and academic problems (Scott, 2019).

Little wonder did Dscout, as cited in Winnick (2016), indicates that, most people tap their smart phones on the average of 2,617 times per day. This is a serious distraction especially for students who are going through training and development process. Studies have shown that powerful computers made in the form of mobile devices most people hold and keep in their pockets can be distracting for even the most disciplined adults not to mention students. Research in the educational sphere demonstrates that using mobile devices and social media while learning new material reduces comprehension and impairs academic performance (Jacobson & Fortse, 2011). Studies have also found that even if cell phones are turned off, turned face down or put away, their mere presence reduces people's cognitive capacity (Ward, et al, 2017).

Establishment of Tech-Free Zones for Students Academic Improvement

Smartphone devices gives students ample opportunity to browse and surf the internet for materials to assist their academic work; it provides students with immediate, portable access to many of the education – enhancing capabilities. But on the other hand, students have been found to have become too dependent on their mobile devices usage as a 'quick fix' for issues and information and it can keep them from developing the ability to 'think on their feet' in work situations (Morgan, 2017). Hence, the suggestion for the establishment of tech-free zones in universities and other academic institutions as a way of engaging in digital detoxification for academic improvement.

Tech-free zones are areas without internet connectivity or areas deliberately mapped out by school authorities or leaders, educators or students in the school environment, to be made tech-free zones where internet connectivity is limited or not seen at all. In her study, Selwyn (2006), notes that educators, students and school leaders can utilize tech-free areas in cases where the topic to be handled does not require plugging into the internet. School authorities and government can identify and map out areas in the school environment or establish lecture halls, conference halls and so on, to be made a tech-free zones in the school where internet access is limited or prohibited. This act according to the suggestion of Selwyn (2006), will enable participants curb screen addiction, improve the level of learning inflow, think on their feet, and achieve high academic breakthroughs.

Rampton (2020) indicates that an average adult interacts with their digital media up to 11 hours per day and hence finds it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Smartphone notifications and the internet are two of biggest distractions in the school environment and at the work place. Technology can make students lazy, score low on their academic work and negatively affect their eyesight; this is because they are paying more attention to tech than what is expected of them (Michaels, 2016). Therefore, the need to introduce tech-free zones in schools for students to utilize at scheduled times to enable them

disconnect from the internet world and adequately experience positive changes in their work-life balance, their social life and academic abilities which will also give way to fostering emotional intelligence and suppresses body melatonin. Tech-free zones can also be establish in homes: some rooms or areas around the house can be disconnected from internet accessibility. This is to enable anyone who wishes to engage in tasks that does not require constant interruptions from the internet world, to utilize these areas for desired concentration. Tech-free zones are vital to the emotional, intellectual and social health of university students, other kids and adults in general (Freitas, 2016).

There is also growing evidence that 'tech-free' classes and 'tech-free' courses lead to better learning for students, and that these benefits extends beyond a given institution (Glass & Kang, 2019).In the light of this, university students who understands and engages in digital detoxification through the use of tech-free zones are most likely to achieve more success and breakthroughs in their academic performances, due to the idea of letting go of their mobile and digital devices for the period of academic activities which does not require internet plug in (Freitas, 2016). While making use of these tech-free zones in the universities, the researcher observed that students who are involved in the tech-free zones exercise focus, understand, and participate fully during teaching and learning and hence indicates high level of understanding of the lecture and participates with maximum focus on the project at hand.

In the course of carrying out assignments, group projects and individual projects, students who are involved in embracing digital detoxification through the use of tech-free zones are more able to set targets, as regards their projects and assignments, and exhibit the perfect ability of achieving set targets at the stipulated time frame. Once students are able to utilize the option of tech-free zones, which allows for the disconnection of internet connectivity, which will invariably give them opportunity for maximum concentration, excelling in every set target becomes very easy. Fernandez (2018) agrees with the above assertion that multitasking during a lecture distracts students, hinders their learning and leads to poor academic performance.

Educators and instructors will be more at ease and relate effectively with the students during tech-free periods. These periods are periods digital gadgets are not to be used in lecture halls; it will be a big win for educators and instructors seeing that students are more engaged in the lecture, ask better questions and exhibit excellent performance. Researchers and scholars like Rampton (2020), Fernandez (2018), Morgan (2017), and Freitas (2016) have brought forward some notable pros of engaging in the establishment of tech-free zones for digital detoxification. These includes the ability of students to think on their feet, encourages the maintenance of work-life balance, fosters emotional intelligence, encourages healthy social life, reduces the suppression of body melatonin, allows

brain to relax and recharge, allows for academic breakthroughs and enables for high target achievement. This study seeks to collaborate with the above suggestions to discover the benefits of the establishment of tech-free zones as a predictor of students' academic improvements in universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Dumb-Phone Utilization for Students Academic Improvement

For millions of people all over the world, smartphones have become a universal part of everyday life. They are used to find directions, browse the web, watch moves, play music, reply emails, and make long and short distant calls and so on. It is not an overstatement to say that smartphones have been seen as overwhelming in recent times: a negative on mental wellbeing that is eternally demanding full and undivided attention (Andersen, et al 2016). Just as these smartphones can be a liberating force in modern society, putting millions of people in touch with one another, they can oppress their owners, enslaving them in constant, unbreakable cycle of fixed attention while the real world passes on unnoticed.

University students are not left out in this era of smartphone and internet connectivity; the constant use and addictive behaviour of university students in the use of smartphone in lecture halls have become a thing of concern (Freitas, 2016). Irrespective of all the benefits technological progress has brought, there is also a dark side to these innovations. Students have been seen to spend most times on smartphone applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Youtube and other social networking sites; this has created a deep vacuum in their academic achievements. In view of this, this study looks at the suggestion of the dumb-phone utilization by university students to enable them engage in digital detoxification which will invariably allow them pay more attention to their academic activities and consequently improve their academic performance.

Dumb-phones are mobile phones with little or no internet connecting capacity. The device typically enables calling, texting and does not require a full keyboard as it contains T9 keys and are mostly used for calling (Wigmore, 2016). They do not require data plans and are typically much cheaper to operate than smartphones. Unlike smartphones, the dumb phones causes little distraction as it has been recently widely sought out for to enable one step away from the numerous distracting features the smartphone attracts. The use of dumb-phones by university students will yield positive outcome in the sense that there will not be constant interruptions of lessons caused by the frequent notifications that is applicable to the use of smartphones.

The contribution made by Glass and Kang (2019), has the following points to back up the benefits of use of dumb phones thus:

The use of dumb-phones by university students gives them adequate opportunity to pay maximum attention to the lecture at hand. When dumb-phone is used for digital detoxification, it

shoves away frequent notifications that floods into mobile gadgets like that of smartphones. The smartphones can really be a distracting tool in the classroom; distracting fellow students from paying full attention to the lecture and equally distracting the educator due to the constant beeping encountered due to the inflow of continuous messages or apps notifications. Disconnecting from these smartphones and embracing the use of dumb-phone will in no small measure, enable students pay attention to the lecture at hand. Secondly, it will also allow students carry out their research and classwork and assignments effectively without the constant interruptions being experienced with the use of the smartphone.

Aside using dumb-phones for digital detoxification in the university, these basic phones cost less and also attracts less expenses while in use: Dumb-phones are less expensive to purchase, it enables one save reasonable amount of money that one could have used to purchase smartphones; in data usage, dumb-phones has a high level of feature that makes it easy for it not to burn data as much as the smartphone, thereby guaranteeing high level economic benefit; in battery life, most dumb-phones have life of over 500 hours, the battery life of dumb-phones cannot be beaten, many users report being able to go over a week without a single recharge.

Hundreds of social media apps, whatsapp messaging, Facebooking, twitting amongst others, that have ways of calling for students attention even when they have no intention of going online pops up most often on the smartphones thereby leading to social media addiction, it keeps students connected and busy with their phones at all times. But, with the use of dumb-phones, these apps do not have access to creep their ways into these basic phones and hence, offers a good benefit of reducing or eliminating social media addiction or mobile phone addictions. Cell phone addiction creates a bad impact in the overall living structure of an individual (Morgan, 2017). Therefore, the use of dumb-phones will go a long way in curbing the addictive behaviours of students towards their cell phones and consequently give them ample time to focus better on the task ahead and invariably present good outcome and good results in their academic activities.

Pertinent to this, scholars and researchers have come up with some indicators suggesting several benefits of utilizing the dumb-phone for effective digital detoxification exercise. These includes suggestions from Syversten (2020), Ifeanyi and Chukwuere (2018), Wilcockson et al (2019) and Wigmore (2016). They analysed and gave the indications that the ways of earning benefits in the utilization of dumb-phone for effective digital detoxification exercise can be accrued to: reduced smartphone addiction, ease in teaching process, restores natural rhythms, enhances academic relationships, effective project actualization, ease in assignment completion, enables the mind to be present, guarantees high economic benefits and allows for empathy. The current study seeks to investigate, discover and collaborate with the opinion that utilization of dumb-phone in

the application of digital detoxification will aid success and thus guarantees the prediction of students' academic improvements in universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem
Universities, as citadels of learning, exist to execute the functions of teaching, research, transfer of worthwhile knowledge and values, community development and the generation of highly skilled manpower to industries and societies at large. As societies keep evolving, and nations keep embracing technological advancements to enhance efficiency and productivity, convenience and communication, university institutions, as part of the society, have witnessed and equally accepted different innovative practices and embraced most technological advancement that have seen the exercise of teaching and learning, more interesting and productive. In all these evolutions and advances in technological developments, digital technology distractions have been identified as major source of distractors on students' academic effectiveness. Hence, the introduction of tech-free zones establishment and dumb-phone utilization as digital detoxification strategies. Digital detoxification is therefore, seen as a period of time when a person refrains from the use of technological gadgets.

Consequently, with the advances in technological developments in industries, institutions and the world of work, it has become imperative for educational institutions to welcome and embrace the use of technological devices, which have come to stay, into their academic activities, and comply with the new ways of doing things. However, the researchers and other stakeholders are worried that university students in general and Rivers State in particular, appear to be performing at a very low level in academics due to the increasing use of mobile devices which majority use for social networking, video watching, skyping, playing games, amongst others; while in school and lecture halls. This worry gave rise to this study which sought to investigate the extent to which tech-free zones and dumb-phone utilization as digital detoxification strategies, predict students' academic improvements in universities in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study
The study investigated the establishment of tech-free zones and dumb-phone utilization of digital detoxification, as predictors of students' academic improvements in universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. In specific terms, the study sought to:
1. Ascertain the extent to which tech-free zones predicts students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. Determine the extent to which dumb-phone utilization predicts students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Questions
The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. To what extent does tech-free zones predict students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does dumb-phone utilization predict students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses
The following hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance.
1. There is no significant prediction of tech-free zones on students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant prediction of dumb-phone utilization on students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY
This study adopted a correlational survey design as it made to determine the extent to which tech-free zones establishment and dumb-phone utilization as digital detoxification variables, predict students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised 3680 students from the Department of Educational Management of the three public universities in Rivers State, which are: University of Port Harcourt (1630 students), Rivers State University (1050 students), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (1000 students). These population acted as total participants for the study, from which 1472 students, representing 40% of the total participants in the population, were drawn as sample size, using the stratified random sampling technique. There were two instruments for the study, titled Tech-Free Zones and Dumb-Phone Utilization Scale (TFZDPUS) and Students' Academic Improvement Scale (SAIS), designed by the researchers in the modified 4-point Likert model of Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2) and Very Low Extent (1) respectively. The reliability coefficients of Tech-Free Zones and Dumb-Phone Utilization Scale and Students' Academic Improvements Scale, using Cronbach Alpha reliability statistics are 0.73 and 0.89. The various reliability coefficients were high and justified the use of the instrument for the study. Simple regression was used to answer the research questions while t-test associated with simple regression was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS
The results of the study came from the answers to the research questions and results to test of hypotheses. Thus:
Research Question 1: To what extent does tech-free zones predict students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Simple Regression on the Extent Tech-Free Zones Predicts Students' Academic Improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Decision
1	.823[a]	.677	.610	Tech-free zones predict students' academic improvements to a high extent

Scale: Very high extent (100% - 76%); High extent (75% - 51%); Low extent (50 - 26); Very low extent (25% - 0%)

Data on Table 1 revealed that the regression (r) and regression square (r2) coefficients are .823 and .677 respectively, while the adjusted r square is .610. The extent of prediction (coefficient of determinism) is 68% (.677×100) showing a high extent from the scale of measurement above, which falls in between 75% and 51%. By implication, the result therefore confirms that tech free zones predicts students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria to a high extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent does dumb-phone utilization predict students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Simple Regression on the Extent Dumb-Phone Utilization Predicts Students' Academic Improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Decision
1	.713[a]	.508	.503	Dumb-phone utilization predicts students' academic improvements to a high extent

- Scale on Table 1 applies.

Data on table 2 showed that the regression (r) and regression square (r2) coefficients are .713 and .508 respectively, while the adjusted r square is .503. The extent of prediction (coefficient of determinism) is 51% (.508×100) showing a high extent from the scale of measurement above, which falls in between 75% and 51%. By implication, the result therefore confirms that dumb-

phone utilization predicts students' academic improvements to a high extent.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant prediction of tech-free on students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 3: t-test associated with Simple Regression on the extent Tech-Free zones predicts Students Academic Improvements

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Unstandardized coefficients	t	Probability val.	Alpha Value	Decision
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**				
1	(constant)	33.964	.930		36.531	.000		
	Tech-Free Zones	.820	.823	.023	2.871	.004	.05	Significant

Table 3 showed that the t-test associated with simple regression is 2.87. The result revealed that the hypothesis is rejected because the probability value of .00 is less than the alpha value of .05. Therefore, there is a significant prediction of tech-free mode on students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant prediction of dumb-phone utilization on students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 4: t-test associated with Simple Regression on the extent Dumb-phone Utilization predicts Students Academic Improvements

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Unstandardized coefficients	T	Probability val.	Alpha Value	Decision
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**				
1	(constant)	17.944	.756		23.743	.000		
	Dumb-phone Utilization	.667	.021	.713	22.361	.000	.05	Significant

Table 4 showed that the t-test associated with simple regression is 22.36. The result revealed that the hypothesis is rejected because the probability value of .00 is less than the alpha value of .05. Therefore, there is a significant prediction of dumb-phone utilization on students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.
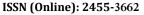
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS/IMPLICATIONS
Establishment of Tech-Free Zones as a Predictor of Students' Academic Improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria
The first finding of the study is that the establishment of tech-free zones predicts students' academic improvements in universities in Rivers State, Nigeria to a high extent. Also a corresponding finding from test of hypotheses, which establishes that there is a significant prediction of establishment of tech-free zones on students' academic improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. These findings are confirmatory of Freitas (2016), Glass and Karz (2019), Fernandez (2018), Rampton (2020), who in their work see the need for the establishment of

tech-free-zones in schools. Though those is rampant in our locale, when it is practice, student feel academic better. This implies that tech-free zone is needed in schools for improved academic base.

Dumb-Phone Utilization as a Predictor of students' Academic Improvements in Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria
The second finding of the study is that dumb-phone utilization predicts students' academic improvements to a high extent. Also, a corresponding finding from hypothesis testing found out that there is a significant prediction of dumb-phone utilization in students' academic improvements in universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. These findings are in tandem with Glass and Kang (2019), Syverston (2020), Ifeanyi and Chukere (2018), Wilcockson et al (2019), Wigmore (2016) whose studies and scholarly contribution give premium to dumb phone utilization as a strategy for improving academic progress. The utilization of dumb-phones practically cuts the user from the internet and user know that hence, the direction of the finding. This finding

implies that, individuals who use dumb phones, have more time to concentrate and therefore are improved academically.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that digital detoxification strategies such as establishment of tech-free zones and dumb-phone utilization, are viable and strong predictors of students' academic improvements in public Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusion of the study, the following were recommended:

1. Government and schools should ensure that there is proper establishment and maintenance of tech-free zones in the universities, as these would help in reducing students' addiction to the internet and therefore enable them concentrate on their academic endeavours for more academic improvements.
2. Students should continue to ensure that they engage in dumb-phone utilization practices at certain times of the day, as this will increase their attention to academics and as a result, improve their academic statuses.

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