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INTERVIEWER: I'm interviewing Ian Wairua. Ian, you're here visiting the Open University from Kenya.

IAN: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: So tell us what you do back at home.

IAN: I'm a doctoral fellow and member of faculty of Strathmore University in Nairobi, Kenya. As a doctoral fellow, I also teach. I teach in languages-- Japanese language. And also I'm involved in training of staff in some of my time that I spend at the university. I also teach a course called Digital Communication Trends to the BS students.

INTERVIEWER: Now you're here to try and develop collaborations with colleagues from the Open University. Tell us what you're hoping to achieve.

IAN WAIRUA: I really hope to do two things. One, I want to learn about how the Open University-- which has a really good reputation for online learning-- I want to see and understand how quality education is produced there, delivered through online platforms. And hopefully, I can borrow a bit of that for my home university and for Kenya-- for Sub-Saharan Africa in general. Number two, I'm interested in developing collaborations with academics in the Open University, people in similar fields that I am in.

INTERVIEWER: And you're talking about the extent to which the mobile phone has shifted the way of being for people, in particular, in Sub-Saharan Africa. But your particular research interest approaches this from more of a student engagement/student experience perspective. So can you tell us what about this area is so current right now?

IAN WAIRUA: Well, first of all, let me say that the mobile phone is very important from a wider perspective, because it's the only 21st century technology that is ubiquitous in sub-Saharan Africa. And putting it into the classroom is really an obvious choice, because this is the technology we really need to use in education training as in all the other sectors. What I'm really interested in is how to use this particular gadget and some of the platforms that we can easily find in the mobile phone, to give the students a deeper learning experience, a more meaningful experience, and actually deliver their courses in an effective manner.

INTERVIEWER: So you're looking at this not in terms of surfing the internet while they're in the classroom but more a way of facilitating and scaffolding their learning and how they can use maybe apps and various gadgets to give feedback/feedforward in the classroom?

IAN WAIRUA: Exactly. I think the mobile phone has a poor reputation as something negative that students should hide under their desk. But in fact, what I would like them to do is put it on the desk and actually use it in a positive manner to help their learning.

INTERVIEWER: And could you tell us about the mobile phone in terms of more social uses? I mean, social learning communities and communities of academics are really important in terms of student success. So how might the mobile phone assist students in that aspect of their learning?

IAN WAIRUA: Oh, absolutely. The students also need to use collaborative methods, peer to peer, in order to learn effectively. And we find that, for instance, students are very comfortable using WhatsApp to discuss whatever they learned in class. But what is even more interesting is we are finding new ways of using social media in the classroom itself. So typically, you may find me in class with a WhatsApp application posted on a screen, and the students are able to discuss and actually use it in class, tackle specific tasks that I give them within the lecture.

And what is interesting about this is we find that they get more engaged than some of the students who would typically not talk in class, because they're shy, or for whatever reason-- are very comfortable answering and contributing in class through their class WhatsApp group.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent-- a very, very interesting area. Thank you, Ian Wairua.

IAN WAIRUA: Thank you.

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