

**STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS ON USE OF CELL PHONES
TO THE TEACHING AND LEARNING SITUATION: A CASE
OF GWERU URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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ABSTRACT

The use of cell phones has virtually simplified communications and made it possible to send or receive information at any time and any where in the world. The study sought to explore stakeholder perceptions on the impact of cell phones to the teaching and learning situation in Gweru secondary schools. Fundamentally, the examination of this topic has been stimulated by major educational debate in which the Ministry of Primary and Secondary is mulling to introduce mobile learning through cell phones in secondary schools. A qualitative research approach was used to solicit various ideas, opinions, perceptions and attitudes held by teachers, parents and students on this new pedagogical tool in learning. The researchers used open ended questionnaires, focus groups and interviews as data collection methods. Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the study. It emerged from the empirical findings of the study that cell phones as important tools of learning were ideally valuable but most of the school administrators have banned them. In that manner the ban was due to misuse and indiscipline committed by students when using cell phones for purposes of learning. Participants to this study have perceived the use of cell phones in classrooms negatively. The study recommends that administrators have to come up with better policies in which students behaviours are monitored as they use cell phones for learning. There is also need to educate the students' etiquette in using mobile devices for educational learning purposes. For mobile phones to be deployed as tools to support teaching and learning, it is imperative that research be continued in the area of educational technology and student perception to bring sanity to this noble cause.

Key words: Secondary schools, cell phones, mobile learning, etiquette, mobile phones, teachers.

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Background of the study

Mobile phones have become one of the most important tools of communication for any forms of socialization and even for the delivery of classroom instruction. The latest technological developments have spread across the divide and the education arena has never been left behind. Surprisingly, research on the influence of cell phones in Zimbabwean schools today has not been given much attention. Enormous developments in information communication technologies have brought vast changes in the education system mainly in developed countries. Loud calls are being made to go along with positive developments brought by information technology to improve the teaching and learning in various educational settings. The growing demand for the use of mobile phones in the teaching and learning situation remains a hot debatable issue. Despite the fact that with the availability of technology, we have the opportunity to change the form of learning method: to create broad learning community, to connect people on the real-time and virtual world, to provide the necessary expertise and support lifelong learning (Sharple, 2007). It is therefore undeniably that ICTs can achieve major breakthroughs in the education system by using cell phones in the classrooms.

While cell phones have become an important tool as a form of communication among the students, this instructional tool is still not welcome in many schools. Katz (2005) underscored that administrators banned cell phones from inside school buildings to prevent drug sales and illegal gang activity. Reasons that may underlie the ban of such a hand technology in the teaching/learning situations are varied and they require being investigated. Administrators often are concerned about inappropriate use of cell phones in schools and this is the major cause of restricting their use (Obringer & Coffey, 2007). The position taken by school administrators in balancing the needs of students and parents in the use of cell phones in classrooms remains a cause for concern. Apparently, the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe has made a pronouncement that pupils can now use smart phones for purposes of researching but guided by professionals. "When we were children, these innovations were not there and we used to draw shapes and diagrams on the sand, but smart phones are now mini-computers and children can do different assignments using them, or even Google for information," he said. (News Day June 13, 2015). However, the fact that pupils may end up accessing undesirable content must not be under estimated. Thus, the mobile phone has the power to undermine the schools' authority and weaken their control over students as well as affects their level of academic performances (Geser2004). So what is the perception of parents, teachers and students in the use of mobile phones to enhance learning in the classroom?

Literature review

The role of cell phones in the teaching and learning situation.

Many researches have been conducted on the introduction of mobile teaching and learning and results obtained support the benefits of the new learning paradigm. Guy (2009) defines mobile learning as electronic learning (e-learning) through mobile computational devices. Where as Quinn (2003) simply defined mobile learning as learning that takes place with the help of mobile devices such as cell phones. This study will dependably allude cell phones to mean mobile phones, tablets and smart phones as shown by some researchers. Mobile phones have increasingly become popular as they are cheap and ease to access. Currently, the impact of this tool has overtaken traditional methods in the teaching and learning. The role of mobile devices is pivotal in the education system. The rapid growth of access to mobile phones around the world and in Africa and Middle East regions in particular have a potential of improving teaching, learning and institutional efficiencies to enable national education system transformation (UNESCO, 2012). Smart phones have the ability to enhance improved teaching and learning in the twenty first century.

The research that has been highlighted by Peters (2007), underscored that mobile technologies can significantly reduce people's dependence on fixed locations, and thus have the potential to revolutionize the way people work and learn. Hence the adoption of cell phones has significant implications in the delivery of instruction in and outside classroom settings. The use of this tool in the schools has the potential to revolutionise education. In a research conducted by Suki and Suki (2009), they opined that mobile devices are educationally interesting because they offer several communications channels on one device, cheaper, have comparable functionality with desktops or laptops, and also provide wireless access to educational materials. The use of mobile phones is helpful and provides a greater flexibility to learners and teachers as they interact to achieve their learning goals. Students become motivated, alert and can solve the learning problems instantly anywhere and any time (Seppälä and Alamäki, 2002). For instance, the mobility and immediacy of mobile learning has offered new communication opportunities to students and changed their learning attitudes (Wentzel, van Lammeren, Molendijk, de Bruin, and Wagtendonk, 2005). The adoption of this technology can change the face of education in secondary schools. Malaysian education stakeholders see the opportunity that mobile phones can become one of the applications for teaching and learning in secondary schools (Mohamad and Woollard, 2010). Thus the spread and acceptance of the new paradigm shows its essence in changing the learning and teaching styles in the schools. Already in Pakistan, mobile phones are used by both teachers and students in sharing information and consulting dictionaries, thesaurus for educational purposes (Javid, Malik and Gujjar, 2011).

While the use of mobile phones offers more opportunities for learning new knowledge through interaction, sharing knowledge and information with others there is need for school authorities to adopt robust measures to curtail abuse of this technology by students. There is gross malpractice among students in the use of cell phones in educational settings. A research by (Gilroy, 2003) found that cell phones ringing during a class time present unwanted distractions and, for some students, sending or receiving text messages can lead to cheating. Some schools have banned the use of cell phones in the school environments due to irresponsible behaviours students' exhibit when they bring and use cell phones in the school environment, banning aims at improving pupils' behaviour (Barkham and Moss, 2012). Whereas most schools ban students from using mobile phones because they spend most of the time chatting, recording fights and violence and watching pornography (Ford and Batchelor, 2007). Instead the devices are now being used to further students' deviant behaviours that bring failure and shame to parents who have bought them phones to allow them to access useful information and share it with the teachers and classmates for the purpose of formal learning. Many authors have focused on the potential for distraction and disruption posed by inviting mobile learning devices into the classroom (Schuler, 2009;

Some researchers emphasize the place of cell phones in the classroom for now and into the future. Cell phones facilitate learning anytime, anywhere, from any source, at any pace, and further more many jobs of the future will require students to take photos, text message, and access the Internet with a cell phone (Kolb, 2008). This vision is quite important but many administrators are finding it difficulty to balance the moral aspect and the educational aspect that students should exhibit when manning their devices for the purpose of learning. A national survey of more than 112 administrators revealed that more than 84% of schools/districts have written policies regarding cell phones and 76% of the schools do not permit cell phone use by students (Obringer & Coffey, 2007). In such circumstances school administrators may decide to use strict policies in schools to prohibit students from accessing cell phones in schools. School policy regarding cell phones, within the majority of public schools in the United States, is generally quite prohibitive and requires students to leave their cell phones at home or turn them off and leave them in their lockers during the school day (Obringer & Coffey, 2007). The inappropriate use of cell phones has been the major concern to school managers and hence they ban their use during school hours. The research conducted by Prensky (2001) warns that; students of today are referred to as "Digital Natives." They have grown up with technology and multitasking, and they are in the habit of processing information quickly. It is said these students are much opposed to the traditional approaches of learning where many a time the learner is a passive recipient in the learning discourse. Some research suggests that

many teachers still see very little use for cell phones in their classroom and remain fairly negative (Ferrari, Cachia, Punie, 2011). It is therefore important and critical to consider the educator's (teacher) perception in accepting cell phones as a media of learning in the classroom and the perception of all other stakeholders remain fundamental and key to the success of this innovation.

Statement of the problem

It is an undeniable fact that cell phones are handy and their impact to educational reform is far reaching. The technology, when put in its right use is equipped for transforming education of our youth to its best level. Many a time educators have been confronted with pedagogical challenges in the delivery of lessons due to shortage of critical learning information fundamental and pertinent to the needs of the students. The coming of cell phones is an intervention that improves the learning of the students and surpasses the traditional learning methodologies which the new paradigm shift overtakes with great success. The adoption and utilisation of this noble innovation has many challenges that emanate from unknown perceptions felt by the stakeholders. The perspectives of these stakeholders are basic for the adoption, implementation and usage of cell phones by students in the teaching and learning. In this manner, their perceptions are to be investigated first before receiving the innovation.

Research Questions

- To establish the perceptions of stakeholders on the use of cell phones for student learning.
- To proffer some intervention strategies on how to effectively adopt classroom cell phone use.

Research Questions

- What are the perceptions of stakeholders on the use of cell phones for student learning?
- What intervention strategies can be put in place to adopt classroom cell phone use for student learning?

Methodology

The research adopted the qualitative interpretive approach. A case study design was employed in this study. The qualitative approach was preferred because it allows the researcher to gain understanding of this social phenomenon from participants' perspectives in their natural settings, (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). The researchers used open ended questionnaires, focus groups and interviews as

main data collection methods. Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the study who were made up of 20 students, 16 teachers and 14 parents all from the four secondary schools in Gweru urban. Four focus groups of eight people each were conducted the first two were made up of teachers and the other two were clusters of students. The results of the study were thematically analysed. Purposive sampling seeks individuals and sites that can best supply relevant information needed to answer the research questions raised (Creswel, 2008: 214). The researchers analysed narrative data from interviews and focus groups using predetermined thematic categories associated with the research questions and then reanalysed it using themes that emerged from the data.

Findings and Discussion

Students' perceptions on using mobile phones on learning

It is undeniable that mobile phone is the simplest and easiest technology for communication and interaction (Shaw, 2009). Many student participants had a feeling that cell phones are important resources in the learning process of all age groups. The modalities in which the technology can be utilised in schools remains a bone of contention. It emerged that there are an array of problems that confront school authorities in their attempt to deal with and prevent disruptions that come along with cell phone technologies as put by some students. Of the students who participated in this study 85% do not hold a positive perception about using cell phones for the teaching and learning purposes. These findings were corroborated by responses that came from the students. *"Imagine sir how disturbing it is to wait for a phone call or simply a message during the lesson. I can not concentrate during the whole learning period, my mood will be out thinking of the sms (short message services). I do not object that cell phones are hand and ideal for learning purposes but I perceive them badly as long as they are used badly by most of us as students."*

The above perception is negative to the use of cell phones as tools of learning in the school situation. Even though some students felt confident in the use of cell phones for learning purposes they would not perceive this tool beneficial for mobile learning. It emerged that parents are responsible for the education of the students and the implications for using cell phones in schools are far reaching. There were disparaging arguments and comments from these students. 85% argued against cell phone use as a learning tool. The rest of students 15% held positive views about adoption of cell phones for learning at school. One student lamented that *"Whether the teachers ban mobile phones, confiscate them, punish students or destroy the cell phones it comes to nothing because we still use them after school and at home. Those who do not have them, or do not know how to use them should not disadvantage those who have the privilege to access cell phones."*

Furthermore the following statements emerged from the student participants who discredited cell phones for accelerating poor performance in learning.

“Cell phones are very important for the learning processes but they are very eminent to destroy our personalities. There is a lot of mischievous behaviours perpetrated by the users of cell phones. One day I had the opportunity to pip over the teacher’s cell phone left on the table, there were horrible sms and pictures stuffed in it, what more of us students?”

There was strong agreement (73%) among teachers who believed students may access inappropriate web sites or even misuse the camera feature on a cell phone if allowed to use it in the classroom. However, mobile phones are misused in recording violence, searching uncensored contents like pornography (Ford and Batchelor, 2007), taking photos and posting them on websites, listening to music and chatting. These findings seem to suggest that mobile phones may affect the performance of students in one way or the other. Further comments from the students section seem to indicate that there was a high propondence of misuse of these machines. The following comments are too suggestive.

“I really concur with my friend’s comments. There is lot that teachers do not know or see when students are managing these small things. Students may shy education and spend the whole day viewing pornography and all sorts of dirty stuff.”

“Our parents are always to blame for the bad behaviours we show at school because we are not mature enough to manage a cell phone specifically for learning.”

“There are students who have been expelled for getting into immoral behaviours, which just started from showing one another pictures of nude people.”

The above situations seem to portray that the use of cell phone in schools receives a very negative perceptions from most of the students and therefore they do not support the move towards mobile learning. To infer further, the responses seem to suggest that there is a lot of mischievous behaviours that further affect students’ education rather than improving. To many, using cell phones in the classroom during teaching and learning situation is considered distracting, rude, offensive or just simply inappropriate. Students themselves are quite aware of the reparcations of handling and using cell phones in the school. Unless parents and teachers collaborate to curb the harmful effects the use of cell phones have on students’ learning performance it would prove difficulty to accept the technology in schools.

When the researchers further probed the students on why they show higher disinterest in the use of cell phones for learning, one female student lamented that, *“In most cases girls are always vulnerable more than boys. Besides, the school policy has since banned any cell phone in the school. I feel we are affected more than boys. Cell phones are used to send romantic information to us again. I for one do not want cell phone, it disturbs me a lot.”*

These findings indeed show that students disobey school regulations, which restrict them from having mobile phones in school environment. Some researches conducted elsewhere have this to say, most respondents agreed that mobile learning helps them to manage their time and be focused, flexible, motivated and interested in their learning (Abas et al., 2009). The same benefits are likely to be enjoyed but the use of cell phone for the learning purpose requires some good attitude and some level of maturity. The teacher's attitude is also critical.

The perception of teachers on students using mobile phones on learning

According to Barker, Khull and Mallinson (2006) the impact of mobile phone technologies on learning are portability, collaboration and motivation enhancing students, parents and teachers' education system. Mobile phones motivate students to become learner-centred and active participation is encouraged among the students. It is ideally important even though to capture their teachers' perception towards students and even themselves in promoting learning. The study revealed that there is lack of support among the teachers towards promoting mobile learning education. Teachers have made several allegations against students' indiscipline due to the use of phones in school environments. One of the head teachers concurred that, *"We can not let this kind of madness affecting the school. There is a lot of mischievous behaviour that is brought with cell phones in schools. We have since banned these phones just to protect our children. One day we made a raid and confiscated more than ten hand sets, on perusing through the gadgets it was all romantic stories, news and music"* The teachers who were interviewed indicated that girls are more vulnerable than boys. Some form six girls had to use their cell phones and communicated with their boyfriends to meet after school. The cell phones were used to facilitate students to go on a picnic spree during the learning hours. Reports of such unwelcome behaviours were received more often and this seriously affects the learning of the students. *"While cell phones can be used as valuable instructional tools in the classroom, a lot of ground work must be done before regularising mobile learning,"* says one deputy head-teacher.

The parents' attitude towards student using cell phones for learning purposes is negative in its strongest sense. They are also bitter about it. Apparently, the educational policy on student discipline in Zimbabwe has banned corporal punishment and this has exacerbated the students' misbehaviour. The parents who were interviewed concurred with views advanced by teachers. *"One thing at a time is my policy. A child can not concentrate on a lecture and at the same time attending to the phone. That is not workable. Cell phones make our students lazy and dull, they can not think, they always want the mobile phones to think for them."* The majority of parents who participated in this study all agreed that students should not use

cell phones for purposes of accessing internet for educational purposes. While they contend the usefulness of the devices it was felt that they turned out to be destructive due to improper use and limited teacher supervision. In particular, some teachers often see technology as threatening and overwhelming. Feelings of anxiety may be further exacerbated if they perceive the skills of their students as being better than their own when using technology. This feeling of inadequacy can result in teachers feeling insecure and declined to support the use of cell phones in schools.

In this study parents and teachers tend to suggest that they are both in emphatic agreement for declining the use of the cell phones for instructional purposes. The parents who participated in the study group all 100% have similar arguments that the use of cell phones in schools will bring an extra cost of buying the machines while they can not even afford the fees. So perceptions to the use of the device were negative. One of the School Development Chairperson had this to say, *“A cell phone is a luxury to students. It can encourage laziness to both the master and the servant. Make our students think and solve problems on their own. Honestly, we can not afford to buy cell phones when there is no bread and butter on the table. Let’s stick to our traditional learning styles for now.* This observation seems to contend that mile stones of successes were also made even before the cell phone era. When such challenges dog the community members, priority is given to having food on the table. It appears that most parents are so resistant for learners to use cell phones trying to escape the cost, bother and responsibility of buying the devices if formally accepted as part of the learning devices. Such feelings are a major barrier to the adoption and use of the ICT. Both teachers and parents highlighted that cell phones can bring anxiety between learners, parents and teachers, so the best is avoiding cell phones for instructional purposes. (Chu et al (2008) endorses that while, it is agreed that anxiety will play a role in the adoption of users of mobile technology, its role has yet to be tested empirically.

In this study the perceived usefulness of cell phone has been negatively accepted by all the participants except 15% student participants who advocated for the mobile learning. This study did indicate that the use of cell in teaching had a mediating effect on the perceived usefulness and beneficial to the students’ learning. The negative perception of the usefulness of this device emanated from the fact that students’ behaviours are negatively inclined to indiscipline and eventually use the cell phones immorally during the learning processes. For that reason many participants of this study found cell phones not appropriate to incorporate them in the learning sessions. Banning aims at improving pupils’ behaviour (Barkham and Moss, 2012).

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of teachers, parents and students on the effects of accessing mobile phones on students' learning performance in secondary schools and suggestions to incorporate cell phones in learning situations. Based on the findings the following conclusions were drawn:-

- There was great satisfaction that cell phones are valuable learning tools in the schools but the majority of students remained unsupportive to use them in learning.
- Both teachers and parents have negative attitudes on adopting cell phones learning in the classroom due to indiscipline behaviours students' exhibit in educational learning situations.
- Cell phones are cable of making learning easier and effective in terms of processing and storing data but due to their abuse most schools have banned them as an indication of negative perception towards adopting the innovation for educational purposes.
- The adoption of mobile phones as pedagogical tools is still far fetched but the opinions gathered from teachers' perspective in this study would be beneficial for future research undertakings.
- Teachers and parents are collaboratively working together in ensuring that students are not taking mobile phones to schools.

Recommendations

- Cell phones can be used as a learning tool for knowledge construction if educators teach students how to use them appropriately (Kolb, 2006). There is need for schools to teach students the etiquette in using cell phones for educational purposes.
- The perceptions of teachers and parents are crucial since teachers' willingness and preparedness to adopt m-learning through cell phones is one of a critical success factor.
- It is quite difficult to generalize the results of this study to the whole country therefore the study also may need to explore on a more qualitative basis on the strategies about integrating mobile phone technology in education.
- For mobile phones to be deployed as tools to support teaching and learning, it is imperative that research be continued in the area of educational technology and student perception.
- Synchronize the secondary school wifi such that it does not download, neither accept unwanted materials.

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