Mobile Phone Use in Zimbabwe's Secondary Schools: Teachers and Parents' Perspectives

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Abstract: There is controversy over the use of mobile phones in schools not only in Zimbabwe but globally. The present study sought to explore the perceptions of parents and secondary school teachers towards the use of mobile phones in urban secondary schools. This study was qualitative and it employed a case study research design focusing on selected secondary schools in Marondera Urban, Zimbabwe. A combination of purposive and convenience sampling were used to select research participants who comprised of 30 parents and 10 secondary school teachers in Marondera Urban. Face to face semi-structured interviews were the main data gathering tool for this study. The findings of this study found out that both teachers and parents were certain of the benefits of the mobile phone as a pedagogical tool but they expressed reservations towards the use of mobile phones by learners in secondary schools. Teachers indicated that they mainly use mobile phones to communicate with the parents and not necessarily during the teaching process. Both parents and teachers were afraid of the potential negative consequences on learners' progress that could result from the abuse of mobile phones. The researchers therefore recommend that school administrators, parents, teachers and also other interested stakeholders should find ways of allowing the use of mobile phones in secondary schools as well as coming up with relevant policies to guide the use of the mobile phones in order to avert abuse of mobile phones.

Keywords: mobile phone, teaching, learning, secondary school, learners.

INTRODUCTION

Developments in Information, Communication Technologies (ICTs) have changed teaching and learning at all levels in a more profound way. There are many ICT gadgets that can support teaching and learning and these gadgets include laptops, desktops, projectors, cameras, smart boards and also mobile phones. But as Aguero [1] and also Akanferi, Aziale and Asampana [2] noted, mobile devices have invaded the universe and as such smart phones or cell phones in general have become more than just communication tools as they have the potential to improve access to information for learning and teaching.

Desktops, laptops or tablets would be probably the most ideal for secondary school teaching and learning but with low funding, schools are unable to provide students with such gadgets [3]. This is more so for developing countries where the cost is generally prohibitive for most schools and parents alike. Because mobile phones are affordable, they have penetrated even the African rural and remote areas and also poor communities than desktop computers [4]. The use of mobile phones thus has the potential to bridge the digital divide as they act as mini-computers and also allow internet access for educational purposes [3]. But despite the wide usage in all other fields, mobile phones are yet to be fully accepted in teaching and learning.

To accommodate the 21st century learner, Zimbabwe's new primary and secondary education curriculum policy framework embraces the use of ICTs and the use of mobile phones for teaching and learning at all levels [5]. But this has not been without controversy because the use of technology in the classroom possesses not only the potential to improve student learning but it also brings with it various negative consequences [6]. Thus, it is not surprising that there are differing views as regards the use of cellphones in schools. But as Mehdipour and Zerehkafi [7] acknowledged the future of mobile learning depends largely on the level of social acceptance it receives. Therefore, in this study the perceptions of parents and secondary school teachers on the use of cell phones in Zimbabwe's urban secondary schools was sought.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The developments in ICT have indeed changed teaching and learning even in developing countries but the use of ICTs in teaching and learning in Zimbabwe's secondary schools continue to be constrained by lack of ICT tools and infrastructure hence mobile phones have been viewed as a more affordable substitute considering that mobile phones are more widely accessible than computers. But there is controversy over the use of mobile phones in secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Though Zimbabwe's new primary and secondary school curriculum framework gives a nod to the use of ICTs including mobile phones in both primary and secondary schools, there are mixed feelings with regards the issue. In this study the authors sought to assess parents and teachers' perceptions towards the use of mobile phones in urban secondary schools.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

- To describe the current use of mobile phones in schools by the teachers.
- To determine teachers and parents' perceptions towards the use of cell phones in schools.
- To examine the hindrances that are faced in the use of mobile phones in secondary schools in Marondera Urban.
- To propose strategies that can be employed to ensure the effective use of cell phones in teaching and learning in Zimbabwe's secondary schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions below also guided this study

- How are cellphones currently being used in urban secondary schools by the teachers?
- What are the teachers and parents' perceptions towards the use of mobile phones in schools?
- What are the hindrances to the use of mobile phones in secondary schools?
- What strategies can be employed to ensure the effective use of mobile phones in teaching and learning in Zimbabwe's secondary schools?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Uses of mobile phones in schools

According to Alwraikat [8] and also Bukaliya [5] mobile phones possess various features which include internet access, sending and receiving e-mails, audio and video capturing, opening of Microsoft Office files, and full-keyboard access (QWERTY) which can be used in the teaching and learning process. Thus as Alwraikat [8] noted smart phones are not different from laptops, personal computers, or such other devices. Because of the increased capacities, mobile phones are able to offer benefits to different types of learners such as aural, audio and visual [9]. Also according to Sevari

[9] and Kihwele and Bali [10] learners are able to learn through sound, short text messages, graphical display, internet search, video clips and also interact with vast learning resources such as dictionaries, pictures, videos that are important learning tools in various subjects in secondary schools. This also has the potential to make learning more engaging and interactive [6].

Apart from that Alhajri [11], Mtega, Bernard, Msungu and Sanare [12] and also Bukaliya [5] averred that mobile phones can facilitate communication between the teacher and learner. Communication between learners, teachers and parents for administration purposes is also enhanced [13]. This is made possible through short message services or multimedia message services and also video call services as is alluded to by Mehdipour and Zerehkafi [7].

Although Mehdipour and Zerehkafi [7] are of the opinion that social media platforms such as Facebook and Skype can be used for communication, the platforms may not be feasible for most schools in developing countries due to limited access to the internet. But according to Clayton and Murphy [3] since mobile phones can act as mini computers, their use in classrooms, can help close the digital divide.

It is important to note that basic ICT knowledge is usually lacking in students at tertiary institutions of most developing countries including Zimbabwe and as such the various capabilities of mobile phones when applied in the teaching and learning process, can help strengthen the learner's ICT knowledge base [8]. But despite its widespread use, Clayton and Murphy [3] asserted that cell phones are "seldom used for learning purposes" in American schools. If mobile phones are not that much used in American schools, their use in schools in the developing countries is likely to be minimal.

Hindrances of Mobile Phone Usage in Schools

Though cellphones provide many advantages in teaching, learning and also administration of schools, they also bring with them issues and challenges. According to Sevari [9], Alwraikat, [8], Johnson and Kritsonis [14], Kihwele and Bali [10] and also Mehdipour and Zerehkafi [7] using cell phones as a learning tool can bring negative effects in learning, which includes:

- Student obsession with devices during class leading to abuse of cellphones for example, sending and/or receiving entertainment messages from colleagues, playing of games, listening to music and access to inappropriate content from the internet. This consequently leads to isolation from the teacher and lack of attention during lessons which may impact negatively on the learner's performance.
- The learners are also vulnerable to predators who can befriend the learners online.

- Cheating during tests, mobile bullying, recording violence and annoying others may also be associated with cellphone use in schools.
- Posing limitations on student creativity and innovation as cellphones come with many applications.
- Short battery life and easily become obsolete
- Extra data charges for the teacher and also parent or learner
- Delays in the transmission of messages due to network outages. This is particularly so for developing countries with poor or limited infrastructure.

More to that, the smart phone or mobile phone in general is less powerful than office equipment and can be easily stolen or lost [8]. A study by Mtega, Bernard, Msungu and Sanare [12] at Sokoine University in Tanzania also noted that mobile phones had limited storage space for storing learning materials and also that phone numbers were at times misused for example calling at night. If Mtega, Bernard, Msungu and Sanare [12] discovered these challenges at a university, such challenges are likely to be exacerbated at secondary schools where learners are generally much younger and immature. Also Sevari [9] note that if cellphones are fully adopted for classroom use, teachers will have to deal with educational problems caused by forgetting to bring mobile phones to school and also the possibility of loss of learning styles, needs, abilities and interests of learners.

According to Alwraikat [8] the use of cell phones may isolate learners due to the digital divide. Though in making reference to the digital divide Alwraikat [8] only referred to students and learners' proficiency in technology, it is important to note that for most developing countries though access to these technologies has generally increased, not all parents may afford to buy cell phones especially smart phones for their children. A study by Bukaliya [5] noted that many learners could not afford the latest smart phones that could be used to access the internet for learning purposes.

Parents and Teachers' Perceptions towards the Use of Mobile Phones

Despite the increased use and potential of mobile phones as teaching and learning tools, controversy over their use in schools has not subsided. Many authors cited this controversy for example, Kihwele and Bali [10]. Matimbwa and Anney [15] also noted that mobile phones in Tanzanian schools were not officially adopted as most schools in the country had strict policies that barred the use of mobile phones in school environments.

Madrid [16] also averred that many teachers have a zero tolerance policy towards cell phone use in classrooms because mobile phones are seen more as a distraction and risk of cyberbullying and as such many schools continue to ban their use in the classroom. Kihwele and Bali [10] also noted that mobile phones can be disruptive tools when used in schools. But despite this seemingly intolerance to mobile phone use in schools, Kiema [18] noted that most American schools were now overturning cell phone ban policies in schools.

In their study Kihwele and Bali [10] observed that sixty-four percent of the research participants believed that, female students were more vulnerable to the negative effects of mobile phones such as being influenced into sexual relationships and as such research participants felt that girls were not supposed to have mobile phones. Others believed that the use of mobile phones in schools could cause poor concentration and poor performance. But in the same study other research participants also argued that the issue of poor performance had nothing to do with the use of mobile phones. Bukaliya [5] revealed that while a greater percentage of the learner participants had a positive view of the use of mobile phones in schools, school administrators and teachers were very skeptical. Johnson and Kritsonis [14] also noted that parents wanted their children to have cell phones in school for safety and security reasons though this also presented challenges of controlling their presence and use for the school administrators.

Despite all these negative views, Madrid [16] notes that mobile phones become a nuisance or a distraction and end up being misused instead of enhancing teaching and learning when the teacher fails to monitor the use of cell phones as well as to offer quality instruction and engage the learner adequately in class. In other words, Madrid [16], puts the responsibility of proper mobile phone use in class on the teacher.

Though some schools have continued to ban the use of mobile phones, the mobile phones have become so small that they can be easily concealed [14]. Thus ensuring that mobile phones are not brought to school has continued to be very difficult. Therefore, with the decreasing prices, increasing and widespread use, banning the use of cell phones is attempting to control the uncontrollable [17]. However, if mobile phones are to be fully utilised in schools, social acceptance is a necessity [7].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Research Design

This study was a case study research design which focused on the perceptions of teachers and parents on the use of mobile phones in secondary schools and employed a qualitative research paradigm. The study focused on selected secondary schools, parents and Advanced Level teachers in Marondera

Urban in Zimbabwe. A case study was chosen for this study because it enabled the researchers to have an in-depth study and understanding of mobile phone use in the study area.

Population and Sample

The study was carried in Marondera urban secondary schools and it focused on Advanced Level teachers. Advanced Level teachers were purposively selected because of the fact that the learners they teach are slightly more mature in terms of age and level of education than the rest of the learners in secondary schools. An urban area was also chosen for the study because of the presumed high access to mobile phones and related services such as broadband. The population of the study consisted of all secondary school teachers and parents of all secondary school learners in Marondera urban, Zimbabwe. The study employed purposive and convenience sampling to select a total of 40 research participants who comprised of 30 parents and 10secondary school teachers.

Research Instrument

The interview was the main data gathering tool for this study. "An interview is a complex social interaction in which you are trying to learn about a person's experiences or thought on a specific topic" [19]. In this study the authors sought the thoughts of parents and teachers on mobile phone usage in secondary schools. The authors opted for face to face semi-structured interviews to generate data from both the teachers and parents. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to explore the issue of mobile phone use deeply as they (semi- structured interviews) are done in a conversational manner giving the participants the opportunity to explore the issues at hand [20].

Data Analysis

According to Gray [21] qualitative data analysis is 'a rigorous and logical process by which data are given meaning'. Qualitative data was in the form of interview texts. In analysing qualitative data in this study, several steps were followed namely organising the data, immersion in the data, generating recurring categories and themes, coding the data as well as offering interpretations through analytic memos and writing the analysis report

FINDINGS
Current Use of Mobile Phones in Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools

Despite their widespread availability and use in teaching and learning as shown by various studies for example Alwraikat [17], Bukaliya [5,9], Kihwele and Bali [10], Womack and McNamara [6] and also Mtega, Bernard, Msungu and Sanare [12], this study revealed that the use of mobile phones in aiding teaching and learning is still restricted to communication between teachers and parents on issues relating to learners'

progress, challenges and updating the parents on subject specific issues. While all teachers indicated they do not use mobile phones during normal classes, two of the teachers indicated that they sometimes use cell phones in class for teaching and learning during holiday lessons. The findings of this research are similar to the findings of a study by Clayton and Murphy [3] which revealed that cell phones were rarely used for teaching and learning in American schools.

The teachers also indicated that learners were still not allowed to bring mobile phones to school. But despite the no tolerance policy to mobile phones, teachers noted that because the learners own these gadgets, they still bring them to school and as a result school administrators were sometimes forced to confiscate these phones.

Hindrances to the Use of Mobile Phones in Schools

Though most learners own mobile phones, the teachers revealed that not all learners had the privilege of possessing these gadgets due to the economic challenges prevailing in the country which has seen urban poverty levels rising. Apart from that, the study revealed that the schools lacked Wi-Fi and as such not all learners or parents could afford the data charges. According to Alwraikat [8] the use of cell phones for teaching and learning had the potential of isolating learners due to the digital divide. Though Alwraikat [8] was mainly referring to proficiency in technology and not access to the technology, in this study teachers indicated that some learners coming from poor backgrounds lacked not only access to the mobile phones but also the general technological expertise to use them.

Controlling mobile phone use during lessons was found be one of the hindrances to the use of mobile phones in teaching and learning. One teacher noted that, "cell phones have various capabilities some of which are capable of impeding learning and therefore ensuring that cell phones are used specifically for learning is a challenge". Other teachers also stressed the importance of a policy or guidelines to govern the use of cellphones in schools. They felt that a policy or some form of guidelines would help all stakeholders including the learners, teachers, parents and also the school administrators. Other hindrances noted from both parents and teachers included, battery life and the challenges of charging the mobile phones at school as well as protecting the phones from theft.

Perceptions of Parents and Teachers towards the Use of Mobile Phones

Both parents and teachers were convinced of the positive and possible benefits of mobile phone usage in secondary schools but their main concern was on the possible abuse of phones. One parent cited an example of abuse of mobile phones by learners from a certain secondary school in Zimbabwe in which girls

recorded and circulated a video in which they were singing obscene songs. Parents felt that in case of such abuse of mobile phones, the image of the parents, learners and school would be affected.

Another parent had also this to say, "use of mobile phones would be good if only there was a way of ensuring that they are used specifically for learning purposes". Likewise, another parent said, "I would rather buy my child a laptop for school use than a mobile phone." Teachers on the other hand felt that though cell phones have pedagogical values, allowing them in schools would be a burden for them. One teacher had this to say, "controlling use of mobile phones in class is difficult, because as teachers we are responsible for what happens in class and if anything bad happens in class due to mobile phone abuse, parents and school administrators will hold us accountable". While these findings relate well to a study by Bukaliya [5] which revealed the skepticism of both teachers and school administrators over cell phone use in schools, it is also important to note that in this study, teachers felt that use of mobile phones would increase their responsibilities in ensuring the safety of learners.

Both teachers and parents expressed concern over the possibility of the young learners accessing and being exposed to adult sites on the internet which could have negative consequences on the teenagers. Teachers also preferred that learners use the mobile phones for learning purposes while at home so that parents and guardians would monitor the use of the phones especially when considering that the parents are the ones responsible for purchasing the gadgets and replacing them in case they are stolen or broken.

Parents also noted that if most schools in Zimbabwe had managed to raise funds to buy school buses among other necessities, schools could also consider charging a technology fee to all learners so that desktops or laptops can be purchased and ICT infrastructure made available at the secondary schools.

CONCLUSIONS
From the findings obtained by this study, the authors made the following conclusions:
- Both parents and teachers are aware of the pedagogical values of mobile phones but the use of mobile phones in teaching and learning is still very limited and in most cases confined to communication between teachers and parents.
- Teachers and parents were concerned about the possible negative consequences that could arise from abuse of mobile phones if allowed into the classroom.
- The main hindrances to the use of mobile phones were noted to be the unavailability of Wi-Fi in schools, lack of monitoring mechanisms and also

lack of access to the mobile phones by some of the learners.

Recommendations
Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made:
- Secondary schools should consider finding ways of funding the purchasing ICT tools and infrastructure. This could be done by charging each learner a flat fee which is meant specifically for that.
- Proper cell phone etiquette need to be taught in schools as it is required for both learners and teachers alike.
- Schools need policies, rules and regulations to govern the use of mobile phones in schools if mobile phones are to be beneficial in teaching and learning.
- Schools and the responsible government ministries need to train teachers on how they can use the mobile phone as a pedagogical tool.

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