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Controversy over the Use of Cell Phones in Zimbabwean Schools

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Abstract:

The Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Minister announced that school children should be allowed to use cell phones since these devices are necessary in this era of technological advancement. It is after reading this article from the Herald of 19 March 2015 that the researchers were prompted to carry out this study to ascertain the necessity of these devices in schools. The stratified random sampling was used to select students for the study. Secondary students from both rural and urban settings were sampled. Ten students from the rural and ten from the urban areas were selected. Purposive sampling was adopted to select ten teachers and ten parents for this study. Varying sentiments were obtained from all research participants over the use of cell phones in schools. Some respondents felt that since we are in the era of technology students should be allowed to use their cell phones at schools while others were totally against it. They felt that student's attention will be diverted to social issues at the expense of the core business of learning. The fact that no one will be there to monitor the use of these gadgets made some to suggest that students should at all costs not take their cell phones to school. The researchers recommended that students should be allowed to take their cell phones to school so that they will be in a position to research. However they further suggest that there ought to be strict measures to ensure that they are used to benefit the students educationally.

1. Background

Students need to be skilled in the use of technology to enhance them become more conversant contributors in the phenomenon of global information sharing. The study by Buchegger, (2008) revealed that the use of cell phones in Europe is a growing phenomenon where the average age for a child to get their first mobile phone is 7.1 years. This reflects that as early as at the infant level the pupil is allowed to use the cell phones. However, school systems in the United States face a challenge pertaining to the regulation of cell phone use by students in schools. Recent research has revealed that texting (in class, in meetings, at dinner) has become a significant problem in the United States. In Europe children and young people in particular, the mobile is an indispensable item to be carried at all times, and one which performs many more functions besides making calls and sending text messages Buchegger, (2008). A survey by Obringer, and Coffey determining school policy and practice regarding cell phone use by teachers and students revealed that parents generally supported the school's cell phone use policy (Ibid). Kreutzer (2009) executed a study that suggests that majority of grade 11 classes at a secondary school in urban South Africans had access to the Internet via their phones during a typical day this reflects that they were using them during school hours.

2. Theoretical Framework

The use of technology is bound to influence the way teaching and learning takes place in schools. Cell phones are becoming more and more sophisticated, incorporating features students can use for work and play <http://www.bamaed.ua.edu/edtechcases/>. This study is going to be guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspectives and Bandura's socio learning theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory focuses on the effects of different environmental systems that an individual encounters. The manner in which people behave and interact is mainly influenced by the associations involving people and their surroundings. He proposed the systems which are the micro system, ecosystem, macro system and the chronosystems (Santrock, 2004). Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2010) expound that microsystems involves roles, relationships and patterns of daily activities that shape many aspects of cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual development. This reflects that the proximal interactions that occur in school at home have an influence on the pro social behaviours of the pupils. In the meso systems the set of micro systems interact continuously with one another (Donald et al., 2010). Santrock (2004) is of the view that students who are given great opportunities for communication and decision making at home or in the classroom showed initiative and better grades. This reflects that if the pupils are not restricted from using the cell phone they will be in a position to explore the world. A child who is not supported by the family may feel anxious and insecure. In the exosystems the child is not directly involved but the people whom she / he has proximal interactions with her. Thus, if the parent is promoted the chances

are very high that the parents will be in a position to furnish the child with all the needs. It will thus be an easy task for a parent to buy the cell phone that will enable the child to have access to the internet. At the same time they can even afford to install Wifi at home. Basically, people learn behaviours through observation of others, also known as modelling (Seligman, 2006). As a result if the pupils are exposed to some bad role models through the cell phones chances are very high that they will try to imitate those unwanted behaviours. There are some cases where the youth try to remodel the dressing and behaviours of models they watch on television. McLeod (2011) expounded that children may imitate or copy the observed behaviour regardless of whether the behaviour is acceptable or not. In concurrence the social element in particular emphasizes that "people can learn new information and behaviours by watching other people (Donald et al., 2010). Feldman (2009) also argued that several aspects of media violence may contribute to real-life aggressive behaviour. This stipulates that through the use of media the individuals are likely to reproduce the wanted and unwanted behaviours.

3. Research Methodology

A qualitative research design has been adopted for use by the researchers. A research design is a comprehensive plan for data collection in an empirical study (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Qualitative research serves to explain the situation that is of concern or that describes the causal relationships of interest (Creswell). Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) the researchers' intent, then, is to interpret the views from the participants on the phenomenon under exploration. An interpretive paradigm was adopted in this study. Questionnaires rely on written information supplied directly by people in response to questions asked by the researcher (Denscombe, 2010). Since the researchers are aiming at getting data from the participants on their views about the introduction of cell phones they saw it worthy to ask questions to the people directly or indirectly affected by the use of cell phones. A stratified sampling procedure was done in this study. Stratified sampling subdivides the research population into different groups (strata) to ensure that crucial parts of the population are appropriately represented in the overall sample (Denscombe, 2010). In this case the sample is represented by pupils from the urban and rural setting as mentioned before. The data was collected using interviews and questionnaires. Interviews were administered to parents to solicit data regarding their perceptions over the proposal of allowing their children to use the cell phones in schools. Interview guide was developed to help the interviewer focus the interview without imposing too much structure. Interviews are a part of most interpretive studies as a key way of accessing the interpretations of informants in the field (Walsham, 2006). The researchers were noting down the contributions from the participants. Some questionnaires were also administered to the teachers and the pupils.

4. Research Findings

In response to the question that sought to find out whether pupils should be allowed to use cell phones at school some varying sentiments were given by the research participants. Twelve parents out of the twenty who were sample were totally against the idea that their children be allowed to take some cell phones to schools. One of the respondents noted that he or she was totally against the proposal for there was a feeling that the cell phones will shift their children's attainment of educational goals. Their further argument was that some children will end up abusing the system by concentrating on social issues that has totally nothing to do with school work. The participant further proposed that schools must embrace effective E-learning and encourage schools to make use of computer laboratories instead of allowing pupils to make use of the cell phones. Eight participants were pro the use of the cell phones. One participant applauded the idea of allowing the students to use the cell phones in schools when he had this to say, 'It is a good idea if the ministry implements it. However, the issue of cell phones must be implemented after there has been implementation of all the policies in the Nziramasanga which are still hanging.'

Several merits of using the cell phone were highlighted by the participants. One of the respondents noted that learners should move with technology. They should get current information through effectively researching using the cell phones for this will keep them up to date with global issues since we are living in a global society. At the same time they will be in a position to share information which they access through their cell phones. Use of cell phone will improve the pupils' grammar since there is an option of grammar check on their cell phones. Since most of the libraries have limited resources and outdated books they will have access to contemporary issues and sources. Life is made easier for the children as they are in a position to do some researches and homework on their own. This lessens burden on the part of the parent who should assist with homework. This means that pupils with parents who are committed with work are not disadvantaged for they are at liberty to do homework on their own. Most participants are of the view that surfing relevant educative information for studies is enhanced through the use of cell phones. One of the participants expounded that they can form some whatsapp groups where the teachers and pupils can share educative information. By allowing pupils to use cell phones this will cut some costs in relation to purchasing of books. The participant argued that it is cheaper to access information on the internet than buying hard copies of books. In support of the use of cell phones pupils can get some form of entertainment through music and videos during their leisure time. At the same time communication between the school and the family is made easier. One participant argued that sometimes he or she would want to give some tasks to do as he or she will be delaying at work, however if the child does not have any form of communication it becomes a hurdle. Use of cell phones will enable students to be independent rather than solely depend on their teachers all the time.

Contrasting views were aired over the demerits of using cell phones as reflected by the diagram below.

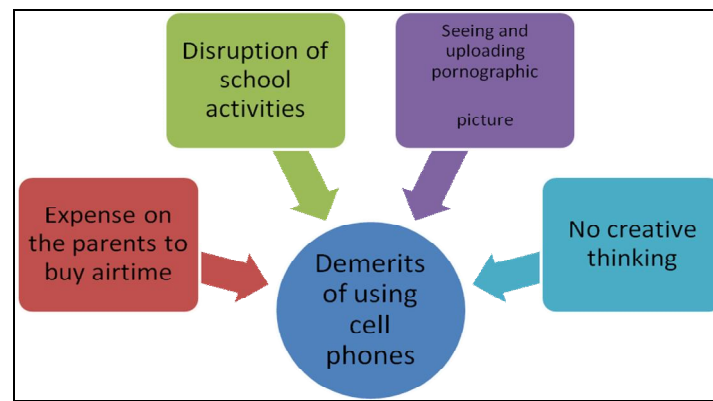


Figure 1

Some respondents complained that use of cell phone does not promote creative thinking. Their sentiments were that no critical thinking is promoted since ready-made answers are provided on the internet. One respondent disputed that with this cut, copy and paste issue pupils will not have ample time to reflect on some issues under study. Anti-social behaviours are promoted through the use of cell phones. Most respondents were complaining that the chances are very high that the cell phones will be abused. Some pupils will end up uploading and seeing some pornographic pictures. It will be difficult to control students and prevent them from sites that promote immorality. Once pupils are exposed to such films it will lead to unbecoming behaviours. As a result it becomes a mammoth task for both the parents and teachers to discipline them. Deviant behaviours can emanate as pupils will end up being inattentive in classes.

Respondents are of the view that use of cell phones promotes disruption of lesson. Some students might end up using the cell phone during the lessons on their private businesses. As a result this will disrupt some learning activities. Lack of concentration will be encountered as pupils will have divided minds during their learning endeavours. One respondent highlighted that some pupils will end up frequenting the toilets to allow them to respond to their calls.

Varying views on the measures to be taken to ensure effective use of cell phones were given by the participants. One participant proposed that there is need to conscientise the pupils on the dangers of using the cell phones especially at school. A proposal was also made to ensure that pupils should use the cell phones at home and do not take them to school. There was a suggestion that cell phone if they are meant to benefit the pupils academically they should only be used during the lesson. It was suggested that they should be restricted to use them during break and lunch time. This is to ensure that pupils will not divert their attention to making appointments and watching unwanted behaviours. One was advising that there ought to be some programmed systems on the pupils' cell phones that block some pornographic sites. A suggestion was also made by those who support the proposal that all schools should subscribe to Wi-Fi so that the burden for the parents to juice the cell phones will be uplifted. Further- more they suggest that there ought to be some specific times to allow the pupils to use the cell phones. To enhance effective use of cell phones the teachers are obliged to assist pupils as they will be researching. Pupils should get guidance from the more knowledgeable people on the proper use of cell phones. To be certain that pupils are using their cell phones for their benefit they should only be used in the presence of their teachers. To ensure that disruption does not take place pupils should only use the cell phones as per teachers' instructions. Pupils should only be permitted to use them when they are researching for their homework. One participant advised that there must be a certain age limit for pupils who are allowed to use the cell phones. Some parents opted that they should be the ones to have power over of their children's cell phone rather than having schools set the rules. They indicated that there are times when they need to communicate with their children so their argument was that why should the school take total control of their own children. They demanded that they wanted to know whereabouts of their children whenever they needed to do so.

In response to the question that sought to find out the views from respondents over the use of cell phone there was a reflection that participants did not share the same sentiments. Some participants are of the view that the government should keep on giving the computers to all the schools. This is to facilitate all the pupils to move with technology. The use of cell phones must only be permitted after some rules and regulations to govern the use of cell phones are put in place. There is need to ensure that teachers do not restrict the students from using the cell phones. One participant fumed that once pupils are allowed to use cell phones it promotes prostitution. Learners need to be monitored so that they are used profitably. Using cell phones is good for this allows one to get in touch with his or her child any time they so wish. However, one was grumbling that this will put some pupils who cannot afford to have the cell phones under pressure.

5. Pupils' Views Over the Use of Cell Phones

All the pupils from the urban set up were really appreciating the idea to allow them to use the cell phones at home. They feel that it's high time they should fit in the global world. One pupil cited that 'we are now living in the technological era where we should not depend upon our teachers all the time. We also need to be weaned from the teachers' guidance all the time. Our teachers should be aware that all what we need from them is the guidance. With this technology I am quite convinced it will take us somewhere. We are now in a position to make researches on our own. This will also allow us to have access to new knowledge as knowledge is dynamic. I understand that some of our teachers were trained years back so chances are also high that they are not catching up with the new

developments. I feel that we should be permitted to use the cell phones because the computers at our school are not adequate for the form ones up to six at this school'. In the same vein another student said, 'The times we are given are limited to allow each one of us to use the computers. Sometimes one can spend the whole week without having access to the internet. Due to power cuts sometimes we fail to use the computers. If we are allowed to use cell phones I can use it any time I wish to do so. I will simply ensure that I charge my cell phone over night to enhance me to use it the whole day. There are times when we are told that the Wi-Fi is down because it was not paid for. If I am using my cell phone my parents will ensure that they buy me some bundles for the whole month'. Students from the rural set up had mixed sentiments. Most of them were really against the use of cell phones at school. They feel that most of their parents cannot afford to buy them some cell phones. One pupil was quoted, '*Iwo maparents angu are using chimbudzi how they can afford yehindaneti.*' This literally means how my parents can afford to buy me a cell phone that can access internet yet theirs do not do so. We also need uniformity so we should be prohibited from using the cell phones at school. Let those who can afford use them at home we do not have problems with that. We will not feel inferior for not having the cell phones. After all we will not blame our parents for not affording to buy us one. '*Zvakare nekunetsa kuri kuita dhora vangazokwanisa here kuti kundijusirawo here time and again.*' In addition, with this US dollar which is hard to come will our parents afford to buy us airtime all the time when we need it. Some students applauded the minister for making this proposal. They feel that they are being deprived the opportunity to advance with technology. They feel that once it is made compulsory that cell phones are allowed there are nowhere their parents will deprive them. It is just as good as uniforms. 'We are all in uniforms because it has been made a policy. Therefore once that minister announces that all pupils are allowed cell phones it will be well with us. Once we are used to technology it will not be a challenge to us when we go to higher institutions of learning. We will never be left behind'. Another one participant was quoted, 'Hats off to our minister for such a wonderful proposal.' One of the participants concluded by saying, 'I feel that this should be enacted as of yesterday'.

6. Discussion

The 21st century has been dominated by the technological advancement. Cell phones have become one of the essential components in our societies. Some studies have shown that use of cell phones in schools is not a strange phenomenon. The proposal by the minister to use cell phones in schools had not been welcomed by most residences. Some parents felt that they should not be allowed in schools at all costs. They were arguing that if their children are permitted to use them it will be a mammoth task for both the parents and the teachers to monitor how they are using them. Some parents appreciated the minister's proposal. They were of the opinion that life on the part of the parents and the teachers will be made easier. The pupils will be at liberty to do homework on their own considering that some parents may be committed at work. However, the use of cell phone needs both the parents and the teachers to be in a position to monitor the cell phone usage. This will assist in minimising the abuse of the cell phones.

7. Recommendations

The researchers recommend that the pupils should be permitted to use the cell phones at school. The policy should be enacted as a matter of urgency in order to catch up with the global world. They also suggested that for the benefit of all the students a cell phone levy should be introduced. This will create uniformity among the students. They also proposed that there is need to censor those cell phones. This is to ensure that the cell phones are going to be used for academic purposes. Schools should also install wifi facilities so that all the pupils will be in a position to access the internet whenever they feel like doing so.

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