CONTRIBUTION TO A CONDUCIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: USE OF MOBILE PHONES IN URBAN SCHOOLS OF KALABO DISTRICT

"Case study on the Use of Mobile Phones in Urban Schools of Kalabo District"

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ABSTRACT: *With the advancement of information communication technology Education has reached a very critical stage in its development on the global stage. This is because education is vital not only for human resource development but also for socio – economic prosperity of the community. One of the tools that have shaped the global community is the mobile phone whose use has rapidly penetrated the global community. However, schools and parents are seemingly reluctant to allow pupils to use phones while at school because it is widely believed that pupils will spend their precious learning time on wrong sites such as facebook, twitter, whatsApp. Some parents have already bought phones for their children and these children have already seen the importance of having a mobile phone as an Information Communication Technological tool that is affordable to most people; and are using them for research using Google, and communication with relatives and friends just like their teachers are doing.*

This study attempts to answer the following major research questions:

a. Why are pupils in most schools in Zambia prohibited from using mobile phones while at school?

b. In which ways has the use of mobile phones impacted on the quality of education in Zambia?

c. ow best can we utilize mobile phones to enhance the quality of education delivery?

One of the findings of this study is that despite the belief that mobile phones have negative influences on pupils, the school administrators and teachers do not have tangible evidence to that effect. This study suggests that rather than banning pupils from using phones in schools when we know that they are using them freely outside the school premises and secretly within school premises, we should focus on how best we can utilise these mobile phones to enhance educational development.

KEY WORDS
Technology, mobile phones, conducive learning environment, schools, social media, internet

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1 BACKGROUND

With the advancement of information communication technology Education has reached a very critical stage in its development on the global stage. This is because education is vital not only for human resource development but also for socio – economic prosperity of the community. One of the tools that have shaped the global community is the mobile phone whose use has rapidly penetrated the global community. However, while leaders appreciate the use of information communication technologies to enhance human development, most school administrators still do not allow pupils to have mobile phones in the school premises.

1.2 STATEMENTS OF THE PROBLEM

Appreciating the significance of information communication technology to human development, the Government of the Republic of Zambia launched a new curriculum framework which makes mandatory for all schools to offer computer studies as a core subject on the school curriculum (GRZ, 2013). To this effect, schools struggled to procure computers to ensure this government policy is implemented. This notwithstanding, school administrators in Kalabo District do not allow pupils to use cell phones in the school even when some pupils have mobile phones; and admittedly mobile phones are the commonest form of ICT available

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this study is find out whether mobile phones could be used by schools for academic purposes as the cheapest and most readily available form of information communication technology to enhance the quality of education delivered in primary and secondary schools.

The following are the specific objectives of this study:

1. To determine why use of mobile phones by pupils is prohibited in most schools in Kalabo.
2. To examine ways in which mobile phones have impacted on the quality of education in Zambia.
3. To assess ways in which mobile phones could be used to enhance quality of education delivery in Kalabo District.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the **Activity theory of learning** in which learning is seen to involve three key features: a subject (the learner), an object (the task or activity) and tool. According to this theory the activity in a learning situation is an interaction of the actor (e.g., a human being) with the world. Learning (the interaction) is described as a process relating the subject (S) and the object (O). Activity differs from other types of interaction in two key aspects: firstly, the subjects of activities *have needs*, which should be achieved through an interaction with the world, and secondly, the activities and their subjects mutually determine one another**.** A close look at these two aspects makes this theory clearer. Subjects have their own needs and, in order to survive, they have to interact with objects of the world to meet these needs. The notion of "subject" is not limited to individual humans but includes other types of entities, such as teams, and organizations (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006).

2. METHODOLOGY/RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 PROJECT DESIGN / APPROACH

This is a case study carried out to get views of both teachers and pupils on the use of mobile

phones for educational purposes in their respective schools. Because it is based on people's views / opinions on the subject matter it is essentially a qualitative study (Vanderstoep, w. Scott & Johnston, D. Deirdre, 2009).

Data was collected on questionnaires that were administered to 60 respondents and a total of 58 respondents provided feedback. The total respondents were 25 teachers and 33 pupils. The data was analysed using MS excel

2.2 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

For the purpose of this study, we will use a mixture of purposive and convenience sampling technique. Convenience sampling technique is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are sampled because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher ((Vanderstoep, w. Scott & Johnston, D. Deirdre, 2009). On the other hand, purposive sampling technique is a non-probability sampling technique that is used when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within, it is also known as judgemental sampling. In this case, the researcher's judgement is based on the judgement of the research subjects (ibid).

2.3 TARGET POPULATIONS AND SAMPLE SIZE

The target population was teachers and pupils found at the four township schools within Kalabo District, namely Kalabo Secondary School, Nalionwa Day Secondary School, Kalabo Primary School, and Nalionwa Primary School. These schools were targeted firstly because the researcher could easily access them and secondly because they all do not all pupils to have access to mobile phones within school premises.

2.4 INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION

The data for this research will be collected on self-administered questionnaires which the research subjects will fill in. The identity of respondents was deliberately withheld to assure them that their responses would not be trace back to them as the topic is contentious. In all

60 questionnaires were sent out but two were not filled in. Researcher left the questionnaires in the custody of the Deputy Head teachers, and collected the filled in forms from the same officers.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The data collected was processed using MS – excel.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. RESULTS / RESEARCH FINDINGS

All teachers have mobile phones and 20 out of 33 (60.6%) of pupils have mobile phones. This means the law banning the use of mobile phones is not stopping pupils from having phones; and although they are not allowed to have them it is likely that they secretly carry them to school. In all 45 (77. 58 %) of the respondents have mobile phones.

NUMBER OF PUPILS WHO HAVE MOBILE PHONES

NO 39%

YES 61%
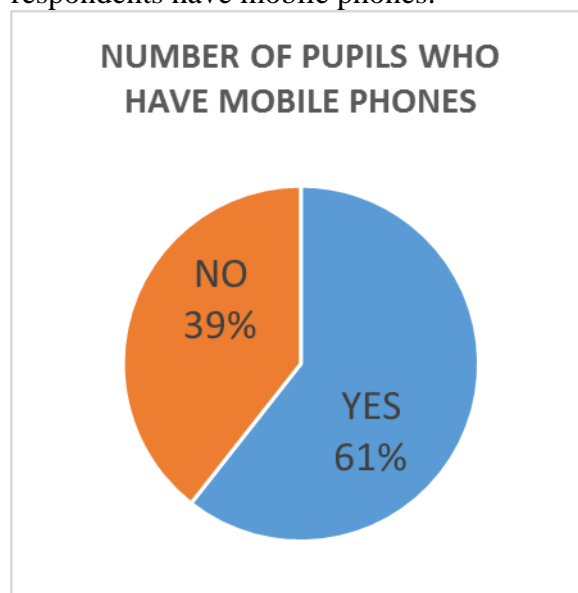
61% of the pupils in this study have mobile phones although their schools do not allow them to have cell phones while at school. The question when do they use them? And for what purpose do pupils use these mobile phones?
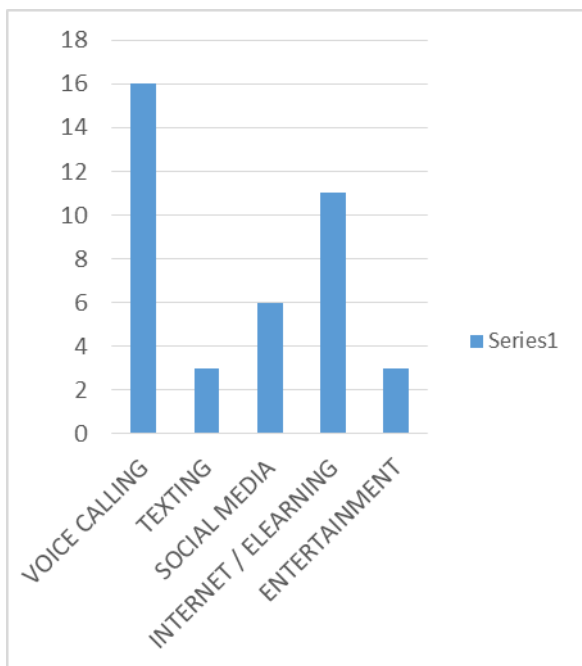
WHAT DO PUPILS USE THEIR MOBILE PHONES FOR?

WHAT DO TEACHERS USE THEIR MOBILE PHONES FOR?
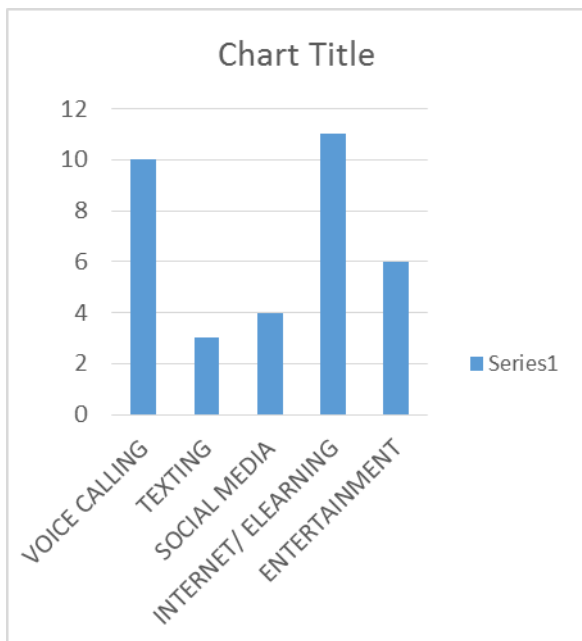
DO YOU AGREE THAT THE MOBILE PHONE IS THE COMMONEST FORM OF ICT?
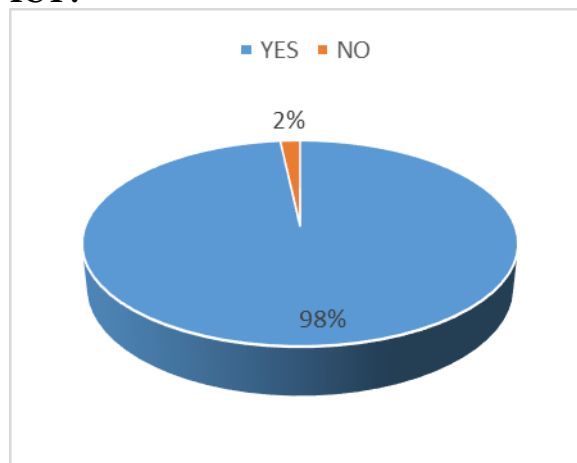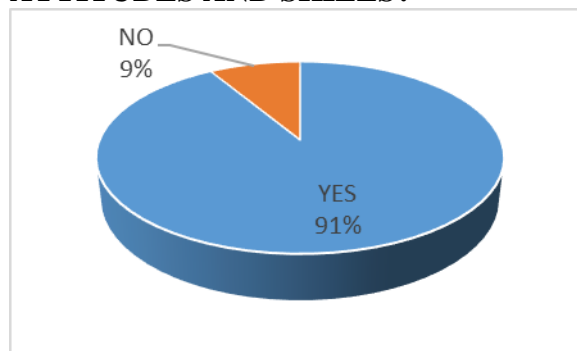

98. 3% of respondents see mobile phones as the commonest form of ICT. This implies that if we want to develop pupils' competence in ICT, we should make use of these readily available gadgets.

CAN MOBILE PHONES HELP LEARNERS DEVELOP KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND SKILLS?

91.4% believe mobile phones can contribute to development of pupils knowledge, skills and attitudes. Therefore, the use of mobile phones in schools would greatly improve the quality of education provided in our schools. What is required is to change people's attitudes to enable them embrace the change that comes with advancements in science and technology, and exploit the use of mobile phones for educational purposes.
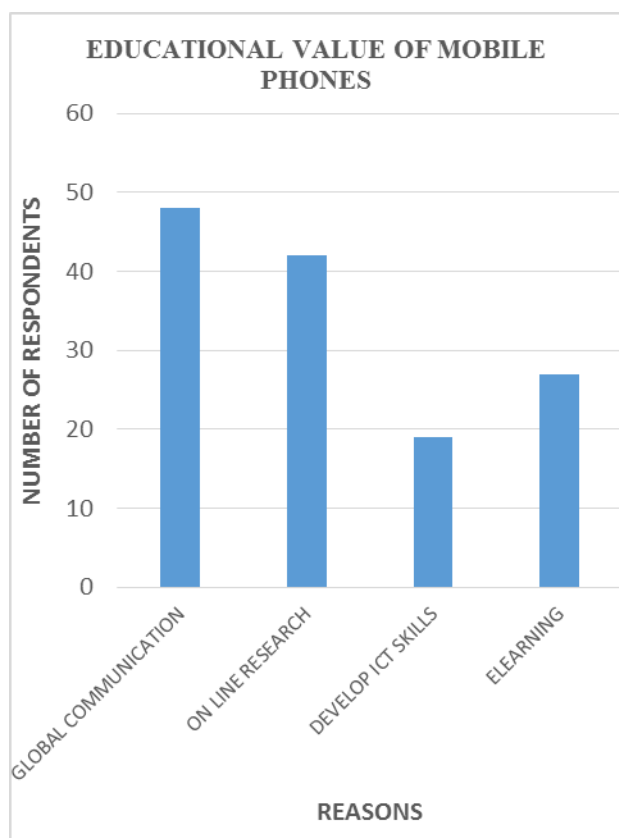
The major educational benefits of mobile phones include ease communication by voice calling, internet, social media (facebook, whatsApp, twitter), and texting (short message services). Both teachers and pupils can use the mobile phones for electronic learning (elearning) through which materials are electronically transmitted to support open and distance learning. Furthermore, as pupils and teachers use the mobile phones more, their ICT competences will be be greatly enhanced to a level where they will be able to use most of the functions on the mobile phones to their educational advantage; for example, rather than writing on the chalk board, the teacher can use Bluetooth, whatsApp or internet to distribute notes to the pupils. The pupils can use their smart phones to record data captured during field work using their camera/ video functions, google map, and GPS.

WHY ARE PUPILS NOT ALLOWED TO HAVE MOBILE PHONES?

All the four schools do not allow pupils to have mobile phones but 61% of pupils in the sample have mobile phones for the following reasons: fear that pupils will wrongfully use social media, fear that pupils wont concentrate on studies, fear that schools will become difficult to manage, fear that teachers may not be able to control use of phones by pupils. However, there is no evidence what so ever to justify this position.
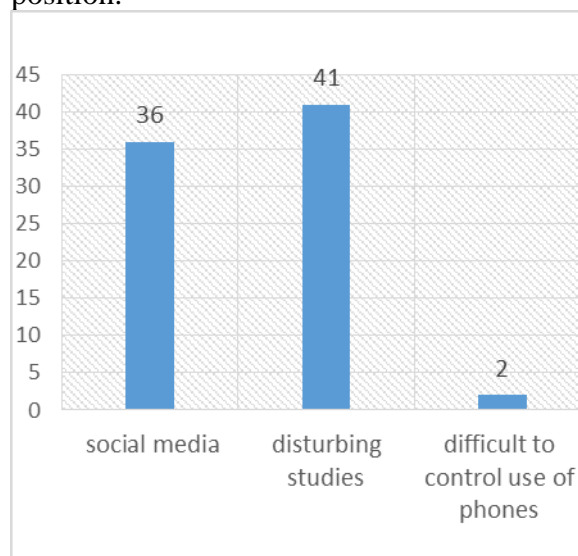

WAYS IN WHICH MOBILE PHONES HAVE IMPACTED ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA

The impacts of mobile phones on the education sector according to the respondents are in two categories: positive and negative impacts. The negative impacts are mainly attributed to misuse of the social media through which the pupils are exposed to social vices such as pornography, transmission of examination leakages on whatsApp resulting in increased cases of indiscipline among pupils! However, as has been mentioned above there is no tangible evidence to support this position.

The positive impacts include surfing the internet for latest information, downloading ebooks, use of social media study groups, increased world view on various subject matters due to ease global communication, increased ICT competences to enable pupils' download and utile educational Apps such as scientific calculators, Advanced Learners' Dictionaries, Holy Bibles, give location of places using

google maps and GPS; and carry out online research using google.
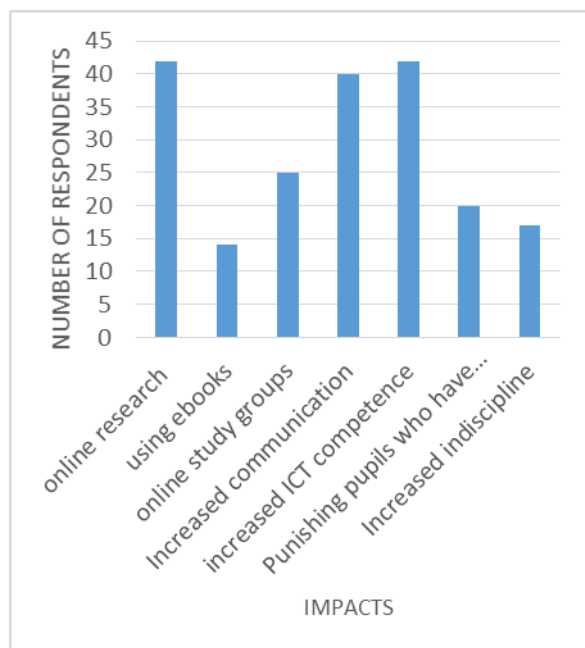
3.2. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Despite the misconception that mobile phones have negative influences on pupils, the school administrators and teachers do not have tangible evidence to that effect. The teachers and pupils use the mobile phones for the same purposes.

From this study we learn that both the teachers and pupils are aware of the benefits of utilizing mobile phones for educational purposes. In particular, the respondents show that features of the smart phone such as camera, video, voice recorder, GPS, and a number of educational APPs in play store are of great benefit. Infact, with the use of mobile phones in schools, there will not be stories of teachers not able to teach certain topic because they do not have text books. All that will be required will be for the teacher to guide the pupils to go to specific sites where the required material is electronically stored.

The learners and their parents will also be free to download all the course books online and store them on the mobile phones so that the learners can carry all the text books on the mobile phone and not in a heavy school bag.

The money that should have gone to procurement of books can be channeled to other needs.

Moreover, the mere fact that schools prohibit pupils from having mobile phones has not prevented pupils from having mobile phones. Mobile phones are not going anywhere and whether we like it or not our children will always find ways of having their phones on the school campus. Therefore, rather than stopping pupils from having mobile phones we should build capacity of teachers to regulate use of mobile phones in schools rather preventing their use.

CONCLUSIONS

The study has established that mobile phones could be used by schools for academic purposes as the cheapest and most readily available form of information communication technology to enhance the quality of education delivered in primary and secondary schools in line with the national ICT policy whose aim is having "*A Zambia transformed into an information and knowledge-based society and economy supported by consistent development of, and pervasive access to ICTs by all citizens by 2030.*" The ban was made out of some misconceptions without taking into account what the national ICT policy says.

The decision to ban use of phones in schools is mostly based on unfounded fears; but what is coming out is that banning use mobile phones by pupils is not stopping the pupils from having mobile phones. It would also appear that the pupils are more advanced than their teachers as far as use of mobile phones is concerned.

The mobile phones have a great potential to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This study shows that both teachers and pupils can use the social media as study groups, internet for communication and downloading educational materials and while using the mobile phones for these purposes the learners' ICT skills will be enhanced.

To benefit from the use of mobile phones as educational tools we should first of all allow

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each learner to have a smart phone for use at school, train teachers on how to manage the use of smartphones in classrooms. The mobile phones are the commonest form of ICT and stopping pupils from having them in school will not make them go away. We should accept that we are now in the ICT era and our education should be re oriented to suit the current era.

Once we accept the mobile phone as an educational tool, we will greatly contribute to the enhancement of human development by creating a conducive learning environment. Rather than punishing pupils for having mobile phones we should encourage our learners to bring their gadgets to school as is the case in the Netherlands.

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