

Effects of Cell Phones on the Social Interaction of Preteens and Its Implication for Christian Education

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Abstract

The adherence of preteens to cell phones anytime they have the opportunity to access one is very unsatisfactory considering the effect of it on their social interaction. Preteens are children between 10-12 years that crave adult status and will always revolt when been referred to as children. Preteens as social being are created to enjoy the company of their peers while disassociating themselves from the adult. Today, preteen's enthusiasm to be in the midst of their peers has been replaced with watching films and cartoons, browsing, chatting and playing games on cell phones. Preteens' attachment to cell phones makes it difficult for them to strike a balance between virtual and onsite relationships. The thrust of this paper therefore is to examine the effects of cell phones on the social interaction of preteens and the implications of these effects for Christian educators working among preteens. The research combines library research, observation and interview. It is expedient to make preteens realize that the use of cell phones is good as it makes life more comfortable for man but the place of face-to-face interaction with their peers and people around them is also important. The paper recommends that Christian educators can help to mitigate the effects of cell phones on the social interaction of preteens through intercession, discussion, teaching, nourishing, parents' education and Christian educators' exemplary living.

Keywords: *Preteens, Cell Phones, Social Interaction, Peers, Christian Educators*

Introduction

The attachment of preteens to cell phones anytime they have the opportunity to access one leaves much to be desired. Preteens are

children younger than thirteen, especially in the ten to the twelve-year-old group. They are also referred to as older children ([Anthony, 2001, p. 213](#)) or junior ([Ayandokun, 2017, p. 107](#)). This

age group prefers the name preteen because they dislike being addressed as children. Today, preteens prefer to sit with their cell phone – watching films and cartoons, browsing, chatting and playing games than to socialize and move around with their peers. The effect of this on their social interaction cannot be over emphasized. While the use of cell phones is good as it makes life more comfortable for men, the place of preteens' face-to-face interaction with their peers and people around them should not be jeopardized. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the effects of cell phones on the social interaction of preteens, drawing implications of these effects for Christian educators working among these preteens. The methodology employed for this research are library research, observation and interview.

2.0 Literature Review

Preteens and Cell Phones

Man is created as a social being. As expressed in creation, God did not create man to stay or live alone but He desires that man should interact and relate with fellow humans. According to Genesis 2:18, Eve, the first woman, was created so the first man,

Adam, would not be lonely. As posited by Ellison ([1986, p. 117](#)), man being in God's image is by nature a social being, so solitariness is not good for him. The woman was created to cure man's loneliness. Man is created to socialize and get along with others.

In this regard, social interaction is an event that occurs between two or more individuals. The parties involved make use of culturally approved methods to communicate certain things or perform appropriate actions ([Hepler & Chapel, 2022](#)). It is expedient for man to get along with others, share ideas and encourage one another. Interacting with other fellow human beings is more beneficial to man in all ramifications than staying alone. As posited by Vygotsky in his Sociocultural Theory of Development, much meaningful learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions supplied by the tutor (often the parent or teacher) and then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their performance ([Mcleod, 2022](#)).

Preteens, like every other human being, are social beings. They are known for their association with their peer group, identification with their peers and disassociation from the adults. Choun & Lawson ([1993, p. 68](#)) declare

that older children crave peer acceptance, and do not care about adult approval. Commenting on the functions of peer groups among school-age children, Bigner (2002, p. 298) reveals that peer groups are important social forces that provide companionship and opportunity to explore. Ordinarily, things preteens would not have done in the presence of an adult are freely carried out as they associate with their peers. Today, things are changing as a result of advanced technology. As one of the achievements of advanced technology, the cell phone has redefined social interaction.

A cell phone is a wireless device or phone that receives its signal from towers. While the earliest generation of cell phones could only make and receive calls, today's cell or mobile phones do much more (Techopedia, 2022). A cell phone is one benefit of technology that makes communication easy for humanity. These benefits are not limited to adults alone but also for preteens. Cell phones allow parents to keep a line of communication with them when the parents are away from home and allow preteens to learn about other children in the world. It is also a good companion for their class assignment. As posited by Prasanna (2022), students can

check their grades or get homework help with their cell phones.

Cell phones are convenient and very swift to use (Upadhyay, Jesudass & Chitale 2014, p. 1495) and preteens find it very easy to operate even the complex ones. Preteens only need to devote a little time studying a cell phone, even the sophisticated one and they start operating it to the chagrin of the adult. Parents often put passwords on their cell phones to prevent them from gaining access, but preteens are smarter. They can easily maneuver to get even a complex password. This researcher opines that denying preteens access to a cell phone by their parents, guardians or adults around them might not be the solution because there are other means of accessing cell phones outside the home. They only need to be taught and guided adequately on ways to use their cell phones to glorify God.

2.1 Effect of Cell Phones on Preteens' Social Interaction

This researcher observes that there has not been a time when preteens were totally denied access to cell phones since the invention of different cell phones. The opportunity was more pronounced during the outbreak of COVID-19, a pandemic that started in Wuhan, China in

2019 and afflicted several nations ([Olayinka 2021, p. 225](#)). The Covid-19 and the lockdown policies introduced by the government to curb the spread of the virus allowed many preteens access to cell phones. This is because the shutdown stimulated the growth of online educational activities so that there would be no interruption to education ([Zalat, Hamed & Bolbol, 2020](#)). Parents that denied their preteens access to browsing phones have no option but to allow them as online education was the most visible option for formal education during the lockdown. Likewise, cell phones have replaced parent-child relationship in some homes. The need for parents to look for survival means makes it imperative for many parents to buy a cell phone for their children to keep the line of communication open with them. As observed by Ola ([2019, p. 405](#)), television, phone and internet serve as nannies for this generation of children all because the parents are not available. There is a tendency for preteens from such homes to believe that social interaction is better achieved with cell phone than in a one-on-one relationship.

Rousseau, one of the childhood philosophers, believed that education for children between 5-12 years should focus more on a child's

interactions with the world, the development of the senses and the ability to draw inferences ([Dhammei, 2022](#)). This cannot be achieved when interacting with peers, parents, siblings and other adults are done majorly on cell phones. While this researcher also sees the necessity of keeping the line of communication open with the children while the parents are away, parents must make themselves available and create time to monitor what their preteens do with their cell phones.

Additionally, preteens always desire their voice to count, especially among their peers. There is likelihood for preteens that their parents cannot avoid a cell phone, that can browse to feel rejected when their friends are discussing their escapade on their personal or parent's cell phone. The tendency for children like this to withdraw from relating with their peers is high. Preteens who have access to cell phones may also see themselves as fortunate and may want to form a clique with their peers who have the same opportunity to the detriment of their peers from a less privileged home.

Likewise, the opportunity to access cell phones makes it easy for preteens to form alliances with online friends. Invariably, it increases the chances of being preyed by online predators. Online predators as molesters who use the

Internet to gain access to young victims. According to United Nation, growing digitalization magnifies children's vulnerability to harm ([United Nation Policy Brief, 2020](#)). Therefore, preteens should be properly guided and monitored to guard them against predators that may want to take advantage of their vulnerability.

3.0 Methodology

The researcher conducted an interview for 36 Christian preteens, 10 girls and 26 boys between ages 10-12. 15 parents of these preteens were also interviewed. All the preteens interviewed lived with their parents in a personal apartment. The sample is purposively chosen because the researcher is looking at the roles of Christian educators. Hence, limiting the scope to Christian preteens and their parents will help Christian educators to start from their own locality. Six out of the preteens have their personal phone while 30 do not but have access to their parents' phone.

4.0 Discussion of Findings

The question was asked about the preteens' preference as regard sitting with the cell phones and playing with their friends and all the respondents declared that they preferred playing games, chatting, watching films and

cartoons than going out to interact with their friends. When asked about their dispositions to running errands for their parents or attending to their siblings when they are pressing phones, 32 of the respondents said they will plead for more time and drop the phone reluctantly while 4 of the girls made it known that they will drop the phone immediately and attend to their parents and siblings.

The parents were equally asked about their preteens' preference to pressing cell phones and playing with their friends and all the respondents declared that their preteens preferred staying in door, sitting with the cell phones to playing with their friends. In respect to preteens disposition to running errands and attending to their siblings when pressing phones, all the respondents made it known that they have to exercise their parental authority either to shout on them or collect the cell phone before getting their attention. The findings from both the preteens and parents are confirmations of this researcher discovery from her observation and library research that preteens prefer interaction with the cell phones to relating with their friends, siblings and people around them.

5.0 Mitigating the Effects of Cell Phones on the Social Interaction of Preteens through Christian Education

Christian education, as the name implies, is different from other types of education. Abegunde (2021, p. 62) defines Christian education as a training process given to a person to bring him to salvation in Christ Jesus and to foster a life-long personal relationship with God. Ilori (2013, p. 15) also defines it as the process of training and developing knowledge, the skill of mind and the life and character of the learner, whether in matters sacred or secular in an environment and in a manner that is truly Christ-centred. The effects of cell phones on the social interaction of preteens have some implications for Christian educators. This researcher addresses the implications as responsibilities of Christian education through Christian educators to mitigate the effects of cell phones on the social interaction of preteens. The responsibilities are explained using the word “phones” as an acrostic.

5.1 (i) Present them to God: The first response to mitigate the effects of cell phones on the social interaction of preteens as posited by this researcher is to present

preteens to God in prayer. As it is written in Isaiah 54:13, God is in the best position to teach the preteens “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children”. The place of prayer in upholding the preteens to live a worthy life as regards their social interaction before and after the necessary precautions have been taken cannot be overstated. Ayandokun (2013, p. 234) admonishes Christian educators to pray for those they teach to accept the truths they learn daily.

5.1 (ii) Honour their Position: Preteens should be helped to see reasons why cell phones should not affect their social interaction but in a manner that will not lower their self-esteem. The children have a position already that the educator should honour before introducing them to what is right. Preteens are more at home with Christian educators that respect them and allow them to ask questions than with those that impose their position on them. The love and belonging needs, the third level of needs in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, is a reminder that preteens, like every other human, need love, affection, belonging, identity and association (Aruma & Hanachor 2017, p. 26). Ayo-Obiremi (2014, p. 20) corroborates that Children workers must sincerely care about

their students' needs and consider how the Bible might be used to meet those needs.

The jurisprudential inquiry, a model of teaching created by Donald Oliver and James P. Shaver (1996/1994) can be applied to help preteens think systematically about the use of cell phones in respect to their social interaction. Jurisprudential inquiry requires students to formulate issues as public questions and develop alternative positions about them ([Joyce & Weil 1986, p. 258](#)). In this instance, preteens are allowed to take a position and the teacher challenges the position with questions to help them think about their stance, learn and have a rethink. Discovery learning theory as proposed by Bruner reveals that facts and relationships children discover through their explorations are more usable and tend to be better retained than the material they have merely committed to memory ([Yount 1996, p. 196](#)).

5.1 (iii) Open their Eyes to God's Expectation: Spiritually, preteens can understand spiritual matters to an extent. Preteens need to understand that they are social being and God desires that they should value relationships above cell phones. According to Fowler's Faith Development theory, preteens are in the second stage, the

Mythical-Literal Faith. At this stage, a child can distinguish between reality and fantasy and view God anthropomorphically ([Dirke 2001, p. 85](#)). Their Bible lessons should be theoretical and practical. Beechick ([1985, p. 52](#)) believes that there is no gain in waiting until children are more fully developed intellectually before exposing them to fundamental Bible doctrines.

5.1 (iv) Nourish Preteens to Maturity: The emphasis here is that there should be regular teaching for preteens as regard the use of cell phones and why cell phones should not take the place of social interaction. This researcher recently organized a teaching for the primary five students of Seminary Staff School Ogbomoso on the topic 'My Cell Phone and I'. More of teachings like this can be organized. Preteens need to learn that they can use the time allotted to them by God to gain useful knowledge, do good to others in prayer and self-examination, seek salvation and make the earth better ([Olapoju 2012, p. 12](#)).

5.1 (v) Educate the Parents – It is expedient to help parents understand their responsibilities in bringing up their preteens to interact appropriately within and outside the home. As observed by this researcher, parental neglect is the major reason for negative behaviour and attitude in some children today. The task of

training children has been given to parents by God. In Deuteronomy 6:5-6, parents are to love God with all their heart and soul and with all their strength and impress God's commandment upon their children, talking about them at home, along the road, when they lie down and when they get up. As much as possible, parents should sit with their preteens to watch films, play games, read the Bible and find solution to school assignments. These will improve preteens' social interaction. Bandura, in his Social Learning theory, make it known that children learn and socialize into appropriate roles by observing and communicating with adults ([Edmund 2012, p. 42](#)).

5.1 (vi) Set Example: Preteens should be able to learn from Christian educators working among them how to maintain a balance between face-to-face interactions and electronic interactions both in words and deeds. Leadership is about persuading and living exemplary life to make people follow you ([Bamgbose 2021, p. 22](#)). While telling them that they should not allow cell phones to hinder them from relating with their peers, they should see that the Christian educator working among them is not overwhelmed with phone when his attention is needed.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper has examined the effects of cell phones on the social interaction of preteens drawing and the implication for Christian educators that are working among these preteens. Preteens' refusal to relate with their peers due to their addiction to cell phones if not curbed is dangerous for their future, the church and the society at large. Likewise, projecting cell phones as evil or something that is not meant to be handled by preteens is not the solution. It is expedient, for Christian educators to let preteens understand that cell phones are good and desirable but must not take the place of social interaction. This is a task that Christian educators must not handle with levity, considering the imperativeness of bringing up godly preteens.

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