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# Utilization Of Digital Communication Technologies In Kenya: How Children Aged 12-14 Years Report Cyber Bullying In School.

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**ABSTRACT:** Emerging digital technologies in the 21st century have led to questions being raised about digital security as children increasingly engage with these emerging technologies for varied reasons. While digital communication technologies are often embedded with varied applications to ensure the safety of users, often users still face various challenges ranging from fraud, cyber-bullying, stalking, identity theft and access to inappropriate content by the children. This paper discusses the challenges faced by children as well as the teachers in mitigating the risks that children aged 12-14 years encounter while utilizing different online digital communication technologies. The overall objective of this paper is to critically analyze the internet use of children in Kenya. This will be established by review of the relevant literature and interviews and focus group discussions with teachers and children to answer how children report cyber bullying when utilizing digital communication technologies in schools in Kenya.

**Keywords**: children, cyber-bullying, digital, emerging technologies, fraud, identity theft, stalking

Date of Submission: 13-07-2017 Date of acceptance: 19-08-2017

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the internet connectivity in Kenya stands at 83 percent with a total population of 35.5 million being online. The mobile phone and other online digital communication technologies lead at 23.7 million subscriptions with affordable connectivity. This has an effect in the number of children accessing the internet. Children have access to the internet through cyber café, mobile phones, tablets and others have computers in their homes. Computer literacy has influenced the use of internet by the children. Primary schools in the country teach computer applications to the children. Kenya is aiming at attaining high standards like other developed countries. The government and other development partners have provided children with digital technologies with internet connectivity in most of the public schools in Kenya. It is important to note that Kenya is among the leading countries in Africa in terms of the use of the internet and ICT issues being ranked at 4th place in Africa and 30<sup>th</sup> in the entire world (White Paper, 2016). Due to the remarkable increase in uptake of internet by young school children, both the teachers, parents and policy makers have been rendered without clear direction concerning the benefits and the risks that are involved. It is not also clear how best to support the children's engagement with internet issues in safe and rewarding way. It is, therefore, hoped that the evidence base increases so that the relevant policy is developed. Public awareness will then be created, and this will assist parents and teachers in mediating their children towards effective internet use. The negative impacts of the internet are thus being witnessed by the children across the globe at an alarming rate. Therefore, this raises the issues of digital internet safety considering the adverse effects associated with it. The Kenyan government has recently passed the Cyber and Computer Bill 2016 which places tough measures towards persons engaging in cyber-crime. The definition of a word child differs from one community to another community. The argument here will be skewed to those who are below the age of 14 years. As a result, there has been favorable consideration given to the protection of young children. Farthermore, diminutive attention has been directed to the available opportunities as well as benefits provided to children through engagement online.

## II. METHODOLOGY

## I. Research approach

I adopted the qualitative approach in this study. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) asserts that qualitative researchers have a commitment to naturalistic viewpoints and interpretation of human experience. Qualitative approach also places a strong emphasis on examining subjective narratives as a way to understand the individual

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or group experience. I sought this approach to comprehend the holistic, dynamic, contextual and complexity of different individuals and their experiences and denotes as the perceived view of the participant (Beck & Polit, 2004). The aim of qualitative interpretation is to describe and understand the complexities of the individual's subjective experiences within socially, culturally and historically constructed world (Davidson & Tolich, 2011). The qualitative research approach enabled me to explore and understand the meaning individuals and groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Since the data was generated in the school which is the natural setting of my participants, I was able to seek preserve the natural surrounding where the study was conducted.

## II. METHOD

I adopted a case study method of a school selected in Nairobi County in Kenya. This is an in-depth investigation of a particular case in real-life situation. Davidson and Tolich (2003) describe that choosing the correct method as choosing the right toolbox and subsequent tools for the purposes of answering the research question. Methods, therefore, relates not just to the analysis of the data, but also the procedures surrounding who will be selected in the study sample and how the data will be generated.

Yin (2003) as cited by Jwan and Ongóndo (2011) define case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon or object within its real-life context. It involves an in-depth observation of an individual unit such as students, a family, a school, an entire culture. The case study was used as a method in this study as it offered me an opportunity to study the contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context or in their natural setting. How people behave, think and feel is only understood if we encounter their world and what they do in it. I sought the views of the guidance & counseling, ICT and class teachers and the children who access internet and have reported being cyber bullied. I selected the school in order to get the relevant participants for this study.

## III. SAMPLING

Sampling in any research is key as it offers the decision making that surrounds who will participate in the study. In the qualitative research, participants are selected because of their firsthand experience of the social process or phenomenon to be studied (Streubert, 2007). Purposive sampling was used whereby the participants were purposively chosen with an experiential fit and willingness to participate in the study (Morse, 2007).

An inclusion criterion in purposive sampling was used to delineate information-rich participants who then offered the opportunity to learn about the topic central to the study. The sample frame included the children aged 12-14 years and their teachers. The inclusion of this study was: teachers working/tackling issues related to children who have reported safety issues online in the school, the victim children aged 12-14 years both boys and girls and their guidance & counseling, ICT teachers in their school. The study recruited twenty-nine participants who met the inclusion criteria.

## IV. SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The school was purposively sampled after a pre study. The characteristic of the sampled school included; pupils' aged 12-14 years allowed to access online digital communication technologies during the school session and at home; the school having both boys and girls; well established guidance & counseling and ICT department.

I used quota sampling to identify eighteen children from selected school in Nairobi County aged 12-14 years from their respective classes to participate in the study. Because the population was of a homogeneous nature, the participants had a similar experience, perspective or outlook. For gender sensitivity, both genders were included in the study i.e. male and female. The five focus groups discussions were used to generate data from the children and their class teachers. I purposively selected two guidance & counseling and ICT teachers who handled safety issues related to these children in the school.

I selected the participants based on their importance, expertise and experience as well as their key role in the school. The teachers' interviewed have a diploma in guiding and counseling and bachelor's degree in computer science. Both have many years of experience in their field ranging from five to fifteen years. The participants were generated as follows;

**Table 1.1.** Table of Participants

Participants	AGE 12	AGE 13	AGE 14	Total
Children	6	6	6	18
Guidance & counseling, ICT teachers				2
Class teachers	3	3	3	9
TOTAL				29

Source: Author (2015)

Six children were selected from each age to ensure that a focus group is conducted effectively. My consideration of this sample size was based on the nature of my qualitative approach which works well with small samples. The limited time of the study and available resource for the academic study also made it possible for the sample size selected.

## V. DATA GENERATION

Data generation in research is the stage where the necessary data useful according to the purpose and objectives of the research are gathered from the field. Jwan and Ongóndo (2011) define data generation as the process of assembling data which involves negotiation, interaction and/or reasoning between the researcher and the participants. The ways for gathering data is what is termed data generation techniques. The two main sources of data that were used include; primary source and secondary source.

I used interviews and focus group discussion as the methods of primary data generation. Interviews were used to generate data from key informant who were the guidance & counseling and ICT teachers because I believed they possessed the quality and experience that I needed in this study. Therefore, there were a maximum of two interviews for each participant. This ensured that quality data is generated from the participants who are the teachers. While the focus group discussions were used to obtain data from the children aged 12-14 years and their respective class teachers. The focus group discussions were made of eighteen participants' aged 12-14 years group according to their ages, and their respective nine class teachers. With few participants in the FGDs allowed for proper coordination. The FGDs were conducted two times. This generated data that was viable

#### VI. DATA ANALYSIS

According to Jwan and Ongóndo (2011), "data in qualitative research is mostly in the form of words" they may exist in verbal form or transcript. I analyzed data concurrently during generation and sampling until no new themes arose from the interview. As cited by Jwan and Ongóndo (2011), Richards (2003,2009) and Yin (2003,2009) describe data analysis in qualitative research as that which involves the looking at the data, assigning categories and putting together emerging issues into themes in an attempt to answer the research questions.

Data analysis is a systematic process of transcribing, collating, editing, coding and reporting the data in a manner that is made sensible and accessible to the reader and researcher for the purposes of interpretation and discussion (Jwan and Ongóndo, 2011). Creswell, (2013) elucidate that data analysis is an ongoing process during research. He argues that it involves analyzing participant information, and researchers typically employ the analysis steps found within a particular strategy of inquiry.

Streubert (2007) state that this concept is known as theoretical saturation whereby the researcher continues to sample as widely as possible until they are confident. Morse agrees with Streusel that saturation is repetition and confirmation of previously collected data.

Jwan and Ongóndo (2011) recommend the use of thematic analysis in analyzing data in qualitative research as it is mostly widely used. They state that 'Thematic analysis is the search for themes of relevance to the research topic under which large amount of data from different sources can be organized. I utilized Braun and Clarkes (2006) six phase of thematic analysis to analyze the data. They argue that a theme captures something important about data in relation to research questions and represents some level patterned response meaning within the data set. The thematic analysis was a realist method.

#### VII. FINDINGS

## i. SUPERVISION

Supervision refers to establishing rules and limits to be observed by children who therefore include the quantity and accuracy of the information. Children should be supervised no matter online or offline. The supervision amount depends squarely on the age of the children. Roddel (2010) views agrees with the finding of this study that children are at risk each and every time they connect to the internet without constant adult supervision. This has been depicted with the numerous anonymous bully messages from their friends. Active supervision ensures that the children are not exposed to inappropriate material or inappropriate contact whom may be an abuser. This regular supervision enlightens both teachers and parent's opportunity to know what children do online. Although when children get older require less supervision, children aged 12-14 years are prone to dangers online supervision may be something difficult to do bearing in mind that the children access internet using different peripherals. The exposure that children get online is fun and of a short fad. The study agrees with Kurbanoglu (2014) who says that teachers consider that children perceive internet differently because they were born with it and learned gradually to use them, therefore supervision is inevitable. Snow (2003) argues that children are vulnerable to cult recruiters via internet, he suggests that parents and teachers should teach children not to be too trusting to strangers. Although Snow points out the children should learn to ask questions of people and insist on answers but not evasive response, I found out that the children fear their

teachers when approaching them on issues concerning their supervision in the internet. Teachers should demand more from internet service providers so that they could be able to control what their children do online. Snow (2003) argues that parents and teachers need to monitor children's internet use since is not more intrusive than them knowing where the children are all times and with whom.

## ii. Inadequacy of tech guidance

From the study, it was realized that the children feel uncomfortable when their teachers check what they do online. Teachers control should go a long way to filtering and blocking inappropriate content on any online devices that the children access. Lack of proper channel of communication from teachers towards the children exposes the children to a different scenario of solving some of their problems. Say & Ren (2016) attributes this to children spending excessive amount of time on the internet with no direct purpose. They farther states that the adolescence face challenges in dealing with difficulties. From the study, it was found out the participants faced these challenges. The need of parents to create quality time to spend with their children is vital. Children tend to deviate from norm when they are not well supervised. As Palfrey (2013) notes that teachers are on the front line of ensuring the safety of their children online, they have the biggest responsibility and most important role to play. The challenge faced by teachers' is that they are not involved in the decisions that children make. They cut themselves off from the children they supervise because of the language and cultural barriers that are too great.

#### iii. Curriculum On Internet Safety

In this internet age, teachers need to educate themselves and become more comfortable with the internet. They should take this opportunity to discuss the dangers and risks of being online with children. Although children learn from coping others, teachers should therefore spend time with the children online. Children are addicted to the internet and may spend long hours both at night and during the weekends surfing. This allows them to explore more sites which might be of harm to them.

Since the internet is accessed by the children using different handheld devices like mobile phones, tablets and laptops, this make them prone to sex offenders who may as far would want to get a lot of information from the children. Teachers should come up with time limits to regulate the usage of internet by the children. This could include purchase of phones which are not internet enable hence it may restrict the children from visiting some sites.

Most sex offenders use the internet as a platform to perform child abuse, there is need for the teachers to put guidelines about what a child should do online, they should as well try to understand the and be curious of what the children are doing online hence inform them the different type of sexual victimization that the children may interact via the internet.

The study agrees with Gillespie (2013) that children are able to access pornographically material unintentionally but disagree with (Moultrie, 2006, Ybarra and Mitchell, 2005, Livingstone and Haddon,2009) that that some minors deliberately access adult pornography. From the participants, children access adult in appropriate content accidentally during the time they engage in exploiting the internet. This has been a case of children picking the parents phone who had forgotten to log out from a pornographically site.

However, children should be courteous with people they meet online and asks them to meet offline. In most cases, online sex offenders often meet their potential victims using chat rooms and instant messaging. The "no talking to stranger" rule, if well implemented at tender age would bear fruit. As Crouse, (2010) indicates that most popular sites for teens are teeming with predator, it is evident from the study since the participants alluded to this. The sites were created for the children to communicate with each other but predators have troll in these areas where they know children are going to be.

## iv. School policy guidelines

Teachers play a major role in safeguarding the security of the children online. But they lack the necessary skills and knowledge to counter this. Teachers roles have also been discussed by (Morgan, Brebbia, and Spector 2006) which indicate that although teachers have are mandated to safe guard the children online behaviors, themselves are taught by the same children on how to navigate through the internet. If a child access internet using the parent's or school's online device, there is need of creating child friendly account for the children. Passwords to all these devices should ensure limited access of children to the internet. Some parents access inappropriate content via their phones, it is important for the parents to counter check and log out from previous sites they were in before handing over their devices to the children when they needed them.

The study concurs with Crouse (2010) who offers suggestion that teachers must be vigilant about what the children watch on television, what they access online and who contact them offline. He farther explains in which the study confirms that with that explaining the dangerous of today's world to children is a delicate

balance between causing fear and making clear dangers that lurk not only just outside the front door, but as well as inside the school and home.

Children access the internet during the night and weekends when there is little supervision, parents and teachers should therefore look out on any change of behaviors from the children both at school and home. According to Hasebrink, Livingstone, Haddon, (2010) half 49% of all the children who use the internet use it in their bedroom or other private room at home and school this has also been supported by (Morgan, Brebbia, and Spector 2006). From the study, the findings were contrary to Hasebrink et al, since the participants in the study access internet during the day and night. Hasebrink et al have not mention the period either night or day time that the children access internet. Sometimes, the victimized children online withdraw from their normal jovial moods.

The use of other people's computers and internet enabled handheld devices by the children may create a disconnect in supervision process of the teachers towards the children, strict measures should be encouraged and put to disallow children using other people's internet accessible devices

## VIII. CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine the online safety of children aged 12-14 years while utilizing online digital communication technologies in a school in Kenya. Explicitly, the study sought to answer the following questions; How do children utilize online digital communications technologies in schools? How do children report cyberbullying when utilizing digital communication technologies in schools? What role do teachers play in safeguarding the safety of children when utilizing the online digital communication technologies in school? Generally, the study reveals that the teachers and children in Kenya acknowledge the need for workable policy and framework in safeguarding the children while interacting with online digital communication technologies. Therefore, teachers and children have developed strategies in dealing with safe internet usage and utilize general aspects of in guarding them against abuse online which include filtering and blocking. However, the policies there are no specific policies in the country that regulate/ counter the online safety of children while utilizing these technologies. The recent Cyber Security bill of 2016 has been not yet passed and taken back to the stakeholders for debate. As this continues, there is likelihood that children may continue to faces such challenges.

Children are hesitant, if not secretive to give information to their teachers when they encounter inappropriate content online. Teachers therefore find it difficult to obtain such information when children encounter varied forms of abuse online while in the school setting. Policies which are in school are not nationalized hence they have created their own systems of monitoring and safeguarding the children online. Developing and documenting proper national policy that cuts across issues regarding online safety of children is paramount. Schools have not invested in capacity building the capacity of teachers and educators on their roles in protecting the children while they are faced with such challenges online. Children are always uncomfortable to talk about issues that they face online with their teachers. They fear to be victimized and reported to their parents whom would therefore pick their devices up. The safety of internet has not been taken with the seriousness that it deserves in the country. The online security majorly remains the interest of the persons that utilize them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

## Development and implementation of international standards on child safety

Online security should be addressed through the adoption of international standards on child safety and protection with regard to new technologies. The law should contain clear prevention and protection policies, strategies and guidelines protecting children from the inappropriate and harmful use of digital media & ICTs. Those provisions should determine the precise scope for the use of ICTs and identify mechanisms for protection of children rights. These standards should be adaptable to countries within the countries in the South to ensure that the victim children are well protected within the entire sphere.

## Promote the right to protection of children privacy

Develop guidelines and regulations to address online data collection practices. Children, teachers and parents should be aware of online data collection practices in order to be educated on the extent to which their privacy may be compromised while accessing the Internet and digital media. These guidelines should therefore strive to ensure that children are safe in the various platforms that they encounter during the engagement with the online digital communication tools. Such tools have tendency of sipping out data from the victims without their knowledge.

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#### Promotion of awareness-raising initiatives and activities

Awareness-raising effort is necessary to sensitize children on the consequences that improper use of online digital communication technologies may have. This should be done through school open forums where children are given opportunities to air out their views on what they have been experiencing while interacting with the digital communication technologies. From these forums, children may be able to share openly the strategies that they have adapted in ensuring their safety while engaging with online digital communication technologies.

#### Aligning online safety topics to the entire education curriculum

Learning about digital media threat should be integral part of the wider educational strategy. The Kenya education curriculum should have different aspects in regard to online child protection. Although the curriculum stipulates safety in general, it does not stipulate the ways and strategies that children should use to ensure that they are safe in the internet. This should also give clear guideline to teachers to develop pedagogical materials that address the challenges that children face while facing cyberbullying. There should be child-friendly materials to ensure that the children have access to information which will allow them to understand the risks that online digital communication technologies come with.

## Development of national and international awareness raising on cyberbullying

Workshops, awareness raising and information campaigns should be organized with the participation of children and families, education and social care staff, internet service providers companies, civil society organizations, governments and state institutions. These should clearly articulate the issues that children experience while utilizing digital communication technologies. This strategy should ensure that all the stakeholders are involve in the appreciation of the voices of the children on cyber bully issues that the experience on day to day.

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Daniel Oloo Ong'ong'a. "Utilization Of Digital Communication Technologies In Kenya: How Children Aged 12-14 Years Report Cyber Bullying In School." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), vol. 22, no. 8, 2017, pp. 49–56.