Redacción Técnica y Científica en Inglés y en Español

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Session 2 — In-Class Activity: Structure

Literature review → Results → Introduction → Conclusion → Methodology → Discussion → Methodology(participants)

The Effect of Smartphone Restriction Policies on Academic Engagement in Secondary School Students: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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Smartphone distraction in secondary education represents a growing pedagogical challenge. Despite widespread device ownership among adolescents, the empirical evidence base for institutional policy decisions remains limited. This study examines the effect of a structured smartphone restriction policy on academic engagement among secondary school students in Mexico, contributing to an underrepresented body of research in Latin American educational contexts.

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Research on mobile technology in educational settings has yielded inconsistent findings. While several studies report positive associations between smartphone access and learner autonomy (Crompton & Burke, 2018, pp. 252–256), others identify significant negative effects on attention and academic performance (Thornton et al., 2014, p. 2765; Kuznekoff & Titsworth, 2013, p. 238). A critical gap in the literature concerns the effects of institutional restriction policies on measurable engagement, particularly in secondary school contexts in developing countries.

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A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was employed over an eight-week intervention period. Academic engagement was operationalised using two measures: systematic direct observation of on-task behaviour, coded by trained research assistants using the Behavioural Observation of Students in Schools protocol (BOSS; Shapiro, 2011, p. 4), and teacher-rated engagement scales adapted from the Student Engagement Instrument (Appleton et al., 2006, pp. 430–431).

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Participants were 186 students (aged 13–16) from four secondary schools in Yucatán, Mexico, assigned to two conditions: a restriction group ($n = 94$), in which smartphones were collected at the start of each class, and a control group ($n = 92$), in which no policy change was implemented. Groups were matched on baseline academic performance, socioeconomic status, and prior smartphone use frequency.

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Students in the restriction group demonstrated significantly higher rates of on-task behaviour ($M = 78.4\%$, $SD = 9.2$) compared to the control group ($M = 61.7\%$, $SD = 11.5$), $t(184) = 9.87$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.62$. Teacher-rated engagement scores also differed significantly between conditions ($F(1, 184) = 44.3$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$). No significant between-group differences were observed in self-reported motivation ($p = .34$).

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The results support the hypothesis that structured restriction policies significantly reduce off-task device use and improve observable engagement. However, the moderate effect size suggests that policy alone is insufficient. Consistent with Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, student self-regulation mediates the relationship between policy and behaviour (p. 193). These findings align with

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recent meta-analyses on digital distraction in secondary education (Loe & Feldman, 2023, pp. 441–445), which found that policy effectiveness is moderated by teacher implementation fidelity.

This study provides empirical evidence that smartphone restriction policies can improve academic engagement in secondary school classrooms. Future research should examine long-term compliance patterns and the interaction between restriction policies and student motivation. Replication across broader regional and cultural contexts is warranted to establish generalisability. These findings have implications for school administrators developing evidence-based mobile device policies.

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