The Level of Usage of Computer and The Internet by Teenage Girls in Ghana

Henry Osborn Quarshie
MBA (MIS) PG. Cyber law
Lecturer Regent University College of Science & Technology, Accra, Ghana.

hquarshie@yahoo.com, sirhoq@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Computers are increasingly present in most childhood education settings in Ghana. Very young children have shown comfort and confidence in using computers in Ghana. The computer also offers unique opportunities for learning through exploration, creative problem solving, and self-guided instruction. This paper presents a review of the level usage of the computer and the internet by teenage girls in Ghana. The amount of time and the types of activities that these girls engage in while using computer and internet.

Keywords: Computer, Internet, Teenage girls, Ghana.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to interrogate the usage of computer and the internet by teenage girls in Ghana. This is a systematic study to understand how computer affect development of teenage girls, to help parents, teachers, and policymakers refine and adopt guidelines that maximize the positive effects and minimize the negative effects of computers in the life of the average teenage girl.

On the July 17, 2012, “Girls in ICT” Programme, a project that seeks to increase the number of girls studying ICT at all levels of education system in Ghana was launched in Accra, Ghana.

The programme seek to establish a substantive number of competent women ICT professionals holding jobs at all levels in the ICT sector as well as setting up their own ICT businesses to create jobs and reduce unemployment.

Launching the programme, Mr. Haruna Iddrisu, Minister of Communication of Ghana, said the project had the potential for girls to help close the gender disparity in ICT in Ghana.

He said the idea to establish the programme came out of the “Girls in ICT” celebration instituted by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and observed in April 26, 2012.

Participants at that celebration agreed that such a programme should be instituted and sustained in Ghana to benefit girls in both urban and underserved rural communities.

An ad-hoc committee was then constituted, comprising 11 women ICT development experts chaired by Ms Eva Lokko, former Director General of Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), to provide policy inputs and programmes to facilitate sustainable and collaborative policy development in the four Ministerial sectors of Education, Environment and Science, Information Technology and Women and Children Affairs.

Mr. Iddrisu urged more girls to discard the notion that ICT was a man reserve and endeavour to enter into that field so they could help “Catapult Ghana to a new height in her quest for equal-partner status in the ICTR economy”.

The Sector Minister announced that a digital device project would soon be launched to enable ISSER undertake a nation-wide studies to access the situation of the digital divide in the country.

Ms Lokko said the ICT programme would involve mentoring, resource mobilisation, girls’ empowerment, awards in ICT, school competition in ICT and curriculum enhancement for all schools.

She said other stakeholders including teachers would be partnered to train girls between 5-25 years in the use of ICT and internet for them to apply the skills in their daily lives.[2]

2. METHODOLOGY

The research covered three hundred (300) girls in Grades 7 to 9 (Junior High School) in Greater Accra region of Ghana where the use of computers and internet among children is widespread. Most of the schools that appeared for the 2011 and 2012 Basic Education and Certificate Examination (BECE ) in ICT are located in this region. In examining the usage of computer and the internet by teenage girls the research looked at the following areas

- The number of times at which teenage girls use the internet for the following activities, computer game, home work, chatting on face book, e-mail, and current events like (news, sports and weather).
- The number of hours per week they spend using the internet for the following activities; computer game, home work, chatting on face book, e-mail, and current events like (news, sports and weather).
The number of times per week teenage girls uses the computer without the internet from home and from school.

The number of hours per week teenage girls uses the computer with the internet from home, school and internet cafe.

How frequent teenage girls use the computer for the subjects they study at school; mathematics, English language, general science, social studies and ICT.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. HOW OFTEN TEENAGE USE THE COMPUTER FOR THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES (computer games, homework, chatting online, sending e-mail and reading current affairs such as news, weather forecast.)

The increasing amount of time teenage girls is spending on computers and the internet at home and school has raised questions about how the use of computer technology may make a difference in their lives. Time spent on computers and the internet may display other activities that have more developmental value to teenage girls.

Figure 1, shows the percentage of teenage girls who use the computer for games, homework, chatting online, E-mail and current affairs. The research revealed that only 18% of the girls always use the computer for their home work as compared to 6% using it for games, 6.3% chatting online and 9.2% for sending e-mails. Most of these teenage girls in Ghana use it for home work and current affairs. We still have a sizable number of teenage girls in Ghana who do not have access to the computer, with those who never use the computer for games, home work, and chatting online, sending e-mails and current affairs, we have the following respectively, 44.9%, 34%, 66%, 62.1% and 52.2%. But occasionally we have the following using them; 40% for playing games, 30% using it for homework, 17.2% chatting online, 22.2% for sending e-mails and 27.2% for current affairs.

2. THE NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK TEENAGE GIRLS USES THE INTERNET FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES (computer games, homework, chatting online, sending e-mail and reading current affairs such as news, weather forecast.)

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The research looked out for the number of sedentary hours teenage girls spend on the activities they engage in using the internet, (computer games, homework, chatting online, sending e-mail and reading current affairs such as news, weather forecast.) Most of the girls spend few hours a week on the internet. Very active hours are between one to three hours. 18.2% spend between 1-3 hours on games, 36.4% spend 1-3 hours a week on their homework, and 15.9% spend it on chatting online, 18.7% on E-mails and 20.7% on current affairs. A large number of teenage girls still don't use the internet for their daily activities. 77.1% spend within an hour a week on the internet playing games, 47.9% for homework, 71.7% chatting online, 73.9% sending E-mails and 66.7% on current affairs. This is not encouraging looking at the various government interventions to increase and improve access to computer by school children in Ghana.

3. THE NUMBER OF TIMES PER WEEK CHILDREN USES THE COMPUTER WITHOUT INTERNET FROM HOME AND SCHOOL.

Only 7.8% and 10% use it four times or more at school and home respectively. The schools that had computers were the private schools. Most of the girls from the public schools who responded to the questionnaire either did not have and if they had, most of the computers have broken down and needed replacement.

4. THE NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK CHILDREN USES THE INTERNET FROM HOME, SCHOOL AND INTERNET CAFES.
The research also finds out the number of teenage girls who have access to the internet at school, home and the internet café. The use of Internet in classrooms allows these teenage girls to work together, share ideas and develop cooperative learning skills. The research revealed that most of the teenage girls struggle to get access to the internet. 49.7% of the teenage girls do not have access to the internet at school and 60.2% don't have it at home. This suggests that most schools in Ghana do not have access to the internet. Most of the children depend on the internet cafes in their communities. These teenage girls have to compete with the adults in these cafes exposing them to online abuse, in the form of pop up pornography and adult related information. Only 1.2% have access to the internet 11 hours and more a week at school for class activities. 3.1% have it at home between 11 hours and more and 4.4% at the internet café.

5. HOW OFTEN CHILDREN USE THE COMPUTER FOR SUBJECTS TAUGHT AT SCHOOL MATHS, ENGLISH LANGUAGE, SOCIAL STUDIES, GENERAL SCIENCE AND ICT)

The introduction of computers in schools and free distribution of laptops to school children and teachers in Ghana is to facilitate teaching and learning in the subjects the children study. The research discovered that, this has not yielded the expected results by government, we have over 50% of the teenage girls who have never used the computer to study any of the subjects taught at school. The only time they use the computer is when it is time for ICT as a subject. The few that use the computer to facilitate teaching and learning are in the well endowed private schools. 58% of the girls never use the computer for mathematics, 45.1% English language, 43.1% General science, 49.8% Social science and 24.1% for ICT. The percentage of teenage girls who always use the computer for the study of mathematics, English language, General Science, Social studies and ICT are 10.6%, 12.6%, 11.2%, 9.8% and 26.6% respectively.

4. CONCLUSION

Children who use the computer and the Internet show gains in cognitive abilities such as memory, spatial and logical problem solving, critical thinking, concentration, abstraction and comprehension. The Internet exposes children to information to improve the quality of learning that they can transform into knowledge. Through the use of the Internet, children’s language and literacy development is often promoted, allowing for greater gains in verbal and nonverbal skills. Ghana as a country cannot be left out with this development. Policy targets should be sets for all schools to be equipped with computers and also connected with the internet to increase and improve the level of usage of the computer and internet by teenage girls.

REFERENCE
