



Phubbing and Its Implications for Managerial Effectiveness and Staff Interpersonal Relations in Public Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT: The increasing integration of smartphones into daily life has introduced phubbing—a blend of "phone" and "snubbing"—as a subtle but disruptive behaviour in professional environments. This study investigates the prevalence and implications of phubbing on managerial effectiveness and staff interpersonal relations in public secondary schools in Osun State, Nigeria. Employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, data were collected from 320 teachers and 40 principals across four Local Government Areas using a structured questionnaire and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Findings reveal a moderate prevalence of phubbing behaviours among school staff and administrators. Frequent smartphone use during meetings and collaborative tasks was reported to significantly disrupt attention and delay communication processes. Results indicate that phubbing negatively affects managerial clarity, authority, and decision-making. Interpersonal relations were also undermined, with respondents reporting feelings of being ignored, reduced team cohesion, and increased miscommunication. While gender and age differences in phubbing behaviour were tested, statistical analyses showed no significant variation, suggesting the issue is institutionally rooted rather than demographically driven. The study aligns with existing literature which associates phubbing with diminished trust, impaired communication, and reduced job satisfaction in organizational contexts. It highlights the urgent need for educational institutions to address digital distractions as a managerial and relational challenge. The study concludes that phubbing compromises effective school leadership and collegial interaction, both of which are critical for institutional performance and staff morale. Recommendations include the implementation of phone use policies, leadership training in digital etiquette and emotional intelligence, awareness campaigns on the consequences of phubbing, and the establishment of device-free zones within school premises. These interventions are essential for fostering a respectful and focused educational work environment.

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INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of workplace productivity and communication have changed as a result of mobile technology's explosive growth. Smartphones improve administrative effectiveness and information access, but they have also fuelled the growth of phubbing, the practice of people ignoring co-workers in favour of their mobile gadgets (Roberts & David, 2016). Phubbing poses a subtle yet serious threat to institutional harmony and efficacy in educational administration, where interpersonal communication is essential to collaboration and leadership. Phubbing is the practice of using a mobile phone during a face-to-face contact while neglecting a co-worker or boss. Despite being modest, this behaviour could have major repercussions for team cohesion, managerial efficacy, and organizational behaviour (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018).

The consequences of digital distractions could be exacerbated in Osun State, where school leadership frequently plays a pivotal role in managing limited resources and navigating systemic challenges. Public secondary schools in Osun State already grapple with limited resources, high administrative workloads, and systemic inefficiencies; adding a new layer of distraction in the form of unchecked mobile phone use could further destabilize work culture and leadership quality. In the context of educational institutions, especially public secondary schools, effective communication, collaboration, and interpersonal relationships between school leaders and staff are essential for the smooth operation of the school and the achievement of educational goals.

Although phubbing is becoming more well-known in social and professional contexts, little research has been done to determine how common it is and what effects it has in Nigerian educational settings. Developing policies and interventions that promote healthy communication norms and effective leadership in schools requires an understanding of how phubbing impacts managerial effectiveness and interpersonal relationships among school staff. Therefore, this study investigates how phubbing affects staff relationships and managerial efficacy in Osun State's public secondary schools.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Strong interpersonal ties and regular communication between principals, teachers, and administrative personnel are essential for effective educational management. However, excessive and inappropriate usage of smartphones in educational settings during working hours has become a major concern in recent years. Phubbing is a practice that can hamper active listening, undermine leadership effectiveness, and erode trust among coworkers (Vanden Abeele, 2021).

Public secondary schools in Osun State deal with a number of issues, such as a lack of funding, overworked employees, and rising administrative demands. Effective management in this situation necessitates responsive communication, teamwork, and concentrated attention. Mobile phone use during work-related contacts might put additional pressure on school administration and lower employee morale. Little is known about phubbing in African educational workplaces, especially in Nigeria, despite the expanding body of research on digital distraction. By examining its frequency and consequences in Osun State's public secondary schools, this study fills that knowledge vacuum.

Investigations into the prevalence of phubbing behavior among educational stakeholders and its effects on staff relationships and school leadership performance are therefore urgently needed. Without this understanding, policy changes might not be able to address a subtle but disruptive conduct that could jeopardize staff unity and the standard of school administration.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to examine the implications of phubbing on managerial effectiveness and staff interpersonal relations in public secondary schools in Osun State.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Determine the prevalence of phubbing behaviours among school principals and teaching staff in public secondary schools.
- ii. Assess the perceived impact of phubbing on managerial effectiveness in school administration.
- iii. Examine how phubbing affects interpersonal communication and professional relationships among school staff.
- iv. Investigate possible gender and age differences in phubbing behaviours and their perceived effects.
- v. Recommend strategies for mitigating the negative effects of phubbing in school settings.

Research Questions

The following Research questions guided the study:

- a. What is the prevalence of phubbing behaviours among principals and teaching staff in public secondary schools in Osun State?
- b. How does phubbing influence managerial effectiveness in school administration?
- c. In what ways does phubbing affect interpersonal communication and relationships among staff?
- d. What strategies can be adopted to reduce phubbing and enhance workplace communication in public secondary schools?

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were formulated and tested for the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in phubbing behaviours and their perceived effects between male and female staff in public secondary schools.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in phubbing behaviours and their perceived effects among staff of different age groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Roberts and David (2016) coined the term "phubbing," a combination of "phone" and "snubbing," to characterize a developing social phenomena in which people disregard those in person by concentrating on their cellphones. Since then, the practice has come to represent the digital age, where technology connectivity frequently trumps in-person interpersonal interactions. Phubbing, which has its origins in social and romantic interactions, has developed into a more widespread behavioral problem that impacts a variety of settings, such as homes, schools, and increasingly, workplaces.

Phubbing interferes with the normal course of interpersonal communication, which causes the people being ignored to feel excluded, irritated, and disengaged (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Additionally, it sends subliminal messages of disrespect or indifference, which over time may degrade relationships. According to research, people who get phubbed frequently report feeling less satisfied, trusted, and emotionally connected (Roberts & David, 2016; Aagaard, 2020). Phubbing occurs in professional contexts including meetings, group projects, and interactions between managers and employees. It could happen when supervisors focus on digital gadgets instead of team members or when workers use smartphones during work-related conversations. According to Al-

Saggaf and O'Donnell (2019), such conduct can have a deteriorating implication on interpersonal relations. As digital dependency grows, phubbing becomes not only a social inconvenience but a structural impediment to organizational communication and productivity.

According to Vanden Abeele (2021), phubbing in professional settings can undermine impressions of professionalism and respect and is frequently viewed as a breach of office etiquette. Furthermore, phubbing is linked to technostress and worse job satisfaction, according to David and Roberts (2021), especially for workers who believe their managers are inattentive or preoccupied by technology. Phubbing has been linked from a psychological standpoint to a number of emotional and cognitive repercussions, such as diminished listening abilities, diminished empathy, and a shorter attention span (Misra et al., 2014). These results are harmful to the expectations of a productive workplace in terms of communication and teamwork as well as individual well-being. Additionally, the habitual nature of smartphone use suggests that phubbing could become an ingrained behaviour unless deliberately addressed through policy or awareness interventions.

The prevalence of phubbing presents serious difficulties in educational institutions, especially secondary schools, where staff engagement and leadership are essential to institutional success. Phubbing by principals and instructors may unintentionally lower staff morale, disrupt communication channels, and lower the general efficacy of school administration. These ramifications highlight the need to view phubbing as a critical organizational and educational issue rather than merely a social or personal irritation.

The ability of educational leaders, especially school heads, to organize and coordinate both people and material resources in order to accomplish institutional goals is known as managerial effectiveness. It encompasses a wide range of core administrative competencies, including strategic planning, communication, conflict resolution, supervision, and informed decision-making (Bush, 2008). These competencies are essential for sustaining institutional stability, improving teaching and learning environments, and fostering positive staff morale and learner outcomes.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) state that goal-setting, resource allocation, supportive interpersonal relationships, and the articulation of a clear vision are all hallmarks of effective school leadership. Effective leaders foster open and cooperative workplace cultures where employees are inspired, communication is unrestricted, and disagreements are resolved amicably. However, contemporary workplace disturbances, especially digital distractions like the increasingly common practice of phubbing, can seriously impair the efficacy of these leadership techniques.

The pervasiveness of smartphones and other mobile technologies in today's digitally dominated workplaces poses two challenges: while they improve connectivity and information access, they can also fragment attention, interfere with in-person communication, and weaken managerial presence. Vanden Abeele (2021) posits that digital interruptions diminish the *relational capital* necessary for effective leadership, such as trust, attentiveness, and emotional connection with subordinates.

Phubbing conveys subliminal messages of detachment or indifference when it is practiced or tolerated by school administrators. Such conduct could be interpreted by subordinates as impolite or unprofessional, which would diminish organizational commitment, communication flow, and job satisfaction (David & Roberts, 2021; Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell, 2019). The collaborative decision-making procedures that are necessary for school reform can be hampered by this breakdown of interpersonal trust.

Furthermore, the capacity to set an example of expected behavior is a prerequisite for effective leadership. Leaders who are constantly distracted by their phones run the risk of normalizing digital disengagement, which would undermine standards for professional behavior, classroom management, and staff focus (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Such disengagement may have long-term repercussions for institutional stability and performance in schools where social and emotional labor are essential, such as settling staff disputes or promoting the wellbeing of teachers.

Effective leadership is both task-oriented and relationship-oriented, as Northouse (2018) emphasizes. This balance is essential in the educational setting for controlling staff performance, implementing curriculum modifications, and creating a feeling of unity. Digital diversions like phubbing, however, have the potential to upset this equilibrium and erode the interpersonal basis that effective leadership is based on. As a result, reducing phubbing and related behaviors becomes a strategic leadership objective rather than just an issue of manners.

Educational institutions must critically evaluate the impact of digital behavior on leadership quality in light of the increasing dependence on mobile technology. This entails creating standards for online behavior, encouraging digital mindfulness, and advocating for a culture of deliberate presence, in which team members can reach leaders both physically and emotionally.

Successful school management is based on having good interpersonal relationships since these relationships affect staff morale, communication effectiveness, and the institution's general atmosphere. Relational abilities including mutual respect, active listening, empathy, and emotional intelligence are essential in school settings where teamwork is essential for decision-making, conflict resolution, and the delivery of instruction (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). These interpersonal abilities promote teamwork, help build trust, and guarantee that organizational procedures run smoothly.

Emotional intelligence, or the ability to comprehend and control one's own emotions as well as those of others, is especially important for leaders who want to build lasting and fruitful connections, claims Goleman (1998). When it comes to managing

schools, emotionally intelligent leaders are better able to settle disputes, inspire employees, and attend to the social-emotional needs of both educators and students. Positive interpersonal interactions are built on mutual respect and active listening in particular, which promote open communication, lessen misunderstandings, and strengthen staff cohesion (Owens & Valesky, 2015).

However, these interpersonal roots are in danger of being undermined by new digital habits, like phubbing (phone snubbing). When coworkers or school administrators prioritize their smartphones above in-person encounters, a practice known as "phubbing," it frequently leads to a breakdown in communication, emotional detachment, and perceived disrespect (Reed et al., 2022). The practice undermines psychological safety and relational trust within the team by gently conveying that the virtual engagement is more essential than the person in person.

Phubbing breaks the feedback loop, which is necessary for clear communication. The simple presence of a mobile phone during interpersonal interactions might diminish perceived empathy, depth of discourse, and relationship quality, as explained by Misra et al. (2014). Such interruptions can result in staff disengagement, professional unhappiness, and feelings of alienation in a school setting where cooperation, mentoring, and support are crucial.

Additionally, persistent phubbing damages relationships one-on-one and has a cumulative effect on organizational culture, according to Reed et al. (2022). Workers who frequently feel overlooked or underappreciated may lose interest in contributing, shun teamwork, and eventually become disconnected from the objectives of the organization. The effects of phubbing can be particularly harmful in educational environments, where collaboration and interpersonal commitment are essential to school reform initiatives.

Furthermore, because schools are hierarchical, phubbing by school administrators could be seen more seriously because it goes against the unspoken standards of role modeling and attentiveness (Northouse, 2018). Senior staff members or administrators who show signs of disengagement during meetings or talks demotivate their subordinates and damage their relationship credibility. The performance and cohesiveness of the company may eventually suffer as a result of this breakdown in interpersonal relationships.

Fostering a culture of presence and attentiveness is crucial to maintaining positive interpersonal relationships in educational settings. This might entail establishing clear guidelines for using smartphones in meetings, encouraging digital etiquette, and pushing leaders to provide an example of emotional present and active listening in their everyday interactions. These methods can lessen the negative impacts of phubbing and maintain the interpersonal quality required for effective educational institutions.

METHODOLOGY

Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, this study combined qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) with quantitative surveys. The target population consisted of all principals and teaching staff in public secondary schools in Osun State. 320 teachers (8 from each school) and 40 principals (1 from each school) were chosen for the study from 40 schools spread throughout four Local Government Areas using stratified random sampling. The Workplace Phubbing and Effectiveness Questionnaire (WPEQ), a structured questionnaire, was created and verified using Cronbach's alpha with a reliability coefficient of Cronbach's alpha = .86. The tool addressed interpersonal connection quality, managerial effectiveness perceptions, and the frequency of phubbing behaviour. In each LGA, a subset of five employees and one principal participated in focus group discussions (FGDs). ANOVA, the t-test, and descriptive statistics were used to assess quantitative data. Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the prevalence of phubbing behaviours among principals and teaching staff in public secondary schools in Osun State?

Table 1: Phubbing Behaviour

S/N	Phubbing Behaviour	Mean	SD
1.	I check my phone during meetings with staff/colleagues	3.02	0.83
2.	My principal/colleagues use their phones during face-to-face conversations	2.92	0.82
3.	I send/read messages during collaborative tasks or school duties	2.42	1.14
4.	I feel that mobile phones disrupt attention during school activities	3.02	0.81
5.	School meetings are delayed or disrupted due to phone use	2.42	1.10

The mean scores, which range from 2.42 to 3.02, indicate that phubbing is quite common among teachers and principals. Mobile device use is prevalent during important administrative tasks, as seen by the highest mean scores for checking phones during meetings (3.02) and using phones to divert attention during school activities (3.02). In some situations, a more indirect or passive

influence of phubbing may be indicated by lower means for reading/sending messages during work (2.42) and disruption of meetings due to phones (2.42).

Research Question 2: How does phubbing affect managerial effectiveness in school administration?

Table 2: Managerial Effectiveness

S/N	Managerial Effectiveness	Mean	SD
1.	Phubbing reduces the ability of school leaders to manage effectively.	2.97	0.83
2.	School leadership suffers when phone use interrupts attention.	2.56	1.11
3.	Principals who phub are perceived as less authoritative.	1.96	0.82
4.	Uninterrupted communication enhances managerial clarity.	2.96	0.79
5.	Staff productivity is affected when principals or teachers engage in phubbing.	2.54	1.16

The majority of respondents believed that unbroken communication improves clarity (mean = 2.96), while phubbing reduces managerial effectiveness (mean = 2.97). Staff members' hesitancy to directly criticize authority figures or cultural quirks may be the cause of a lower score for "principals who phub are less authoritative" (mean = 1.96).

Research Question 3: In what ways does phubbing affect interpersonal communication and relationships among staff?

Table 3: Interpersonal Relationships

S/N	Interpersonal Relationships	Mean	SD
1.	Phubbing negatively affects team collaboration in the school	2.99	0.80
2.	I feel ignored when a colleague uses their phone during a discussion	2.96	0.84
3.	Staff trust is weakened by excessive phone use	2.50	1.13
4.	Phubbing leads to misunderstandings and Miscommunication	2.97	0.82
5.	Reducing mobile phone use can improve communication among staff	2.97	0.82

There is strong consensus that phubbing impedes teamwork (2.99), makes others feel ignored (2.96), and results in misunderstandings (2.97). One possible remedy is highlighted by the belief that communication might be enhanced by minimizing phone use (2.97).

Hypotheses Testing

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in phubbing behaviours and their perceived effects between male and female staff in public secondary schools.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to assess differences in the composite phubbing behaviour scores between male and female respondents. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Gender Differences in Phubbing Behaviour

S/N	Gender	Mean Phubbing Score (\bar{x})	SD
1.	Male	2.74	0.39
2.	Female	2.78	0.43

- **t-statistic:** -0.999, **p-value:** 0.318, **Significance Level (α):** 0.05

The results of the investigation showed a p-value of 0.318 and a t-statistic of -0.999. The null hypothesis is upheld since the p-value is higher than the conventional significance limit of 0.05. This suggests that there is no gender-based statistically significant variation in phubbing practices and their perceived impacts. The mean phubbing scores of female employees were marginally higher, but this difference was not statistically significant. Therefore, there were no statistically significant variations in phubbing behaviors between male (mean = 2.74) and female (mean = 2.78) personnel ($p = 0.318$).

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in phubbing behaviours and their perceived effects among staff of different age groups. To assess age-related differences, a one-way ANOVA was performed across four predefined age categories: under 30 years, 30–39 years, 40–49 years, and 50 years and above. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Age Differences in Phubbing Behaviour

S/N	Age Group	Mean Phubbing Score (\bar{x})	SD
1.	Under 30	2.76	~0.40
2.	30-39 years	2.75	~0.42
3.	40-49 years	2.78	~0.41
4.	50 years & above	2.73	~0.38

F(3, 316) = 0.045, p = 0.987

The ANOVA result revealed a p-value of 0.987 and $F(3, 316) = 0.045$. There is no statistically significant difference in the phubbing behaviours of the various age groups, according to this high p-value. Consequently, the null hypothesis is retained. All age groups exhibited similar phubbing ratings (means about 2.73–2.78) with no significant variations ($p = 0.987$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study are consistent with past research that found phubbing to be associated with poor leadership outcomes, even that passive phone use impairs attentiveness and conversation quality when other people are around and a decrease in social connectivity (Roberts & David, 2016; Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Phubbing introduces a layer of dysfunction that erodes authority and confidence in Osun State, where educational leadership is essential for performance and transformation. The issue is made worse by the lack of official regulations governing phone use.

Another finding confirms that phubbing is quite common and has a detrimental influence on school management effectiveness and interpersonal communication. Phubbing undermines staff cohesiveness, hinders administrative processes, and erodes trust despite its subtlety. These results are in line with earlier research showing that phubbing is a significant workplace dysfunction rather than a minor social annoyance (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018; David & Roberts, 2021; Reed et al., 2022). The results also lend credence to Vanden Abeele's (2021) assertion that leaders' relational capital is weakened by digital distractions. Similarly, David & Roberts (2021) discovered that job satisfaction and leadership legitimacy are decreased when supervisors are considered to be phubbing. In a similar vein, the findings support the findings of Misra et al. (2014), who discovered that using a phone during in-person interactions reduces empathy and interpersonal pleasure. Persistent phubbing also promotes disengagement and organizational mistrust, according to Reed et al. (2022).

The lack of notable age or gender disparities indicates that phubbing is a systemic problem rather than a singular demographic trend. This emphasises the necessity of organizational-level treatments as opposed to group-specific training. In this situation, gender has no discernible impact on the perception or probability of phubbing. The findings of Al-Saggaf & O'Donnell (2019), who discovered that phubbing behaviours were situationally and culturally driven rather than gender-dependent, are supported by this. The results also indicate that age is not a significant differentiator in Osun State school environments, despite other research (e.g., Roberts & David, 2016) suggesting younger persons may phub more frequently. This could be because generations have adapted to digital technology or share professional norms.

Unchecked digital distractions can result in staff disengagement and leadership failure in educational settings, where open communication, emotional intelligence, and leadership visibility are essential to institutional stability (Bush, 2008; Northouse, 2018; Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Phubbing is an emerging challenge in the educational workplace. In public secondary schools in Osun State, it undermines managerial effectiveness and disrupts interpersonal communication among staff. Addressing phubbing requires deliberate cultural and policy changes within school systems. Phubbing is an emerging yet under-addressed challenge in educational management. This study reveals that in public secondary schools in Osun State, phubbing reduces administrative performance and damages interpersonal relations among personnel. The absence of significant disparities across gender and age shows that institutional culture, not individual attributes, perpetuates this behavior. Without structured policies or cultural shifts toward digital mindfulness, school environments risk deteriorating into fragmented, disengaged workplaces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- Except in cases of emergency or for educational purposes, there should be explicit institutional policies that forbid using smartphones during meetings, classes, and one-on-one conversations.

- Principals and senior staff should participate in workshops on digital etiquette, emotional intelligence, and purposeful presence to provide an example of proper conduct.
- Start awareness-raising initiatives to inform employees about how phubbing affects trust, communication, and output.
- To promote concentrated interpersonal interaction, designate some places (such as staff rooms and meeting halls) as device-free zones during business hours.
- Establish channels for employees to voice concerns about phubbing and offer suggestions for bettering workplace communication standards, such as anonymous surveys.
- To encourage balanced technology use in line with learning objectives, incorporate digital wellness training into professional development programs.

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