BECOMING MOBILE READERS-NARRATIVES OF ZIMBABWEAN TEENAGERS' MOBILE READING EXPERIENCES

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: April 2023 Revised: July 2023 Published: October 2023 **Keywords** *Mobile reading;* *Mobile reading devices;* *Adolescent learners;* *Literacy practices;*	*The absence of a vibrant leisure reading culture amongst Zimbabwean teenagers has long been a national cause for concern. The advent of handheld mobile devices like smartphones and tablets has opened up whole new avenues through which adolescent learners can develop literacy and explore reading. This paper aims to provide a reflective account of the mobile reading experiences of Zimbabwean adolescent learners. The paper draws data from a larger qualitative action research study conducted with a group of twenty-three adolescent learners enrolled at a private college in Harare, Zimbabwe. Data was collected using the literacy practices interview, mobile reading diaries, focus group interviews, and the researcher's personal field notes. The findings of the study revealed that contrary to beliefs of a non-vibrant reading culture, the adolescent participants were actively engaging in opportunities presented by mobile reading devices to become mobile readers. It was also established that the participants had to employ different strategies to reconfigure and rethink their literacy practices around the new reading media to match the rest of their digital lives which are quick, uninterrupted, personalised, and smart. The researcher concluded that mobile reading is a novel, noble and credible means through which adolescent learners can foster positive leisure literacy practices. Consequently, teachers need not be dismissive but rather opened-minded about leveraging the literacy development opportunities presented by mobile reading devices in reading instruction and promotion. Upscaling of mobile reading initiatives and research in Zimbabwe is recommended so that the mobile reading phenomenon is further demystified.*

INTRODUCTION

Initially meant to be used primarily as voice communication devices, mobile device use has also extended to support many other non-core functions that promote the development of literacy skills like reading and writing. Mobile reading is a growing phenomenon in the global South and, a 'reading revolution' has dawned across the developing world because of mobile reading technologies (UNESCO 2014, 83). MRDs are offering an alternative medium to paper-based texts for learners to access reading materials and practice reading. Mobile devices have changed the reading landscape for adolescent learners, by broadening the options of reading media available to them, the spaces they can navigate and occupy as they read, and the practices they engage in as they read (Turner, Hick & Zucker, 2019). It is in light of these technological developments that the study sought to examine the extent to which a group of Zimbabwean adolescent learners was willing to use their mobile devices like phones and tablets to read for leisure ahead of other gratifying utilities offered by their mobile devices.

This paper presents findings from the qualitative action research study on the mobile reading experiences of a group of twenty-three Zimbabwean adolescent learners from a

private college in Harare, Zimbabwe. The personal narratives of the participants' mobile reading experiences during their transformational journeys toward becoming active mobile readers are recounted. The participants' voices were captured using the Literacy practices interviews (Moje & Tysvaer, 2010), mobile reading diaries, focus group interviews, and the researcher's field notes. Through this cooperative, collaborative, and interactive approach, the researcher managed to engage the participants on critical issues surrounding their digital literacy practices, their digital identities, their digital inclusion, and digital exclusion thereof.

This paper focuses on the changing reader identities of the adolescent participants induced by their shifting perceptions of reading for leisure as they responded to the influences of MRDs as an alternative reading media to paper-based text. The study was guided by the following research questions; What are the current literacy practices and reading habits of a group of adolescent learners in Zimbabwe? What are the current attitudes and perceptions of a group of adolescent learners in Zimbabwe towards reading for pleasure and self-enrichment? In what ways can mobile reading devices (MRDs) be used to change the reading habits of a group of adolescent learners in Zimbabwe? How does the use of mobile reading devices (MRDs) influence the attitudes and perceptions of Zimbabwean adolescent learners towards reading for self-enrichment?

Conceptual Framework

Two concepts are central to this paper. These are mobile reading (m-reading) and mobile reading devices (MRD). Establishing a conceptual grounding for these two key terms is essential, as they both capture the essence and meaning of the paper's subject matter. Since their invention, mobile phones have continuously evolved in terms of their appeal, and technological sophistication, from being mere handheld communication devices to immensely powerful computing devices. This evolution of the mobile phone has enabled more and more people freedom to use them not just as communication devices but as mobile reading devices as well. Mobile reading devices are portable, handheld, and usually battery-operated and may be connected to cellular networks and or the Internet, these devices support learners to learn to read, practice reading, and acquire a broader range of learning skills that support participation in a literate society (USAID, 2014).

This newly emerging trend of being able to constantly read on-demand while also on the go using mobile digital devices like smartphones, tablets, and laptops has led to a pattern of human behaviour that may be termed mobile reading. Conceptually, Mobile reading is "the act of reading and consuming digital content on mobile devices such as cell phones, tablets, personal computers, e-readers, etc. which covers e-books, e-newspapers, m-novels, mobile cartoons" (Rochester, 2015, 1). The advent of mobile e-books and mobile reading devices has stimulated a lot of research interest and academic discourse centring on the numerous affordances and possibilities these new reading media can offer the developing reader if smoothly integrated and mainstreamed into the daily reading lives of adolescent learners.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts a model of connected reading (Turner & Hicks, 2015; Turner, Hicks & Zucker, 2019) as a theoretical lens through which adolescent reading in the digital era is analysed. This model is a twenty-first-century reading theory that recognises the centrality and influential role various technologies are playing in the ever-changing reading lives and experiences of adolescent learners today.

Mobile digital reading is connected reading and the model is premised on three fundamental practices of on-screen reading namely, encountering, engaging, and evaluating (Turner & Hicks 2015b:42). These three central tenets of the model are outlined by Turner et al (2019, 298) as follows; Encountering: (How a reader first makes contact with a text);

Engaging: (The activities that happen before, during, and after reading a text) and Evaluating: The act of finding value in a text.

Encountering happens when a connected reader gets into contact with a particular text on an MRD (Turner & Hicks 2015b, 43). This may include receiving a text from a peer or surfing the internet, where readers skim and scan various web pages for content to read. The reader may even stumble across captivating reading content while scrolling through web pages or following recommended links.

Turner and Hick point out that after the encounter, the connected reader chooses between engaging with the encountered text. The practice of engaging with a text entails deciding on whether to read, share, discard, or store the chosen texts to read later offline. According to Turner and Hicks (2015b:43, another sub-practice of engagement in the actual reading of the text and indicators of an engaged digital reader is browsing, perusing text, ploughing in, using multimedia, marking, reacting, interacting, censoring and analysing and comprehension beyond a given text. The challenge for this study was to engage adolescent readers using MRDs to capture their interest and motivate them to read because they tend to use these devices for other competing purposes like communication, socialising, and entertainment and not solely for reading purposes (Wigfield & Guthrie 2000).

The last practice of connected reading as posited by Turner and Hicks (2015b:43) is evaluating a text. Sub-practices of evaluating a text include determining value, judging, employing digital tools, and managing distractions. Since it is assumed that connected readers form reading communities, they share texts that are worth reading based on their quality and utility. As a result, the cycle continues as readers encounter a shared text, engage with it, and then evaluate it.

The model of connected reading offered an ideal analytical framework for this study as it echoes the main aim behind this study, which posits that the dawn of mobile reading devices like e-book readers, tablets, and cell phones have significantly transformed the reading lives of individuals, changing the way they access information and consequently, how and when they read (Turner & Hicks 2015a:3). The model advances that this reader reorientation brought about by technological advancement has led to a paradigm shift in how adolescent reading instruction should be approached.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Reading on Demand: The Growing Popularity of Mobile Reading

Mobile devices have captured the imagination of many educational practitioners and as a result, the available research literature on mobile reading largely celebrates the novelty and growing popularity of mobile reading devices. Traxler (2018, 152) describes the ubiquitous and omnipresence of mobile devices among the populace as "the near-universal ownership of mobile devices", a factor that accounts for the growing popularity of mobile devices in education and literacy development arenas. Reading today has largely become digital as vast amounts of digital reading materials are being made available via various digital platforms for readers. As a consequence, readers are constantly transitioning and shifting their reading acts between physical reading media and digital reading mode (Levratto et al., 2021).

Several studies have revealed that today's adolescents are increasingly becoming digital readers through both design and default (Merga, 2014, Mlay et al., 2015, Shimray et al., 2015). Some factors accounting for the rise in digital mobile reading amongst young people include ease of access to cheap and up-to-date reading content, (Mlay et al., 2015). Mobile e-books also offer the reader the convenience of accessing books on demand and on the go. There is no need to visit a bookstore or a library, as the reader can simply download many books onto their mobile device. Furthermore, the reader can opt to read the book online

or offline depending on their preferences. The virtual immediacy of mobile e-books affords readers ample opportunity to develop into avid readers as time is not wasted searching for books but rather productively used reading them (Merga, 2014).

The advent of mobile reading devices and dedicated e-readers has ignited a flurry of research trends in mobile reading. Early studies focused on the characteristic features of mobile reading devices which make them more psychologically and socially desirable compared to printed books (Wang, 2009). Mobile reading devices were found to be embedded with features that promote multisensory reading which makes reading an engaging undertaking. Reading, listening to, and viewing a digital text simultaneously greatly aids comprehension and improves vocabulary acquisition. Undoubtedly, this built-in feature of the mobile e-book has massive motivational value to reading. They breathe life into a book, making it interesting and enticing for young people to read wherever and whenever (Ciampia, 2014; Shutaleva, Kuzminykh & Novgorodtseva, 2023).

As the features of mobile reading devices evolved and improved, the focus of mobile reading studies shifted focus to pay attention to their acceptance and widespread use as a new medium for transmitting and decoding textual information (National Literacy Trust, 2014, UNESCO, 2014). The impact mobile reading devices have on the reading behaviours of adults and children has also been investigated. The emphasis of such efforts has been on the causal effects these devices have on reading motivation, literacy skills development, and attainment levels in schools (Bhatti, 2013, Long, 2014).

Reading on Paper a Dying Craft!

Mobile books and other formats of digital books today pose a huge threat to the traditional hegemony the printed book has enjoyed for hundreds of years. Studies reveal a growing trend where students are generally very reluctant to read paper-based materials. In contrast, a profound increase in interest in reading digital texts was observed because they are easy to access through electronic devices (Oh et al., 2022; Baharuddin & Hashim 2020).

There are also, however, many research findings that seek to discredit the efficacy of m-reading as a viable literacy development practice. M-reading has been viewed as blatantly undermining the precepts of good reading behaviour. Mobile reading is considered as upsetting the maximum concentration of the reader as the attention of the readers is divided between reading and other mobile device functions (Baron, 2013, Chiong et al., 2012). The superior qualities and specifications of digital texts like hyperlinks act as cognitive distractors that disturb the mentally and intellectually absorbing task of reading which ideally should be a linear experience if undertaken with printed books (Baron, 2013). Mobile reading has been blamed for devaluing and removing the touchy-feely enjoyment and gratification associated with the reading of physical books. Reading onscreen results in a state of emotional, intellectual, and even aesthetic disharmony which undermines the enjoyment derived from the reading process (Mangen cited in Keim, 2014).

A knowledge gap on the digital reading habits of Zimbabwean adolescents exists. It is this knowledge gap that this paper sought to fill. Mobile reading in Zimbabwe is still largely subsidiary and remains under-documented. Analytical data available on one of the Worldreader mobile reading applications used by the participants in this paper (www.worldreader.org), indicated that only 29 223 Zimbabweans out of a possible population of 13 000 000 (thirteen million) are registered users of their free mobile reading application. This represents 0.15% of the total population who use the platform. This particular paper sought to fill this gap by documenting and analysing the personal narratives of the participants' mobile reading experiences during their transformational journeys toward becoming active mobile readers.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design
The insights presented in this paper are based on a qualitative action research study that investigated the extent to which a group of adolescent learners in a Zimbabwean private college were ready and willing to use their mobile telecommunication devices like smartphones and tablets as MRDs to read for leisure ahead of other enjoyable functions available on their mobile devices. The mobile reading study was conducted at a private college in Harare, Zimbabwe over twelve weeks involving twenty- three adolescent learners. A total of twenty-three adolescent learners were involved with thirteen females and ten males aged 14 to 17. All the participants hailed from urban middle-income families and owned a mobile phone which they used as a tool for mobile reading. The study examined the various ways in which a school-based mobile reading programme that uses MRDs such as mobile phones and tablets could be used to sustain and promote a lifelong culture of reading among a group of adolescent learners in Zimbabwe.

The Context of the Study
Zimbabwe ranks amongst the top literate societies in Africa and this large literacy rate of over ninety per cent is a result of a deliberate mass education policy adopted in 1980 at Zimbabwe's independence (UNECA 2018:23). Concerns have however been expressed that this high literacy level in the country is not complemented by the reading culture (Makaudze, 2015). This study was conducted at a private/independent co-educational school offering secondary-level education in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city. The school is located in the low-density suburb of Belvedere. The school is conveniently located less than five kilometres from Harare's central business district. Due to its centrality, the school had an enrolment of between one hundred and fifty to one hundred and eighty learners from all over Harare's low, medium, and high-density suburbs. The school had a robust technological infrastructure that supported the teaching and learning of tech-based subjects like computer science and the International Computer Driving License (ICDL). The school, however, had a very strict no mobile devices policy and concessions from the school management had to be sought to allow the adolescent participants of the study to bring their mobile devices once a week for the m-reading session they engaged in with the researcher.

Sampling and Participants
This paper is part of a larger study focusing on the mobile reading habits and practices of adolescents in Zimbabwe. The participants of this study comprised form 2, form 3, and form 4 learners enrolled at a Private/ Independent College in Harare, Zimbabwe. They were aged between 14 and 17. The group had a total of twenty-three participants. The group of participants consisted of 10 males and 13 females, who all willingly volunteered to take part in the study. The participants for this study were conveniently selected, based on their willingness to participate, parental consent, and mobile device ownership. The age range of learners in this group of participants was fourteen to seventeen. Despite this wide gap in age range, the participants shared a homogenous urban culture that emanated from the strong urban background the participants originated from and their adherent love for mobile digital technologies (Gwaka 2018:5).

Data Collection and Analysis
Data collection for this study took place in three stages which aligned with the four steps of the action research process (Kemmis and McTaggart in Burns 2010:9). The three phases were *(i)* the Pre-mobile reading phase, *(ii)* the Mobile reading phase and *(iii)* the Post-mobile reading phase. Each phase of the data collection process had its data collection technique. This qualitative action research study combined different methods such as the literacy practices interview (phase i) (Moje & Tysvaer, 2010:31), mobile reading diaries

(phase ii), and focus group interviews (phase iii), …. with the adolescent learners who were involved in the school-based mobile reading programme. The data collected in this study was analysed inductively and thematically. Ethics approval was obtained from the supervising university and institutional clearance was granted by the management of the Private College where the study was conducted.

The present paper specifically reports on the data emerging from the focus group interviews, as these focused on evaluating the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards their identity as mobile readers after being exposed to the twelve-week mobile reading intervention. It is also from the focus group interviews that the theme of becoming mobile readers emerged. In the post-mobile reading phase of the study, a task-based evaluative focus group interview was employed to assess the influence MRDs had on the mindsets and opinions the young participants held towards reading for pleasure. The data from the focus group interview aptly captured the participants' voices as they articulated their mobile reading experiences with regard to the changes, adjustments, accommodations, and strategies they had to employ in becoming mobile readers. Three focus group interviews were held. The focus groups were numbered FG1 to FG3 for anonymity. FG1 had 8, FG2 had 8 and FG3 had 7 participants respectively. Data were analysed using a generic inductive approach (Liu, 2016, 129) to establish behaviours, trends, and experiences of mobile reading amongst the group of Zimbabwean adolescent learners.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Research Findings

This section of the paper presents an overview of the key findings of the adolescent participants' mobile reading practices as recorded in the focus group interviews. This research began by asking questions about the ways mobile reading devices (MRDs) could be used to change the reading habits of a group of adolescent learners in Zimbabwe and how the use of mobile reading devices (MRDs) influenced the attitudes and perceptions of Zimbabwean adolescent learners towards reading for self-enrichment. The focus group interviews comprised ten questions that sought to elicit from the participants' narratives of their mobile reading experiences. Three themes emerged from the data collected from the focus group discussions and the findings were grouped under the thematic headings; (1) becoming mobile readers; (2) developing mobile reading habits, and (3) developing a mobile reader identity.

Becoming Mobile Readers

This paper documents the changing attitudes, perceptions, and reading habits of a group of adolescent participants and the journeys they undertook as they transitioned from becoming merely physical book readers to mobile readers. Initially, the teenage participants were asked if they liked engaging in mobile reading and the majority of the responses expressed that the participants were familiar with and had begun to engage in mobile reading. Twenty-one out of the twenty-three participants (91.3%) acknowledged that they engaged in mobile reading. Only two (8.7%) out of the twenty-three participants said they rarely engaged in mobile reading.

As a follow-up, the participants were asked which device they used for mobile reading and their favourite mobile reading application(s). The responses of the participants revealed a rising consciousness of mobile reading. Firstly, all the participants confirmed that they had access to a mobile device that they could use for reading. Secondly, the broad range of mobile reading applications preferred by the participants was testimony that the participants had widened their own mobile reading experiences beyond the two mobile reading applications recommended in this study. While Watt pad and the world reader mobile reading applications featured prominently as the participants' favourite mobile reading applications, other mobile reading applications were referred to. Mobile reading applications like blue fire, read it, adobe

books, and reading online Google Books all reflected the independence and autonomy exercised by adolescent participants as they engaged in mobile reading.

According to the findings, the participants started to reconstruct and reconfigure their literacy practices around their mobile devices, to suit the demands of the reading media (MRDs) placed at their disposal. A key finding which also emerged was that two types of mobile reading actions could be identified namely, incidental reading and engaged reading (Turner & Hick, 2015).

Incidental reading relates to everyday occasional reading that is associated with the communicative function of mobile devices such as reading, composing, and sending a text message. Incidental reading also promotes reading skills such as skimming, scanning, and multitasking as opposed to intensive reading (Shutaleva et al, 2023). Incidental reading was common to every participant and characterised by short and often colloquial forms of digital texts as the adolescent learners engaged in day-to-day communication. Incidental reading was normally practised as a subconscious and involuntary act (reading by default).

> *"I love social media such as Instagram and Twitter because I can follow my friends and favourite celebrities. I use my phone for everything (FG2)*
> *I also go on social media like Instagram to keep up with my social life (FG2)*

It was evident from the participant's comments that incidental reading is non-intentional, non-linear nor is it sequenced. Incidental reading more or less satisfied the social mobile reading needs of the individual rather than their intellectual reading needs as the focus was more on 'viewing' content as opposed to 'reading'. As such this type can be described as incidental because it was limited to the consumption of text embedded in videos or pictures that were being viewed. Video subtitles and comments (often written in text-speak) also enabled the learners to practice and develop their literacy skills incidentally (Livingstone 2013, 28). Levratto et al (2021, 170) concur when they posit that text in the cyber age has undergone cognitive, structural, and creative changes which in turn have resulted in mutations in the literacy practices of individuals.

Engaged mobile reading, on the other hand, was found to be deliberate, serious, and more sustained than incidental reading. This was practised by the participants on both academic texts (school notes, researching the internet for assignments) and leisure reading texts on mobile.

> *"Sometimes when I am doing my research for different subjects using my mobile device is quicker and easier (FG3).*
> *I always stay interested and I never get tired because I can change the lighting on my mobile device different from a book where you keep looking for good lighting until you get bored (FG2).*

Engaged reading, was characterised by the participants as motivating, easy to perform, prolonged, and frequent. Engaged reading meant that the participants were able to connect both with the digital content they consumed and the MRDs which afforded them the opportunity to interact with the digital content (Turner & Hick, 2015).

All the adolescent learners profiled in this paper partook in some form of mobile reading be it incidental or engaged. It was also discovered that there was a rising consciousness toward mobile reading amongst the participants and their mobile reading encounters and experiences shaped their feelings and perceptions toward mobile reading. The participants further reported that MRDs had begun to alter their literacy practices and foster positive reading habits:

> *Yes, it has changed me because I prefer to read using a gadget than reading a big and heavy textbook. It has encouraged me to read more as it provides many other resources on the internet. My reading behaviour changed because I became confident about how I would talk about the history of footballers with my friends (FG3).*

Another question from the focus group interviews which sought to gauge the acceptance and assess the spread of mobile reading amongst the participants and their peers asked the participants if their friends read on mobile, if they shared stories on social media and to establish if they would encourage their friends to engage in mobile reading. This question examined the social connections and reading networks the participants formed around their mobile reading devices. Three categories of responses emerged from this question. Fifty percent of the participants affirmed that they shared mobile books or encouraged their friends to read on mobile. The mobile reading materials distributed amongst friends included individual books that would have been deemed interesting, mobile books in different formats like books in Portable Document Formats (PDFs), and whole reading platforms like Wattpad.

The second category of responses was represented by 17.4 % of the participants who reported that they shared mobile reading material with only some of their friends and not all of them. The reasons put forward for sharing mobile reading materials with only some friends and not all included the fact that some of the friends did not have gadgets and that some of the friends did not love reading. The remainder 32.6% of the participants indicated that their friends did not engage in mobile reading and that they did not share mobile reading material.

In the final analysis, the theme of becoming mobile readers represented the climax of this study on the adolescent learner's mobile reading narratives. The journey of becoming a mobile reader was not a linear one as it involved juggling a matrix of several complex literacy-related decisions among them reading media choices, mobile reading application choices, and reshaping or reconfiguring their reading habits to match their developing virtual or digital reading identities.

Developing Mobile Reading Habits

The key agenda of this study was to assess the impact MRDs had on shaping the attitudes and perceptions of adolescent learners in Zimbabwe towards reading for self-enrichment. The findings emerging from this thematic section point to a generally positive and increasing mobile reading culture amongst the adolescent participants of the study. Data from five of the focus group discussion question have helped to create this impression.

The adolescent participants were asked if they thought MRDs had changed the way they read. This very explicit question was designed to interrogate the extent to which MRDs had started to foster positive reading behaviours and literacy practices amongst adolescent participants. These literacy practices included such elements as interest in reading, amount of time spent reading, and the frequency of reading. The findings from this question revealed that 80.6% (nineteen out of twenty-three) of the adolescent participants affirmed that MRDs had changed the way they approach and perceive reading. Yusof (2021) in a study on the reading habits of Malaysians also reported a higher percentage of participants shifting and being more inclined to digital reading.

Other reasons advanced by the participants in support of the above assertion were that they now spent longer periods reading, they understood what they read better, and they were now able to read on the go (anytime and anywhere) without being interrupted by visits to the library to borrow books. The participants also formed the opinion that mobile reading was more active compared to physical book reading which they felt was passive. Another reason why the participants felt that MRDs had influenced their reading habits was that MRDs were portable and enabled them access to a wide range of reading materials that matched their interests. Only 8.7% of the participants were unsure if MRDs had altered their reader identity and reading habits. A further 8.7% of the participants said MRDs had not changed them in any way as they already loved and enjoyed reading already.

The participants' motivation to read on their mobile devices was also investigated. The question focused on the triggers that drove the participants to read on mobile devices. The participants identified several triggers that motivated them to read on mobile. The participants

said they were motivated to read on MRDs to overcome boredom, learn more about the world, and enhance their thinking skills and imagination. The participants were also motivated to read on mobile by the rich media formats in which most of the mobile reading content and books were presented. Other mobile book features and functions that also motivated the participants to read included digital flip and scrolling pages. The participants also felt motivated to read on mobile because they loved reading and reading gave them a sense of accomplishing something. Segura-Arias (2021) investigated the role of mobile devices in reading motivation, identifying device novelty, the authenticity of reading material, complex and varied activities, and engaging dynamics all as fostering positive effects of mobile devices on mobile reading.

To further establish their mobile reading habits, the adolescent participants were asked how they felt when they read on mobile. This question sought to elicit more information regarding the emotional response of the participants toward mobile reading. The emotional responses of the participants served as a barometer to determine the extent to which the participants engaged in mobile reading and were likely to continue reading on mobile. This question elicited a wide range of emotional responses from the participants. However, a general feeling that could be gleaned from the responses to the question can at best be described as satisfaction. In other words, the participants expressed satisfaction at engaging in mobile reading as it fulfilled some of their emotional needs. The participants felt that they learned more, and were happy, relaxed, liberated, and energised by engaging in mobile reading. The participants also felt tech-savvy, secure, and excited to read on mobile.

A few participants did however feel disgruntled by mobile reading. They felt that mobile reading emptied and stole the joy away from the whole reading process it did not involve the use of physical or hard-copy books. Previous research informants also report that they feel that they learn more when they read on paper (Levratto et al 2021, 175). Another respondent grumbled at the mere fact that they were simply not a fan of mobile reading and thus felt unmoved.

Asked what they thought were some of the benefits/ advantages/ joys or pleasures they had experienced while reading on mobile, the participants reported deriving many benefits, joys, pleasures, and advantages from engaging in mobile reading. This question helped to assess if the literacy practices of the adolescent participants had undergone any radical or incremental change as a result of their engagement in mobile reading. The benefits of engaging in mobile as stated by the participants included gains in vocabulary, visual images in mobile books which aided the understanding of more concepts, and an increase in the volume and amount of reading done. Other benefits included not buying books and being redirected to websites with more details (Shutaleva et al, 2023). The pleasures derived from mobile reading by the participants were that mobile reading spurred the imagination and MRDs were easy to carry around. The participants also enjoyed changing fonts, colours and listening to audiobooks. The adolescent participants also got joy from the twists, happy moments, and happy endings of the various mobile books they read. The distinct advantage of mobile reading stated by the participants was that it promoted good reading habits through access to a wide range of reading materials. Xu, Wong, He, Veldre, and Andrews (2020, 1112) concur that '… digital reading resources have the potential to enhance global literacy by providing more people with cheaper access to written material through mobile devices.'

The adolescent learners were also asked to outline some of the challenges/ problems/ disappointments they had experienced while reading on mobile. The negative experiences the participants encountered while reading on mobile were mainly technical. Some of the technical glitches the participants reported included limited battery life, slow internet connections, poor connectivity, device damage, and prohibitive data costs (Segura Arias 2021). The on-screen literacy practices of the participants were also interrupted by mobile

notifications from messages, the temptation to game ahead of reading, and getting carried away by other device functions such as listening to music. The participants also cited that a bright backlight posed a health risk as it led to dizziness.

Despite this negativity, the evidence from the focus group interviews still indicated that MRDs had begun to shape and reshape the way adolescent learners read in terms of reading habits, interest in reading, and time spent reading. The adolescent learners began to develop a distinctively mobile reading culture as MRDs strongly took root in their reading lives, influencing and carving their digital reading habits. The data from the focus group interviews revealed a radical and incremental shift in the reading perceptions, and reading habits of the adolescent participants as they engaged in mobile reading. One such comment explains,

> *I basically think technology can promote good reading habits among people because it provides a wide range of reading materials. For example, I do not think mobile devices make people smarter it is just the effort that you put in. Other benefits of reading on mobile are when I feel like reading but I am maybe having eye problems I can use the audio to read to me. (FG2)*

It was found that MRDs promoted good reading habits because readers have the luxury and freedom of choice when it came to the availability of reading materials, the frequency and length of time spent reading on mobile, and reading alternatives like audiobooks.

Interest amongst adolescent learners in reading digital mobile books was also driven by the affordability of mobile books, ease of access to a wide range of reading genres on mobile book applications, multimedia capabilities of mobile books, and the portability and ubiquity of mobile books (Oh et al., 2022). This is aptly captured in the participant's narratives,

> *Mobile reading is good because you can read your books anywhere, even on a bus, walking because it will be your gadget other than going for a walk with your school books. (FG3)*
>
> *It is easily accessible and portable since it is on a phone also than looking for your book which you cannot carry everywhere so it has increased the amount of time I spend reading. (FG2)*
>
> *I think it has because I might finish my library book and not have time to change, but with mobile reading, I can read any time, I can even download a book and read it whilst in the car going somewhere. I am quite lazy and with my phone, I don't have to stand up and look for a book. There is also a wide range of books on the net and I am not limited. (FG1)*

The adolescent learners' responses revealed a rising consciousness of mobile reading and a reading culture that is largely starting to be defined by the proximity of their mobile devices. Through engaging in mobile reading the participants managed to broaden and widen their reading experiences.

Another sentiment expressed by the adolescent learners concerning the influence of mobile reading devices (MRDs) on their reading culture was that MRDs allowed them to read on their terms as one participant explained:

> *I dislike being told when to read novels because reading novels is done when you feel like doing it, otherwise, it is not fun (FG1).*

Here the participant reiterated their displeasure at adults, particularly parents telling them when to read and what to read, hence intruding on their autonomy to make choices as readers. This confirms the findings by Klimova and Zamborova (2020) who reported that mobile reading applications increased reader motivation and autonomy in terms of taking responsibility for making decisions about reading materials and time and place of reading.

The implication is that mobile devices enabled and allowed adolescent learners to develop their unique mobile reading culture, mobile reading habits, and mobile literacy practices that responded to their physical, social, and emotional dispositions. In other words, the adolescent learners read on their terms and as they engaged in mobile reading, the desire to self-define and assert their independence grew stronger. This meant that the cross-cutting influence of mobile technologies in the reading lives of the young teenage participants signalled and signified the dwindling adult influence in the cultivation, transmission, and perpetuation of reading-related attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs. This failing adult influence on the literacy decision-making processes of adolescents simply shows the extent to which the vast proliferation of digital technologies is fast reshaping adolescent experiences and what it means to grow up in the twenty-first century. This is in accordance with Levertto et al (2021, 169) who observed that reading habits in today's digital contexts "have been deeply modified by the structure of different devices." In other words, the adolescent learners read on their terms and as they engaged in mobile reading, the desire to self-define and assert their independence grew stronger.

Adolescent Reader Identity

Asked if they liked reading physical books or mobile books, the consensus emanating from the participants' responses showed that mobile reading and mobile books were slowly becoming the preferred reading medium compared to physical books. Three categories of responses emerged from this question. Fifty percent of the participants felt they preferred reading mobile books only. Some reasons for their preferences included portability and the convenience of audiobooks. Those that preferred reading both mobile books and physical books constituted 25% of the participants and the remaining 25% said they still preferred reading physical books only. They felt that physical books were more engaging.

Lastly, the participants were asked if they could evaluate if they were changing into a mobile reader. The participants expressed three opinions in response to this question. 26% represented those participants who felt they had not changed in any way and still considered themselves physical book readers. 39% of the participants have still torn apart and were either not sure or practised both mobile book reading and physical book reading. They could not make up their mind as far as their reader identity and literacy practices were concerned. The last group was made up of 35% of the participants who affirmed that they had changed completely into mobile readers. Mobile reading is slowly and gradually being adopted by the participants.

From the findings emerging under this theme, it was evident that the adolescent participants' mobile reading personalities were shaped by their pre-existing mobile reading literacy practices. This finding mirrors the one by Levratto et al (2021, 183) who reported that "different ways of moving through texts - on paper or digital devices - characterise the reader of the digital age." Three distinct pre-mobile reading identities were apparent at the onset of the study namely eager readers, fifty-fifty readers, and non-readers. These reader identities were formed because of the adolescent participants' self-conception about their literacy abilities as the participants put it:

> *I am the type of person who loves reading... Most of the people I am with are shocked by the way I read because I am a very fast reader. Some think I skip pages but that is one thing I could never do (FG3).*

As the participants engaged in mobile reading a change in reader identities was noted. This resonates with the finding by Wagner (2020) who found that children's reader identities are dynamic and are constantly negotiated and renegotiated as they engage in literacy in different social spaces. Responses from focus group interviews revealed three changing types of mobile reader identities namely; Non-mobile readers, Fifty-fifty mobile readers, and

Mobile readers. Non-mobile readers were those participants who did not feel that mobile reading had changed them in any way. Mobile reading had not altered their perception of leisure reading as expressed through the following narratives;

> *I preferably enjoy reading physical books, because usually when reading from a mobile phone one is easily distracted [FG 2].*
> *Mobile reading hasn't changed my reading habits or interest in reading [FG 2]*
> *No,* [because] *I have always loved reading [FG 1]*

The sentiments expressed by the three participants above reveal a group of readers who can be best described as conservative and steeped in tradition. These narratives imply that the self-conception of these participants as readers was already strong, and well-shaped and that no amount of technological innovation could sway them into identifying as mobile readers. This 'immunity' to mobile reading can be attributed to the inner driver the participants already possessed to read on their own.

The second mobile reader identity which emerged from the data was the Fifty-fifty mobile readers. These were a group of readers who were unsure, expressed mixed feelings about mobile reading, identified as both mobile and physical book readers, and felt they were still transitioning from one identity to the other. This feeling of hesitation and uncertainty was evident in some of the comments,

> *but I'm not so sure because I balance between physical and mobile reading. But at home, I'm more of a mobile reader, and at school a physical reader. (FG 1)*
> *I think it's both ways; I still read physical books but I also read mobile books when I can. (FG 2)*

These readers were still at a crossroads, unable to identify as mobile readers or not. This cohort of participants still engaged in physical book reading while they also tried out mobile reading and they were yet to fully assert if they had become mobile readers.

Lastly, the third cohort of Mobile readers was made up of those participants who affirmed that they had become exclusive mobile readers. According to these participants, they read longer, understood more, became confident, talked about what they read more, and found reading on the go more convenient and ideally suited to their increasingly mobile lives.

> *I mostly do e-books for reading since that is where most of my favourite novels are found [FG 2].*
> *Yes, it has because I prefer to read using a gadget than reading a big and heavy textbook. It has encouraged me to read more as it provides many other resources on the internet. My reading behaviour changed because I became confident about how I would talk about the history of footballers with my friends. (FG 3)*

As the world becomes increasingly digital, the mobile phone has become the new space to be transcended and the mobile reading lives of Zimbabwean adolescent learners proved to be no exception as mobile phones penetrated and permeated a greater part of their lives. The participants spent most of their leisure time reading on mobile. Hence they had to negotiate and find new reader identities that were in sync with their emerging virtual identities (Levratto et al., 2021).

Discussion

This paper provides a snapshot of the impact MRDs have on the literacy practices of a group of Zimbabwean adolescent learners. The central crux of the study hinged on investigating the extent to which a group of Zimbabwean adolescent learners was willing to use their mobile devices like phones and tablets to read for leisure ahead of other gratifying

utilities offered by their mobile devices. Through the voices of the participants, the researcher was able to gain valuable insight into questions about ways mobile reading devices (MRDs) could be used to change the reading habits of a group of adolescent learners in Zimbabwe and how the use of MRDs to influence the attitudes and perceptions of Zimbabwean adolescent learners towards reading for self-enrichment.

The journey to becoming mobile readers while not linear can be depicted using a three-stage process. This three-stage model that outlines the process of becoming a mobile reader is based on the findings discussed. This model was gleaned from observations and findings reported by the participants as they narrated the strategies they used to negotiate and navigate their mobile reading journeys. These stages can be classified as initiation into mobile reading, trying out mobile reading, and active mobile reading.

The first stage in the process of becoming a mobile reader is the initiation into the mobile reading phase. This stage connoted initial contact with mobile reading-related applications, activities, and media. In this stage, the adolescent participants were exposed to mobile reading through an initiation event in the form of a school-based mobile reading club. Mobile reading initiation events can also include those kinds of incidents meant to expose and raise awareness or introduce non-mobile readers to mobile reading. Some examples of mobile reading initiation events could include formal exposure or more informal self-discovery through the exploration of mobile reading applications on an app store or browsing the internet. Other mobile reading initiation events include peer sharing of mobile reading applications and mobile books between devices over social media platforms like WhatsApp, and receiving notifications through push feeds (Oh et al., 2022, Turner & Hick, 2015).

Once initiation to mobile reading was successful, the learners tried out mobile reading. The trying-out of the mobile reading phase involved the participants selecting and reading mobile books they found appealing to them. In this phase, the participants tried mobile reading to see if it suited and matched their reading tastes and preferences. During this second phase of trying out mobile reading, the participants evaluated the utility of mobile reading and MRDs on their literacy practices (Turner & Hick, 2015). Throughout this stage, the participants made value judgments about mobile reading based on the novelty of MRDs, mobile reading application appeal, and mobile book functionalities. It is also during this stage that adolescent learners asserted their independence and autonomy as mobile readers. They used their curiosity and inquisitiveness to discover and use reading applications like Wattpad. Yusof (2021), noted a similar trend among Malaysian students and concluded that reading behaviours and trends in the digital era was changing in tandem with technological advancements.

In the last phase, Becoming Active Mobile Readers, the participants used their experiences of trying out mobile reading to adopt MRDs as a new medium for leisure reading. Developing a mobile reader identity or Becoming an active mobile reader implied a radical transformation of the participant's literacy practices (Liu, Li, Feng, Chen & Zhan 2023:1). The active use of MRDs as reading media involved the participants reconfiguring their literacy practices around the new reading media. New literacy practices influenced by MRDs included self-created mobile book libraries, audio book reading, non-linear reading, and reading on the go. The mobile book features such as audio, visual, and text capabilities and interactive features like hyperlinks promoted engagement amongst the adolescent learners who adopted and accepted MRDs as a reading medium.

However, not all the participants accepted and adopted MRDs as a reading medium. The participants decided not to become active readers on mobile based on their experiences during the trial phase. The novelty and appeal of MRDs were short-lived for some participants and did not make a lasting impression on them. Some of the adolescent learners did not adopt mobile reading because MRDs were full of distractions and offered an unnatural

reading experience. Some of the high-tech tools and features embedded within the digital texts caused distractions and impeded reading comprehension (Baharuddin & Hashim 2020, 12). As a result, these learners still preferred physical book reading.

However, because of the ubiquitous nature of mobile technologies in their lives, they probably cannot continue to ignore mobile reading and they become reliant on the connectivity to the internet MRDs provide hence unwittingly continuing to engage in mobile reading (Xu, Wong, He, Veldre & Andrews 2020: 1113). This cycle is likely to continue until the perceived flaws of MRDs and mobile books are improved and the learner gradually accepts and becomes a mobile reader. Other factors that also militated against mobile reading adoption, acceptance, and use by adolescent learners included prohibitive school rules, sanctions, and negative parental attitudes.

Based on insights gained by the researcher's actions in endeavouring to empower the adolescent participants to become mobile readers, an active mobile reader model as illustrated in Figure 1 is proposed. The active mobile reader model was gleaned and conceptualised through the findings and experiences during the mobile reading study. The model is meant to share ideas with all persons involved in the literacy instruction of adolescents on how best they can introduce or improve mobile technology use in the teaching and learning process. The model also helps to turn into reality one of the motivations behind the study which was to develop a framework to support mobile reading integration in secondary schools.
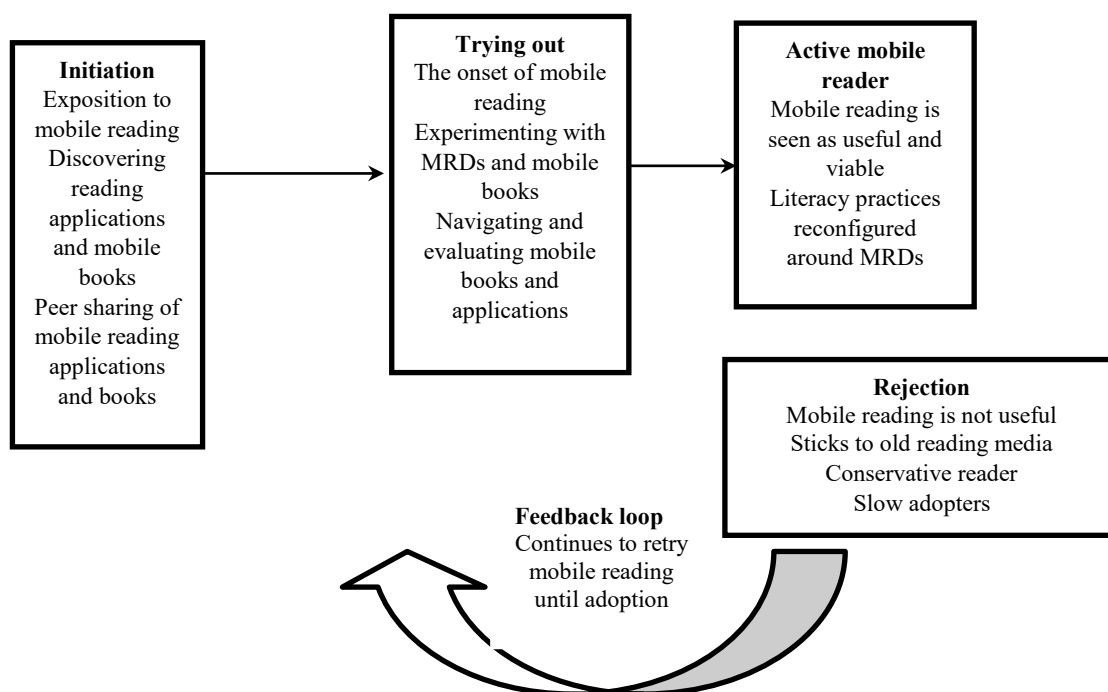

Figure 1: Active Mobile Reader Model (Bachisi 2020)

Figure 1 illustrates the active mobile reader model, the process of becoming a mobile reader by adolescent learners. The process kick starts with owning a personal mobile device or accessing a shared mobile device. Digital reading starts with brief (incidental reading acts) encounters with digital content such as text messages, direct messages, or chats on various social media platforms (Loh & Sun, 2022:327; Singer & Alexander 2017). As the individual continues to explore the digital content on their mobile device, they end up discovering human interest stories which engage and sustain their concentration. As they become more

engrossed in this process, the desire to engage in and read digitally develops and becomes stronger (Loh & Sun 2022; Singer & Alexander 2017). During the initiation into the mobile reading phase, actors in the literacy support system such as peers, teachers, and family can also play an instrumental role in shaping the individual's mobile reading identity.

Once individuals are initiated, they will experiment and try out several reading websites, reading applications, text formats, and mobile reading situations that best suit them. The whole logic behind this process is that the individual is trying to plug into the most ideal mobile routine to support and fuel their mobile reading actions. Once the individuals are comfortable and establish a routine and rhythm, they begin to identify themselves as mobile readers and will naturally pick up a mobile device to read as that would be their preference. By this stage, the individuals have become active mobile readers, established their digital libraries, and bookmarked their favourite reading websites and mobile reading applications (see Connected Reading Model Turner et al 2019:298-303).

If one rejects mobile reading, they are likely to try it out again because of the pervasive nature of mobile devices in adolescent learners' lives. Inevitably, they will continually undertake mobile reading either deliberately or incidentally. These repeated actions are represented by the feedback arrow which indicates that probably due to the frequency of the action, it will lead to eventual acceptance and adoption of MRDs.

LIMITATIONS AND WEAKNESSES

Reading by its very nature is a complex multi-dimensional mental process coupled with the reality that technology and the technological environment are always in a constant state of flux, it does not necessarily follow that adolescents will always be motivated on mobile or permanently maintain a mobile reader identity (Loh & Sun 2022). The reverse of the model described above may occur, with an adolescent reader starting as a mobile reader and changing their reading identity to become a print reader because of shifting interests and the desire to read challenging texts. The adolescent participants of this study live in both a physical and digital world and each realm has its specific reading demands. As a result, adolescent learners may need to vacillate between reading on mobile and reading print depending on the context. Therefore, no single reader identity can hold constant as the reading ecosystem is ever-shifting between print and digital (Turner et al 2019).

CONCLUSION

This paper traced the path a group of Zimbabwean adolescent learners journeyed as they became mobile readers. The key question in this study centred on the extent to which a group of adolescent learners was prepared to transform their mobile devices into mobile reading devices which they could use to read for leisure ahead of other competing functions found on their mobile devices. This was a transformational process as the group of adolescent learners had to adjust numerous aspects of their literacy practices to adapt to the demands MRDs exerted on their reading lives. MRDs reinforced already existing literacy practices while also promoting positive literacy practices amongst adolescent learners. The participants started by reshaping their identities as readers, by aligning their existing reader identities to their mobile reading identities. Furthermore, the participants established mobile reading habits that suited their digital lifestyle i.e. fast, smart, and on the go. While the journey of becoming a mobile reader is not singular and linear the participants engaged in a complex matrix of mental and cognitive processes to finally identify and acknowledge that they had become mobile readers. It is envisaged that this paper, albeit it reports a small-scale mobile reading initiative, will stimulate wider discourse and research on mobile reading amongst the adolescent populace of Zimbabwe and other African countries.

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