Using GoGuardian Teacher Technology to Combat Students’ Digital Distractions on School-Issued Devices

Cyprian Sohpouh Pungong, Scott Marakovitts, and Angela Maria Lee

ABSTRACT

In recent years digital devices have become ubiquitous in schools in the United States and worldwide. This study set out to investigate if the specialized technology GoGuardian Teacher assists educators in combating students’ digital distractions during class time on school issued-devices. A purposeful sampling method was used to select a sample of 16 certified teacher from a public high school in South Carolina with at least one year of full-time teaching experience, currently using or having prior knowledge using GoGuardian Teacher technology. Qualitative data was collected via semi-structured interviews and observational fieldnotes. In-person or virtual (Zoom) interviews were recorded, transcribed, manually coded, and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The results showed that to control digital distractions, teachers use GoGuardian Teacher technology to eliminate students’ technology distractions, engage and communicate with students, and hold students accountable for their web-irrelevant activities. The findings led to recommendations for privacy concerns, district-wide digital citizenship programs, and teacher professional development.

Keywords: Curbing distractions, Digital devices, Digital distractions, GoGuardian Teacher.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, digital devices have become increasingly prevalent in the daily lives of adults, youths, and teenagers worldwide (Flanigan & Kim, 2021; Tseng et al., 2019). Digital devices, including laptops, smartphones, tablets, iPads, and wearable devices, continue to inundate the modern-day classroom (Awofala et al., 2020; Kraehe, 2018). Students have adopted an always-on, always-connected lifestyle due to electronic devices becoming ubiquitous and not likely to fade very soon (Deng et al., 2019). Digital distractions have become a significant problem among students in the United States because of the proliferation of digital technologies in classrooms (McCoy, 2020). According to Deng et al. (2019), students frequently use digital devices in class for non-academic pursuits because web-enabled devices have become profoundly integrated into academic and social lives. For example, computer off-task activities occupied two-thirds of students’ class time during the day, negatively affecting students’ academic performance (Ragan et al., 2014). Digital distraction is becoming increasingly prevalent as students spend many hours online daily. According to a study on digital minimalism, Generation Z students spend over 7 hours online daily (Sarnou, 2021). The extended period spent online using tech tools impacts students’ learning attention. This addictive attachment to tech tools and applications causes students to habitually succumb to digital distractions.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Students are expected to use digital devices during class time for instructional purposes as well as to extend their learning outside of the classroom. However, some students use these technologies for non-content-related purposes during class time. The problem is that digital distraction impedes students’ engagement and academic performance. Technology is extensively integrated into the school system in the United States, as in many other developed countries (Wang et al., 2022). Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act two decades ago, there has been a surge in the adoption of technology in US schools. School districts, in response, launched technology integration efforts such as the 1:1 technology or “bring your own device” policy.
to ensure all students have access to a personal school device (Chou et al., 2017). As students have ready access to school-issued computers and individual gadgets and teachers enable instruction in which students use electronic devices, digital distraction is rising (Awofala et al., 2020).

1.2. Digital Distractions, Students’ Engagement, and Academic Performance

Students’ engagement, which includes physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement, is critical to their learning success. According to Flanigan and Babcik (2022), digital distraction during instruction diminishes students’ engagement and comprehension of the subject matter, which in turn lowers academic performance. Distractions from the digital world often result in decreased attention and engagement in class and an overall decrement in learning (Wang et al., 2022). In addition, Wang et al. (2022) reported that when students are distracted by technology, their cognitive and behavioral engagement suffers because the information is not processed adequately to be encoded into long-term memory.

Many studies have been conducted on how digital distraction affects academic achievement in general, and the consensus points to a detrimental effect. Using digital devices for content-irrelevant activities during class time contributes to lower academic performance. Akgün (2020) and Patil et al. (2019) argued for the same point about digital distraction and students’ performance. Classroom digital distraction activities set back students’ academic performance and interest in the subject (Akgün, 2020). Patil et al. (2019) explained that students’ time spent on tasks is dramatically increased by digital distractions, resulting in lower. Students who use non-class relevant platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube while in class get lower grades than students who study without these distractions (Halpern et al., 2020; Zubairu, 2021).

1.3. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate if the specialized technology GoGuardian Teacher assists educators in combating students’ digital distractions during class time on school-issued devices in a large high school in South Carolina.

1.4. Research Question

How do teachers use GoGuardian Teacher to control students’ digital distractions on school-issued devices?

2. Methodology

A generic qualitative approach was used in this research. This research was conducted at a large urban high school in South Carolina. A semi-structured interview protocol and observation field notes were used to collect research data. Sixteen certified high school teachers from different subject areas and years of experience using GoGuardian Teacher were selected for this study. Purposive sampling was used to select research participants. Pre-determined criteria also guided the selection of research participants. Among other inclusion requirements, participants must be teachers in the large urban school district in South Carolina chosen for this study. A minimum of one academic year of full-time teaching was required for participation. To be eligible, participants must currently use GoGuardian Teacher or have prior experience with it. The teacher must be certified in the content area they facilitate. Exclusion criteria included non-certified staff, long-term substitute teachers, instructors holding positions such as instructional coaches, physical education coaches, teachers with no experience with GoGuardian Teachers, and less than a year of experience in teaching. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling approach in which study participants are selected based on the researcher’s judgment that they are knowledgeable about the subject of the study (Etikan et al., 2016). The instrument’s reliability and validity were achieved in this study through validation by subject matter experts, member checking, triangulation, and a detailed description of the research procedures. Inductive thematic analysis was used as an evidence-based model for data analysis.

3. Results

A final sample of 16 eligible teachers was retained for this study. Table I presents the study’s participants by content areas and years of experience using GoGuardian Teacher. For confidentiality reasons, pseudonyms identify participants, eliminating any possible identification.

The research question for this study explored how teachers at a large urban high school in South Carolina use GoGuardian Teacher to combat students’ digital distractions. The semi-structured interview questions let participants share their perspectives on using cutting-edge technology GoGuardian Teacher to fend off students’ technology-driven distractions. Data analysis identified three themes: Eliminating technology distractions, virtual communication with students, and holding students accountable.

3.1. Eliminating Technology Distractions

Fifteen participants declared that digital distractions are caused by students’ favorable attitudes toward technology and multitasking beliefs. All 16 participants reported using GoGuardian Teacher to eliminate students’ digital distractions. Real-time screen monitoring was a commonly cited strategy used by participants to recognize and eliminate students’ digital distractions. Participants reported that real-time screen monitoring provided visual control over students’ screens, current activities, open tabs and other students’ digital exploration. Using GoGuardian Teacher’s commands to restrict access to unrelated-subject- websites was another strategy that teachers used to effectively eliminate students’ technological distractions on school-issued devices. GoGuardian’s commands, such as scenes, tab management feature, lock/unlock screen and exclude/include students, were used to control junk browsing during class time on school-issued gadgets. Scenes in GoGuardian allowed teachers to set content-related websites on allowed mode and content-irrelevant sites on block mode. With the tab feature, teachers remotely close students’ inappropriate tabs or open new tabs and use the exclude/include feature
Using GoGuardian Teacher to Combat Digital Distractions

Pungong et al.

### Table I: Participants’ Subject Area and Years of Using GoGuardian Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Content area</th>
<th>Years of using GoGuardian Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jasen</td>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedro</td>
<td>ELA</td>
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<td>Luke</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey</td>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
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<td>Jessica</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Science</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>English 4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Virtual Communication with Students

A strategy 15 participants employed to avoid distractions when students strayed from content-related activities was to use GoGuardian Teacher’s communication. Participants made use of GoGuardian chat and announcement features to communicate with students who strayed from content-related activities, thereby redirecting and re-engaging students. Teachers used the chat for one-on-one communication and announcements for general class communication. This communication strategy was reported as the first approach to controlling students’ pleasure browsing on school-issued devices. Besides the chat and announcement features, another technique was to make either a voice call or a videoconference within GoGuardian to get a disengaged student or students back to task.

3.3. Holding Students Accountable

Using GoGuardian to document students’ media distractions to hold students accountable resonated with 13 out of 16 participants. Using GoGuardian’s screenshot and students’ report features, participants documented and kept parents, guardians, and administrators informed of students’ irrelevant digital activities. Participants reported that it was easy to take a screenshot of a student’s inappropriate browsing activity with the screenshot feature, which can be shared with the student, parent or administrator. GoGuardian’s enhanced reporting feature called reports was reported as a huge feature that documents students’ online exploration essential for unplugging their technology misuse.

4. Discussion

This study’s findings offer valuable empirical information regarding restricting students’ technology misuse during class. All 16 participants acknowledged using GoGuardian Teacher to eliminate students’ technology distraction on school-issued devices during a school day. This finding is consistent with Anand and Bergen (2021)’s research at a community high school in Pekin, which adopted GoGuardian software to eliminate technology distractions through content filtering and device surveillance. All participants used real-time screen monitoring to recognize and eliminate students’ digital distractions, congruent with other research on curbing cyberslacking with technology (Anand & Bergen, 2021; Kumar et al., 2019; Quillen, 2010). The participants’ views reinforced findings from previous research in which teachers utilized platform-based technology to monitor students, generate data, and restrict technology distractions (Kumar et al., 2019). Technology monitoring may become more widely used to eliminate digital distractions due to its effectiveness over manually checking each student’s device. This technology-driven approach to tackling digital distractions differs from research by Luo and Kiewra (2022), which advocated active learning strategies to prevent students from cyberslacking during class time.

Within the GoGuardian platform, 15 participants used virtual communication to limit distractions when students strayed from the subject-related task. Flanigan et al. (2022) research found teachers used nonconfrontational techniques like electronic communication, private verbal conversations, or discrete reminders when students become digitally diverted without jeopardizing the student-teacher relationship. Teachers expressed how virtual communication assisted in re-engaging students without humiliation, public calling, or disrupting the entire class, confirming findings from peer-reviewed literature (Flanigan et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2019). This virtual communication strategy extends Cheong et al. (2016) study in which technology distractions were dealt with through verbal communication of codified rules and strategic redirection before imposing sanctions such as deactivating web access and reprimands.

Thirteen out of 16 participants utilized the GoGuardian Teacher’s screenshot feature to document inappropriate
digital exploration by students. This strategy corroborates earlier research in which teachers used an online behavior management tool called ClassDojo to document students’ desired and undesired behaviors (Barahona Mora, 2020). Participants used the GoGuardian Teacher students’ report feature to hold students responsible by informing parents, guardians, and administrators about inappropriate student digital activities. Other K−12 studies showed similar results when GoGuardian and ClassDojo were used to monitor students retroactively, generate reports and provide feedback to parents (Barahona Mora, 2020; Kumar et al., 2019). Utilizing GoGuardian Teacher to hold students responsible supports the research of Flanigan et al. (2022) on nonconfrontational approaches to dealing with digitally distracted students without endangering the student-teacher relationship.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The purpose of this study was to investigate if the specialized technology GoGuardian Teacher assists educators in combating students’ digital distractions during class time on school-issued devices in a high school in South Carolina. Key findings revealed that GoGuardian Teacher technology helped teachers eliminate student technology distractions by providing visibility and control over students’ devices. Findings show that teachers used GoGuardian Teachers’ virtual communication to fend off technology distractions and for instructional purposes. Documenting students’ pleasure browsing within GoGuardian Teacher emerged as a practical approach to restrict technology distractions by holding students accountable. Educators and school leaders should consistently supervise students’ digital activities through technology software that mitigates cyberslacking and maximizes the appropriate use of technology resources for teaching and learning. Educators and school leaders should be aware of the risk of monitoring technology on students’ privacy and take deliberate steps to mitigate these risks. Leadership should create a consistent and organized use of GoGuardian Teacher alongside professional development for teachers and a digital citizenship program for students.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES


