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Cell Phone Usage in Secondary Schools: A Pervasive Post-Pandemic Problem

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CELL PHONE USAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: ENGAGING A PERVASIVE POST-PANDEMIC PROBLEM

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The Problem

Technology has come a long way in recent years, and it is undeniable that many of these advancements have allowed educators the ability to teach in new and different ways. However, the advent of new technologies has also presented new challenges. In particular, some teachers and students are now dealing with heightened distraction caused by cell phone usage in the classroom (Ali, Papike &McDevitt, 2012). Time spent on phones in the classroom routinely detracts from the time students are able to spend learning. Mobile devices have also been proven to be detrimental to student attention and ability to retain information, as research shows that multi-tasking with a phone is not often effective (Chen &Yan, 2016). There are examples in research literature that show that implementing class and school policies to reduce cell phone usage can significantly improve exam scores, especially in lower-performing students. (Ravizza et. al., 2014). In light of findings showing that phone and device use has dramatically increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to stay elevated despite the end of lockdowns, there is a heightened need to address the problem (Nagata et al., 2022). Teachers across the country are urgently making an effort to find solutions, and this study aims to examine one such effort in a local secondary English classroom and analyze its efficacy.

Research Questions:

1. What is the impact of the intervention on the positioning of phones (desks vs. away)?
2. What is the impact of the intervention on the number of instances of phone use in the classroom?

Intervention

In my classroom in particular, I noted that students seemed to really struggle with distraction caused by phone usage. Based on information from peer-reviewed articles and from veteran teachers, I instituted an intervention within two of my classes. The intervention contained the following steps:

- Articulate reasoning behind intervention
- Share relevant research on the negative impact of excessive cell phone usage in an educational setting
- Institute system of reward for positive behaviors and punishment for negative, clearly articulating rules and consequences.

Positive behaviors (using phones for appropriate educational tasks and keepint them away otherwise) are reinforced by thanking and praising students for their attention. Inappropriate use of phones is addressed by confiscating phone for a period or a class day.

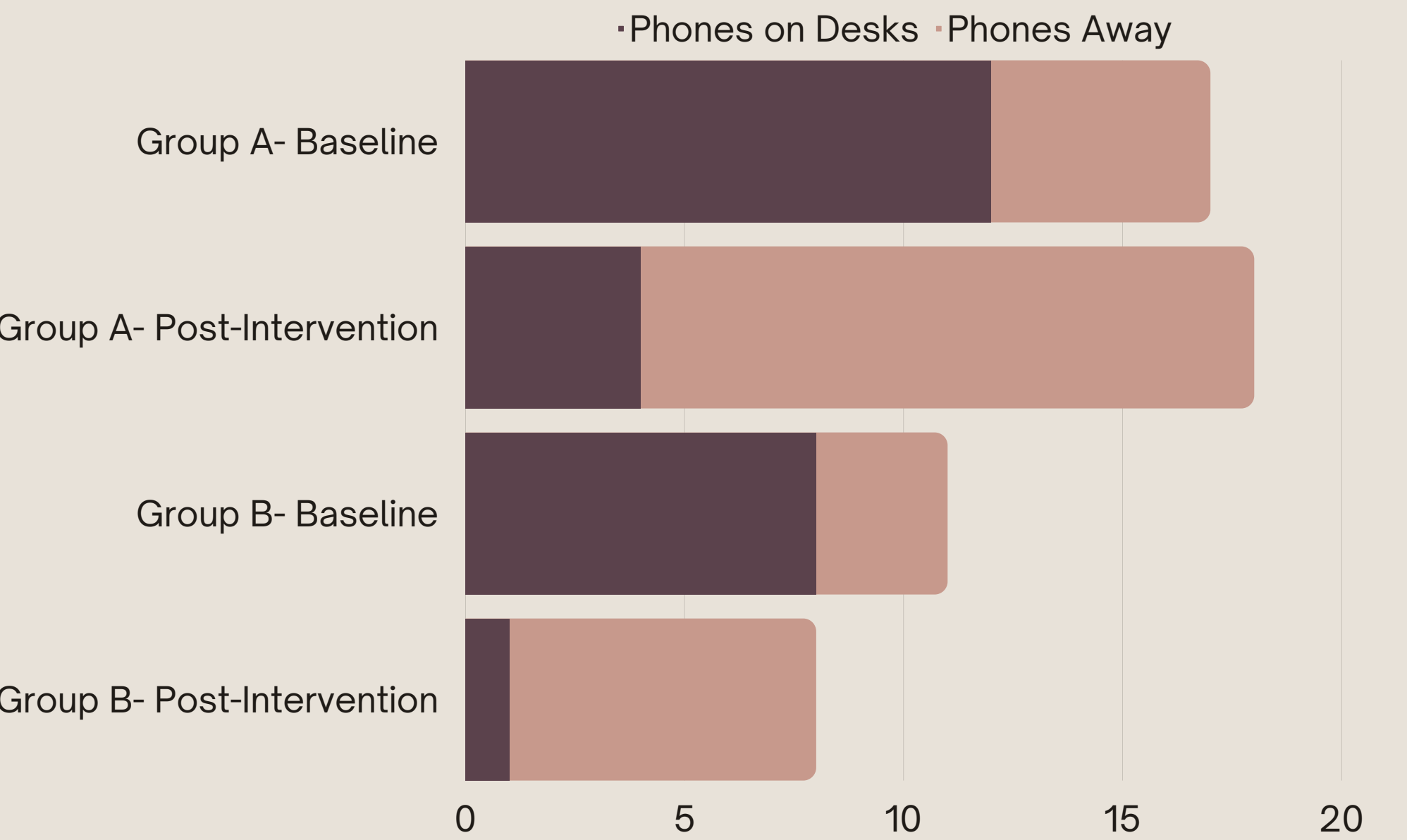
Data Collection and Analysis

Before instituting the intervention, I tracked the number of phones kept out on desks, as well as when and how frequently students used them as another teacher taught. Using a tally mark system, I tracked the amount of times students used their phones. When I saw a student pick up a phone and use it for a short time, during lecture, a lull, or individual work time, I marked one tally. If I looked back after a minute and the student was still using their phone, I marked another tally.

Post-Intervention, data was tracked in the same way. However, when a phone came out the teacher went to the student, reminded them of the policy, and ensured that the phone was being used for appropriate academic tasks. If it was not, they were given a warning. No students repeated the infraction.

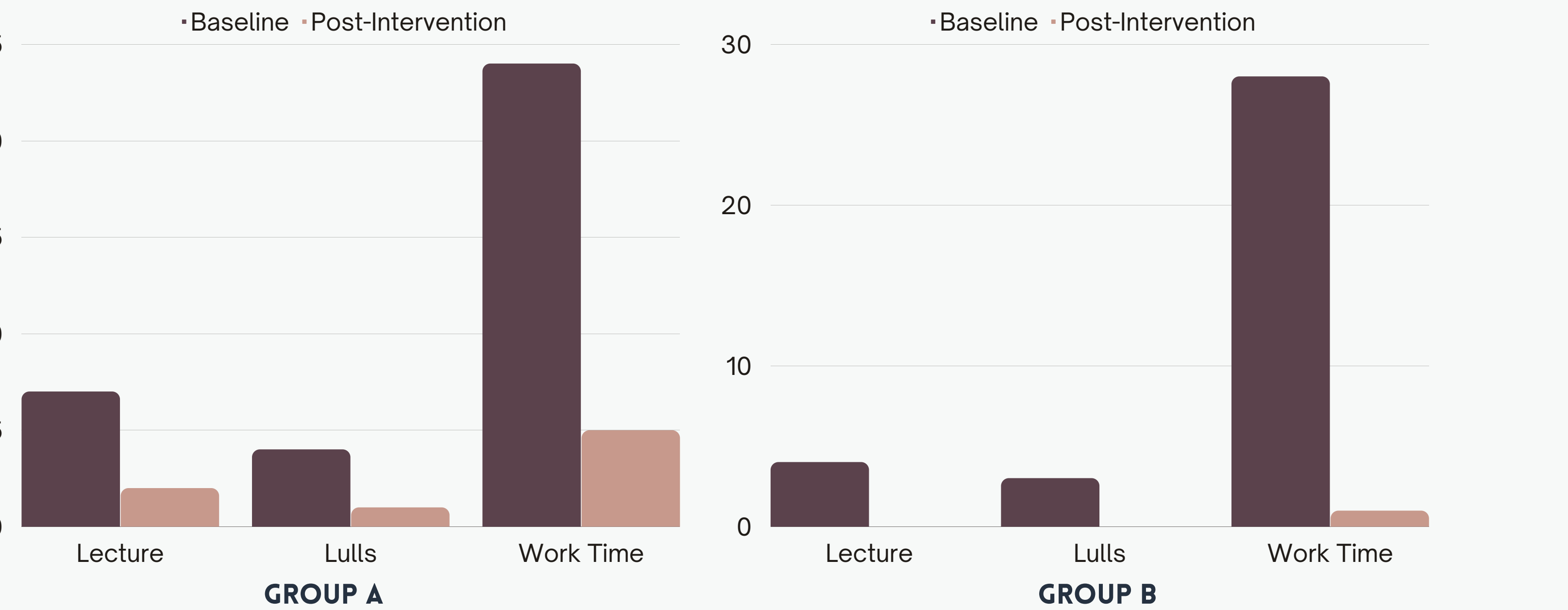
Findings (RQ 1): Position of Phones

From this preliminary data, it seems that this cell phone policy makes a significant difference in the amount of phones out on desks at any given time, thus decreasing distraction and temptation to utilize cell phones during learning time.



Findings (RQ 2): Instances of Phone Use

As is made clear by the preliminary data available in these graphs, implementing a cell phone policy has resulted in a dramatic downtick in disruptive cell phone use during lecture, lulls, and work time. Further data surrounding how the policy affects class engagement long-term will be interesting to see.



Conclusion

Given the significant problems caused by excessive and disruptive cell phone usage in class (achievement, wellbeing, etc.) results of this study are encouraging. We can see that implementing a policy to reduce cellphone usage is a useful tool in improving student success, and can make a dramatic difference even in a short time. The next steps will be to gauge the longer-term impacts of such a policy, and the academic outcomes for students.

Sources

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