

# High-tech cheating

By Hafsa Ahsan

*Edm - cheating*

**I**T was the day of the final semester examination. The students were hurriedly pouring through their lecture notes in a last-minute attempt to cram as much of the lessons as they could. Others were feverishly asking around who had studied what while demanding answers to the difficult questions. Many quietly sat in a corner, setting out their pencil cases, too tired apparently to be looking at any book. The typical pre-exam environment also had one student doing the unimaginable. She was going up to every bright student of her class and requesting all to keep their cell phones within her reach.

"I will ask you the answers to some of the difficult questions — make sure you send me a reply," was her request. This request was greeted with skepticism from a few. Others just nodded and went back to their work. Interestingly, when the examination finally commenced, there were absolutely no instructions from the invigilator to switch off cell phones or any attempt to check if the

and look at each in turn. When it comes to schools, there are some very clear factors which favour a complete ban.

First and foremost, giving a cell phone to school-going children, especially if they are in primary or middle school, can prove quite detrimental. With cell phones fast becoming a status symbol, it is quite possible that these children, young as they are, might be caught in the rat race to acquire the best and the latest cell phone. This can prove quite burdensome for the parents of those children who can ill-afford the more expensive cell phones. Worse case scenario can arise when there are some children who just cannot afford any cell phone or whose parents are a little strict. These children can then feel extremely inferior and inadequate in the presence of their peers, especially if the latter love to flaunt their latest cell phones and their advanced features.

Iqra Asad, a college-going student, pointed out an interesting fact regarding the need for cell phones in schools.

Sarah Rizvi, a university-going student had a similar incident to narrate in this regard. "In one of our tests last week, not only were people's cell phones ringing and causing disturbance, but they were also being used by almost all back benchers for circulating answers to objective questions. Obviously, with a class of 60 plus students and just one invigilator, there's only so much a teacher can do. If not at all times, cell phones should in the very least be completely banned from examination rooms. And more importantly, they shouldn't be just banned in theory, but the ban should be strictly enforced and strong penalties given to those who are caught, so that it sets the right precedent for everyone else."

Other misuses of cell phones include using cell phone cameras to snap random and candid photos and videos of unsuspecting classmates. With the advent of DSL and broadband connections, it is only a matter of time before such videos and photos are uploaded on Facebook and YouTube for the entire world to see. Respect for privacy and ethics takes a backseat as students relentlessly engage in this activity in the name of fun.

Of course one cannot deny that cell phones have their use. With the law and order situation deteriorating in the country, there is no knowing when any emergency might strike the educational institute. At times like these, worried parents can easily ensure the safety of their individual child through the cell phone.

Also, cell phones can ease the minds of parents especially if children are instructed to message the former whenever they reach school or are going out somewhere with their friends after classes. Whether it is calling home for the car or informing one's mother that one has to stay back for work, cell phones are definitely invaluable at times like these.

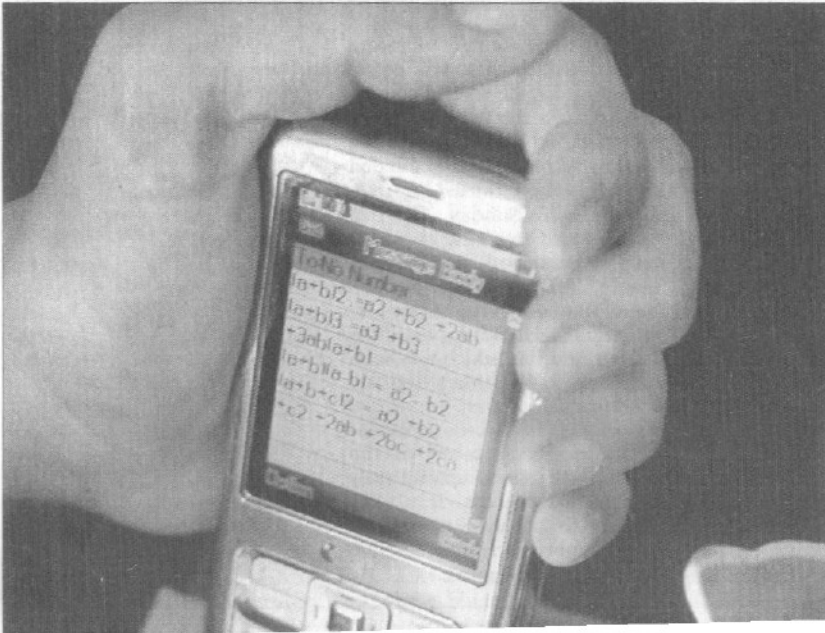
Different students, when asked for their opinion on this subject, along with a description of how cell phone usage is governed in their respective educational institutes had the following to say.

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stitutions should devise strict laws against cell phone usage during class and in libraries, and perhaps only allowing restricted access to them in labs for educational reasons (but only in silent mode) and thereafter make sure that these laws are strictly enforced, on the part of teachers and students both. A ban should also be placed on using cell phones to play music or other audio content on loud speakers."

Iqra Asad, whose college has a ban on cell phones, clearly felt that no student takes such a ban seriously. "Teachers know that the students have cell phones in their bags," she said. "How else can they contact their driver/family member to ask to be picked up? How about people who use the bus and have to call home to be picked up from the bus stop? If a phone rings in the middle of a lecture, the teacher usually admonishes the student but does not confiscate the phone. Even the senior mistress, who confiscates phones, said: 'If I see a single phone I will take it from you, no questions asked, whether you are using it or I see it in your bag.' Then she added in jest, 'So that means, keep your cell phones well hidden in your bags!' There is only one good thing. As people cannot use their phones that openly, the chances of using camera phones negatively is lessened."

Sehar Sheikh, another student, emphasized that it falls on parents and elder siblings to make sure that their charge knows the proper use of cell phones within educational institutes. Parents should not consider this as the sole responsibility of the school or college in question. "The duty lies with the parents and more so with elder siblings (as many parents don't know how to use a mobile phone) to check the cell phone usage of the young ones. In universities and colleges where students keep on talking on their mobile phones for hours, administration should give authority to every worker — gate keepers or peons — to snatch away the cell phone from compulsive talkers and give it to the college administration."



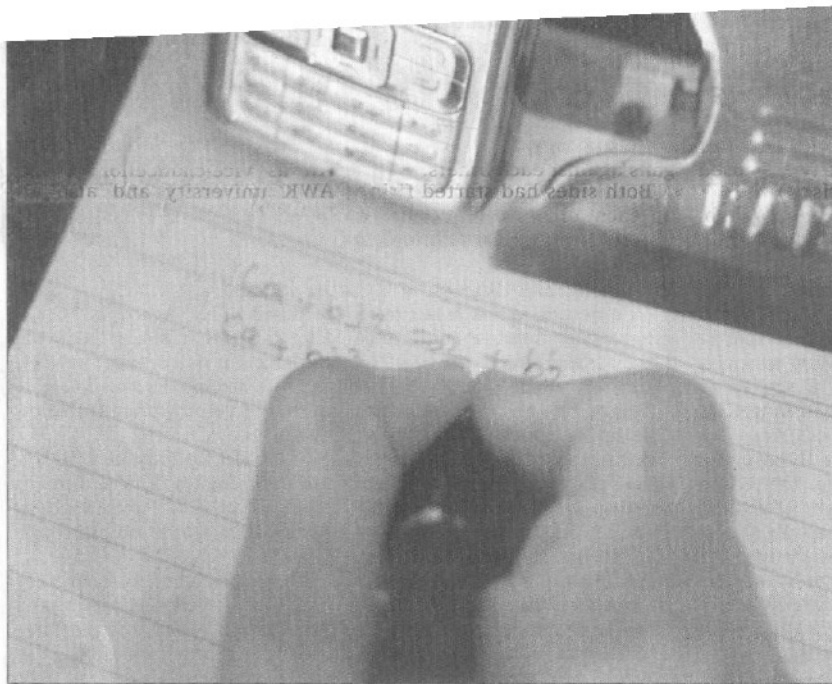


Photo by Arsalan

students possessed one.

Whether one is talking of schools, colleges or universities, just about all students are routinely in possession of a cell phone. Very few educational institutes have a ban implemented on the use of cell phones within their premises. Also, clearly absent is a comprehensive set of guidelines to govern the use of cell phones during classes or seminars and ensure minimum abuse of this facility.

Should educational institutes take an initiative and place an outright ban on the use of cell phones? Many students feel this would be an extreme and impractical measure, not to mention the fact that each student is sure to have a cell phone and educational institutes would be hard pressed to maintain and implement any ban. It is quite likely that over time, students will learn how to escape the eyes of authority and defy the said ban.

To analyse the question of banning cell phones in detail, it would be interesting to divide the educational institutes first,

“There is a set home time so there is no need whatsoever to bring a cell phone to inform the folks at home when you are to be picked up. There is an office phone that can be used if there is any real reason to do so. Ban of cell phones in schools is completely all right.”

Moreover, in schools, the rules are quite strict than they are in colleges and universities. Hence, it is quite possible that a ban on cell phones is enforced and implemented. Measures such as confiscation of the cell phone if any student is found using it can go a long way in implementing such a ban.

In colleges and universities, the story is different. Students are no longer governed by strict rules within their educational institutes, and hence are more liberal about what they use their cell phones for. The aforementioned scenario where a university student was willing to use her phone for cheating during exams is unfortunately only the tip of the iceberg. In reality, the possibilities of abusing the cell phone facility are innumerable.

...institutes had the following to say.

“There is no doubt about the usefulness of cell phones especially when you have to make urgent calls home or for other work; or when you ask friends to give you a missed call when the teacher arrives so you can quickly get that book issued from the library or pick a quick snack from the canteen nearby,” stated Farah Aqueel, a university student. “But cell phones can become a menace — the loud, annoying bells during classes and seminars; and the fact that you can now play songs on cell phones is very annoying too. If a person wants to listen to songs on his/her phone, then they can use the ear phones but what’s the point of making everyone else hear it too? There are students who might be completing some work, reading or revising lectures or just trying to relax. Cell phones should not be completely banned but yes there should be strict rules about their use to be limited only to important calls and messages at a proper time.”

“We are discouraged to bring cell phones to school, but as they are a necessity for those with conveyance issues, we are allowed to bring them,” explained Fizza Hassan, a school-going student. “Previously, we had to submit them to the coordinator, but now we can keep them in our lockers. However, if anyone is found using a cell phone near the lockers, their phone will be confiscated. I feel that cell phones are just another piece of technology, so there should be no harm in bringing them to school. But on the other hand, I also think that educational institutes should be the last place to be polluted with the ills of the contemporary cell phone culture.”

Zainub Razvi, a university-going student, pointed out an important use of cell phones for science students. “Science students, especially those whose study involves identification of microscopic slides, benefit greatly from mobile phone cameras. When I was in dental school, pictures of histology slides were taken during regular labs and then circulated via email and printouts to the entire class for handy reference. Overall, there’s no reason why cell phone usage cannot be more closely monitored. Educational in-

...to snatch away the cell phone from compulsive talkers and give it to the college administration. Lastly, PTA should bar mobile phone subscribers from offering packages with cheap call rates during night and noon to entice the young populace which in turn is making them corrupt.”

A look at both sides of the issue reveals that instead of an outright ban on cell phones (which can only work in primary or middle school), the educational institute in question can put in some stringent measures in place to ensure that cell phones are used in a proper manner. Some of these measures can include keeping a cell phone but never using it during a class or a seminar. Failure to abide by this rule should lead to the confiscation of the phone. Also, cell phones should be banned during tests or examinations. Teachers should check that no one is carrying a cell phone, before they begin the exam. Camera phones can be banned completely, with only certain models allowed for the students.

On the positive side, educational institutes at all levels should try and have frequent lectures or seminars on mobile phone usage. This can include the safety aspect of excessive phone usage as well as the privacy issues. Instructing students on privacy and security can provide constructive in the long-run. Very few educational institutes currently make any effort to address this issue.

The debate on whether or not cell phones should be banned in educational institutes is definitely an ongoing one. There are some very strong proponents on both sides of the argument, each putting forward their point of view with convincing arguments. One cannot deny that cell phones have permeated the very existence of one’s individual self, but that is no reason why dependence on technology should surpass the normal rules and norms governing educational institutes in particular. At the end of the day, it is all about exercising responsibility in the face of the increasing exposure that cell phones provide, and the educational institutes themselves will have to decide when and where to draw the line for their students, keeping in mind the latter’s best interest. ■