THE ADVANTAGES OF USING SMARTPHONES BY STUDENTS IN A CLASSROOM SETTING

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Abstract

We live in a technology driven world. It is impossible for us to imagine life without technology. One of the most important inventions of modern technology is the mobile phone. As every coin has two sides, so also a phone has advantages and disadvantages. It is up to the human eye how we perceive things. A smart phone is a device which is owned by most of the students, engineering or otherwise. It is very difficult and irresistible for a student to part with his / her mobile for a long time. It is very evident that students are addicted to their phones. Though some educational institutions strictly follow a "NO mobile policy", the students still come up with a way to bend the rules. The paper aims at providing ways to use mobile phones effectively in and outside the classroom.

Key words- Mobile phones, technology, students, advantages, disadvantages

Introduction

We all live in a technology driven world.

The human being has always been social and constantly in search of forming new relationships, but never fully content with what we had. We are zealots and have always ventured for more in all walks of life, be it in any field and our insatiable thirst for knowledge has eventually resulted in the creation of all technology we see and use today. Our primal need to be a part of a group has evolved over time and incorporated itself into the technology we have created, and has made the world a smaller place by connecting people across the globe.

The radio is one such example that can pass information to people living around the world. It was hailed as one of the greatest inventions ever, until the television was invented. When humankind was not content with only listening on the radio, we invented the television where we can not only perceive information and entertainment acoustically, but also visually. As the first television set only played black and white programs, we went a step ahead and brought some colour onto the television screen. Next came the dissatisfaction of watching only the National Channels which fuelled the discovery of several more channels, with numbers now running in the hundreds, which we watch tirelessly today. It proves the saying, 'You are only as good as your last show' and inspires us to do more and to keep doing it.

Life has become so much easier with the advent of technology in nearly every walk of life. We have microwaves to cook, washing machines to wash our clothes, iron boxes to iron our clothes, mixer grinders to ease our work, dishwashers to do the dishes, air conditioners to prime our atmosphere and so on.

It goes without saying that cell phones and smart phones are the cream of the crop when it comes to connect and speak to people anywhere on the planet. The cell phone also comes from a place of humble beginnings, just like the monochrome television, but the cell phones we see today are living proof of mankind's ever changing modern ways. The new models rolling out into the market these days are sleek, colorful, and affordable and most importantly, everyone's need today. We probably cannot do without a phone in today's world. What began as an idea for an entity that could be used to communicate across places has rapidly grown to become an indispensable part of human life. Cell phones and up to an extent smart phones are now used in the most remote areas of the world.

It has been an endless debate on whether technology is a boon or bane to mankind. If asked, a parent would definitely top the list of people who are annoyed with their wards using the cell phones all the time. If viewed from their perspective, they are absolutely correct as children use their cell phones for various reasons like texting, making calls, playing games, social media and many other applications.

Educational Institutions have understood this and some of them have come up with strict instructions not to allow mobiles phone usage in the class rooms while some are compelled to allow them as students have it as a means of communication with their parents during emergencies.

Let us throw some light upon the ill effects of mobile phone usage by the young learners when in class before we plunge into the positives. Young learners today are addicted to their mobiles, and unfortunately unaware of the repercussions the over usage could have in the later stages of life. Let us consider the probable effects these actions could have on the class.

The first and foremost reason to be cited is that the young learners get distracted easily with the applications, games and social networking sites like Whatsapp, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram and so on. They eagerly wait for their mobiles to buzz with notifications, often forgetting that they are in the classroom and satisfy the urge by having a glance at their phones. It is a sheer waste of time. They tend to lose interest in the class as they are not able to focus on the topic being taught because of the constant urge to check their phones. Their motivation stoops down and it leads to a lack of democracy in the class. Their concentration is affected as their priorities vary. The learners get disruptive as the flow of the lesson is broken and may not concentrate on the instructions given in order to cope up with the class. Furthermore, the perpetrators are not the only ones distracted as the other students are also busy watching them.

Some students try translating the lexis the moment they come across a new word from the lesson or one used by the teacher. It might give them immediate satisfaction of understanding a new word, but the chances are that they might not be able to remember it. By doing so, they are not really able to use their cognitive skills to deduce the meaning from the context. To cite an example, if a teacher is teaching a skilled lesson or reading, he would want the student

to be able to develop autonomy and deduce the meaning based on context, or simply raise their hands to obtain the meaning from the teacher himself.

The biggest challenge a teacher faces today is that the students have a tenuous attention span. A good teacher can use technology as a boon and encourage the young learners to use their mobiles wisely in a positive way for learning in and outside the classroom.

BENEFITS OF USING MOBILE PHONES IN THE CLASSROOM

There are various advantages of using mobile phones in a class room if monitored properly.

- ✓ Authentic communication takes place which further contributes to communicative competence.
- ✓ The class becomes student centered as students love to hang around with their mobiles.
- ✓ The students get more engaged constructively.
- ✓ It saves a lot of paper to the institution and also saves the environment.
- ✓ The pace of the class can be changed from dry to a more exciting class.
- ✓ It changes the dynamics of the class.
- ✓ The students have instant access to real current information as many new words are added to the dictionary every day. They learn various meanings of the words according to the context.
- ✓ Phones can be very helpful if the lesson is well directed and has a clear objective.
- ✓ Learners become more practical and it also saves a lot of time on the lesson.
- ✓ They have information on their finger tips.
- ✓ The apps can be used creatively for fun filled activities associated with the class as keeping students' attention for the whole hour is not possible.
- ✓ The pictures taken in the class from a board or chart become a permanent record with the students who can access it outside the class. It takes the focus away from the teacher and encourages learners' autonomy.
- ✓ They can be encouraged to have interactive apps for usage in and outside the classroom.
- ✓ They can take a quick look at the pictures as an image leaves a lasting impact on the learner.
- ✓ With the vast availability of information on the internet, the learner can be fed with ample information.
- ✓ Activities like story telling can be encouraged and it will be very beneficial in case of Podcasts.
- ✓ Most importantly we will be up to date as a teacher and mobile phones make us feel autonomous in learning.
- ✓ A phone is a wonderful tool for communication and very useful for sharing ideas particularly with project works.
- ✓ Learners learn new vocabulary with fun and brainy games like Book worm.

THE CHALLENGES OF USING MOBILE PHONES IN THE CLASSROOM

- ✓ Technophobia could be developed both for the teacher and the learners.
- ✓ The phones are completely dependent on the wifi signals but not all institutes provide wifi connections accessible to the students.
- ✓ Institutional policies regarding e-learning also come into the picture.
- ✓ Technological failure can lead to a mishap for a scheduled class that is completely dependent on the internet connections with limited or no access connections.
- ✓ There can be no clear outcome if the class is disruptive.
- ✓ It is very difficult for the students to listen and concentrate with a mobile in their hand.
- ✓ They get lazy as they rely completely on them.
- ✓ They don't concentrate on vocabulary building as they believe that the phone is a solution to all their questions.
- ✓ The negative automatic correction hinders their spellings.
- ✓ The students get used to copy and paste from the text and the actual reading does not happen.
- ✓ The biggest challenge if for the teacher who finds it very difficult to keep a tab and check if all the students are doing the same thing assigned to them.
- ✓ No thoughtful learning can take place if the students are too busy on their phones.
- ✓ It also harms their eyes and the learners get passive.
- ✓ It is a challenge for the teacher to train the learners to use the mobiles correctly.
- ✓ Logical application of their brain slugs down as they tend to look at the internet for solutions.

In order to balance the pros and cons and have effective learning with mobile phones in class, the teacher can come up with a probable solution by using the traffic lights system in the classroom. The board or interactive board can be used for this purpose where three coloured circles can be used. The red circle indicates that the students are not allowed to use the mobile phones for that class. This could be effective when a reading class or a test is going on. The amber circle indicates that mobile phones can be used if required and the green circle indicates that mobile phones are allowed and encouraged by the students.

The traffic lights system clearly informs the learners about the usage of their phones for that class. The teachers can come up with their own probable solutions for this.

HEALTHY WAYS OF USING MOBILES IN CLASS ROOMS

A teacher can create a class group on Facebook or WhatsApp or Edmodo to communicate with the students inside and outside the classroom. All they have to do is give a name to the group and ask all the learners to join the group. It would however, be professional if the teachers do not accept personal or friend requests from any of the students. The teacher can send links to the supplementary material or send authentic reading and listening texts. A

teacher can send reminders about homework, projects or any leftover assignments to be completed. A teacher can ask for feedback on lessons and also be able to negotiate course content. Notes and ideas can also be shared that will help peer assessment and peer support. Copies of board work can also be shared which will be very helpful for the absentees.

As this becomes an open forum, the onus lies on the teacher to ensure that this platform is not used for bullying or letting someone down.

ACTIVATING SCHEMATA

This method is very useful if using a flipped class room method. We can also give learners 5 – 10 minutes time and ask them to research on a given topic associated with the class and then give a presentation or conduct a discussion. It also works well for a debate as speaking skills are implemented. In this way many ideas will be covered in one shot without the teacher spending much time on explanation or missing out on any vital information. This also works very well if a written assignment is assigned to the students as they get to hone their spellings and writing skills. The students can also feedback their information later on the class groups if needed.

AUDIO RECORDINGS

Most mobile phones have this feature to record sound. The students can use their mobiles to record themselves while debating/giving an extempore/ discussion/ speaking or while they spell words. The students can also be given homework to record a JAM (Just a Minute) topic and play it in the class the next day. Working on JAM topics is very important as they become a part of the recruitment process of the interviews which the students cannot master overnight unless done on a regular basis.

This becomes an excellent option for the students to self assess and self correct. This could be done regularly by the students as a means to monitor their progress especially if they start doing it right from the beginning of their course. The audio can also be reused to focus on the range of language points, especially if a student is weak in lexical or grammatical areas. They can also focus on individual phonemes and stress patterns. Measuring their progress could be assigned as homework and the data can be expressed pictographically to show the student's progress at the end of the term or year.

STUDY SKILLS – VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

The instructor should follow a strict no mobile policy in a reading class. After the reading part is done however, the students can be encouraged to use their mobiles for the vocabulary. The students who have a dictionary app in their mobiles can use the app and the rest can have access to the website. This develops learners' autonomy on dictionary use.

The students can be encouraged to focus on the phonetic script of the word, thus learning proper pronunciation and the different usages of the word as a Noun/ Adjective/ Verb.

PHOTO GALLERY

This activity can be fun if the students have a smart phone. In situations where the students do not have a smart phone, they can share. The students' photos stored in their phones can be used for a variety of activities.

To develop the Speaking skills, the students can be asked to compare two photographs, similar to the Cambridge Speaking exam. They can use a wide range of language and sentence structures to compare and contrast.

Speaking and listening skills can be developed when a student describes a photo to his partner who in turn has to draw whatever has been described. This is a typical communicative activity with an information gap.

Writing skills can also be developed using a photograph when the students create a story based on a picture.

The students can also have a pair activity in which one partner shows his photo to the other and asks to make deductions based on the picture.

If the photograph has been taken during a holiday or a celebration, the students can get personal while reliving those moments and that makes it more memorable and fun. The activity can be named as 'A picture says a thousand words'. This would be an amazing activity for visual learners.

The three skills of listening, writing and speaking can be improved using the photos.

CALENDAR

This app can be used to set reminders for deadlines, assignments, home works, class trips, events and so on. The students can also create a systematic study timetable to follow.

APPS AND WEBSITES

Apps like Kahoot are really easy to use and have hundreds of exciting lessons. It is easy to even create our own activities for a language review.

Questions on tenses or any topic can be formed with the options given. At a given point of time, the students are requested to login and answer the questions. Similarly, writing tasks can also be given. A question can be posed and enough time is given to the students to come up with the answer before discussion.

It serves as a wonderful platform for grammatical practice, writing articles, essays, e-mails, reports, reviews, proposals, and letters and so on.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, an effective teacher sees potential in everything, even in the worst situation and converts the available facilities as assets for the development of the students. A simple thought can change the whole perspective of the classroom.

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