

Teaching an English Lesson: Smart Phones of Students' as Teaching Aids

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Abstract

The conventional English classroom in India has long been characterized by a teacher-centric approach, predominantly facilitating one-way communication. This paradigm of English Language Teaching (ELT) prevailed in Indian classrooms throughout the 1980s. By the 1990s, a transformative shift had occurred within the educational landscape, where the Indian English teachers began to integrate various teaching aids, such as charts and visual images, into their pedagogical practices.

As we moved into the 2000s, the advent of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology further revolutionized the approach to English language education. This innovative framework introduced a plethora of collaborative activities, including pair work, group discussions, debates, seminar presentations, peer teaching, and group tasks, which energized the English classroom environment. By the 2010s, a significant disruption swept through the curriculum of undergraduate English classes, fundamentally altering the approach to teaching. The omnipresence of smart phones emerged as a distraction, luring students' attention away from traditional teaching aids and engagement in class activities.

This article explores the innovative utilization of smart phones as pedagogical tools in the context of teaching an English lesson. It highlights a teaching experiment conducted in the English classroom for UG Semester-1 students at Govt. Degree College in Pakala, specifically during the academic year 2025-26. The focus of this experiment lies in integrating smart phones within the students' learning experience, utilizing these devices as effective aids in the instruction of English.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Communicative Language Teaching, Teacher centric, Student centric, Peer Teaching, Smart Teaching, Smart phones.

1. Introduction

The conventional English classroom in India has long been characterized by a teacher-centric approach, predominantly facilitating one-way communication. In this setting, Teachers engage in a multitude of activities—speaking, reading, writing, questioning, and even providing answers to their own questions—while students often act merely as passive observers. Some may listen attentively, while others act as if listening. The typical practice involves students transcribing notes from the blackboard, memorizing responses, and reproducing these learned answers during assessments. This paradigm of English Language Teaching (ELT) prevailed in Indian classrooms throughout the 1980s. Such pedagogical strategies may have been appropriated for that particular time and context, as the primary aim of English instruction then was to enhance students' writing abilities, with a strong emphasis on spelling and grammar.

By the 1990s, a transformative shift had occurred within the educational landscape, leading to a redefined set of objectives in language teaching. In Indian schools, the emphasis of English instruction transitioned from an exclusive focus on writing skills to a more holistic approach centered on communication proficiency. Consequently, Indian English teachers began to integrate various teaching aids, such as charts and visual images, into their pedagogical practices. They implemented oral practice sessions, embraced storytelling, facilitated dialogue rehearsals, and engaged students in vocabulary games to enhance the effectiveness of the learning experience. Despite these efforts, it was observed that only about 30% of the students displayed genuine engagement, while others appeared to false participation.

As we moved into the 2000s, the advent of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology further revolutionized the approach to English language education. This innovative framework introduced a plethora of collaborative activities, including pair work, group discussions, debates, seminar presentations, peer teaching, and group tasks, which energized the English classroom environment. As a result, a remarkable increase in active student participation was noted, with nearly 60% of learners fully engaging in the teaching and learning process.

By the 2010s, a significant disruption swept through the curriculum of undergraduate English classes, fundamentally altering the approach to teaching. The omnipresence of smart phones emerged as a distraction, luring students' attention away from traditional teaching aids and engagement in class activities. Whenever instructors turned to the blackboard, a parallel world awaited in the palms of their hands, as students gravitated towards YouTube videos and WhatsApp conversations. Initially, educational institutions imposed restrictions on the presence of smart phones within classroom walls. However, the pervasive influence of telecommunications proved formidable, rendering such regulations largely ineffective. Ultimately, it became necessary to permit smart phones in the classroom, as students relied on them for completing various tasks, including filling out forms. Consequently, they were instructed to silence their devices and refrain from using them during lessons. Yet, despite these numerous restrictions, smart phones continued to disrupt both the students' focus and the overall learning environment. This scenario presents a formidable challenge for English teachers striving to captivate their students' attention amidst the allure of mobile technology. In light of these challenges, a pertinent question arises: 'Why can't the English Teachers use Smart phones in the hands of students as Teaching aids for effective English Language Teaching?'

This Teaching experiment explores the innovative utilization of smart phones as pedagogical tools in the context of an English lesson. It highlights a teaching experiment conducted in the English classroom for UG Semester-1 students at Govt. Degree College in Pakala, specifically during the academic year 2025- The focus of this experiment lies in integrating smart phones within the students' learning experience, utilizing these devices as effective aids in the instruction of English.

2. Smart Phones in the Hands of Students:

Within the UG Semester-1 English class at Govt. Degree College, there is a group of 60 students, predominantly hailing from lower middle-class or Below Poverty Line (BPL) backgrounds. The majority of these students' parents engage in labor-intensive professions, such as daily wage work or small-scale farming. Remarkably, a substantial 90% of these students possess smart phones that facilitate their connection to the internet. The remaining 10% are able to access smart phones owned by their parents. All smart phones in question are equipped with internet connectivity, and students actively

engage with various social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Gmail, and YouTube, thereby enriching their learning environment.

3. Lesson for the Experiment:

In Andhra Pradesh UG Semester-1 English prescribed syllabus of 2025-26, there are poems, short stories, one act plays, speeches, essays and grammar topics also. But for this teaching experiment a prose lesson ‘Letter to a Teacher’ by School of Barbiana is selected. ‘Letter to a Teacher’ is a book written by the students of the Barbiana School, Italy. This book was originally written in the Italian language in 1967. Then it was translated into English by Nora Rossi and Tom Cole in 1970. The present lesson is one of the letters from this book.

This letter is addressed to a Teacher by a few former students. They criticize teachers for their apparent indifference, insensitivity, and, at times, outright mockery of students from poorer backgrounds. Through vivid examples and personal anecdotes, the letter exposes how the teachers’ attitudes, language, and humor perpetuate social divisions, undermining the self-esteem and educational prospects of the most vulnerable learners.

Significantly, the letter does not merely catalogue complaints; it constitutes a powerful socio-political critique of the state-run schools of that era. The students highlight the systemic failure to recognize and respond to the diverse socio-cultural realities of the classroom. Their collective voice becomes an emotional yet reasoned protest, challenging the prevailing pedagogical norms and demanding a more compassionate, inclusive, and context-aware approach to education.

4. Smart Phone as a Teaching Aid:

In this Teaching experiment Smart Phones with Internet connection are used as teaching aids. Online resources like WhatsApp, YouTube, G-mail, Google forms, online Dictionary, Mentimeter etc., are used by the students in this practice. Here Flipped Teaching model is used, where learning resources are shared to the students in advance. They study the material at home and attend the class.

5. Lesson Plan:

Day-1		
Activity	Description	Online sources used
Pre-Teaching activity	A YouTube video of Sunder Pichai, Google CEO meeting his school teacher and expressing his gratitude, is shared in advance to the students through Whatsapp group and asked the students to watch it and attend the class.	Youtube Whatsapp
Motivation	The YouTube Video shared is played in the Classroom through Projector, Students watch the video and appreciates the humble attitude of Sudar Pichai towards his teacher. Teacher discussed about the importance of Teachers.	Youtube
Discussion	Then a discussion is conducted in the class, where students have to introduce their favorite school teacher to the class.	-

<p>Digital Assignment</p>	<p>The prescribed lesson is a blame letter and it blames the Teachers and the Education system of those days. By studying this letter students may feel bad about their Teachers or misunderstand them. To avoid this, the Teacher thought to begin this lesson with a positive note. Hence students are asked to write a letter of gratitude to their favorite school teacher. For this a model letter is shared to the student's through the whatsapp group. Students have to submit the Digital Assignment in the form of a word file to the teacher through the g-mail. They use spell check and Grammarly to correct the sentence structures.</p>	<p>Whatsapp MS-Word Spell check Grammarly G-mail</p>
<p>Introducing the lesson & Writers</p>	<p>Teacher introduces the Lesson and its context Teacher introduces the original writers and Translators. Shares a PPT through WhatsApp group.</p>	<p>WhatsApp</p>
<p>Sharing the Text</p>	<p>Teacher shares the prescribed text through whatsapp and asks the students to study the text and identify the difficult words.</p>	<p>WhatsApp</p>
<p>Day-2</p>		
<p>Studying the Text</p>	<p>The class is divided into groups of 5 students each. They sit in groups and try to understand the text in detail. They use Online Dictionaries to know the meanings of difficult words, synonyms, usage of words, pronunciation etc.</p>	<p>Online Dictionary</p>
<p>Group Reporting</p>	<p>Each group comes on to the stage to report their understanding of the text.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>Day-3</p>		
<p>Writing the Summary</p>	<p>Teacher gives clues about writing a paragraph and different parts of a paragraph. The students sit in groups and try to write the summary of the text. Teacher guides the students in writing a meaningful and grammatically correct paragraph.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>Online Assessment test</p>	<p>An online Assessment test is conducted using Google form. It tests the understanding of the text, vocabulary and other things learned in the lesson.</p>	<p>Google form</p>
<p>Feedback collection</p>	<p>At the end of the class a feedback is collected about the experience of the students using Mentimeter</p>	<p>Mentimeter</p>

6. Challenges:

It has been noted that educators must exercise caution during this particular form of instruction. It is imperative for teachers to ensure that students remain focused on the designated curriculum and do not stray off course by engaging with unrelated resources that may lead to distractions. To facilitate this, teachers should establish clear guidelines in advance, such as requiring students to silence their mobile devices and refrain from answering calls during the learning process. The use of smart phones should be restricted to instances where it is deemed necessary. It is essential to promote the constructive utilization of smart phones within the classroom, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of learning.

7. Conclusion:

In conclusion, this innovative teaching experiment has afforded students a genuine sense of freedom in employing smart phones during class. Their body language and overall demeanor suggest that they relished each moment, particularly as they actively engaged with various online resources and collaborated in group activities. Feedback gathered through the Mentimeter Survey reveals that 100% of students express satisfaction with this initiative. Moreover, the results from the online assessments surpass those of the physical tests administered in previous lessons, which did not incorporate smart phone usage. A notable improvement of 10 to 15% in results has been observed. This method represents a progressive teaching strategy for enhancing English Language Teaching (ELT) effectiveness.

9. References

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