



Blog Post #10

The Silent Epidemic: Smartphone Addiction in Italian Classrooms

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"Tech with Care, Mind Aware."

A recent study by the University of our Padua Research Group reveals how smartphones are transforming educational environments in Italian schools: based on interviews with educators across multiple disciplines, identifies key concerns and intervention strategies related to smartphone use among students aged 14-19.

Major Concerns

Educators identified several critical issues related to smartphone use in educational settings:

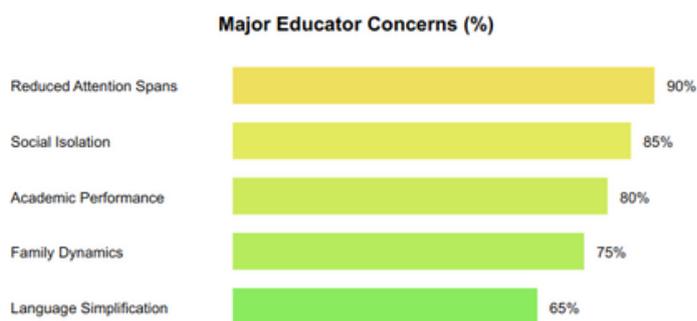


Figure 1: Major concerns reported by educators about smartphone use

1. The Collapse of Attention Spans

Nearly every educator interviewed reported a dramatic reduction in students' ability to sustain focus. One language teacher observed that "attention spans have drastically reduced in recent years: students accustomed to quickly viewing videos and content through scrolling can no longer manage slower tempos necessary for reflection."

When faced with a challenging question, students frequently abandon it entirely rather than working through the cognitive strain that deeper analysis requires.

One teacher noted that students "tend to respond hastily without carefully reading the instructions, and if they don't find an immediate answer, they prefer to skip it rather than pause to think."

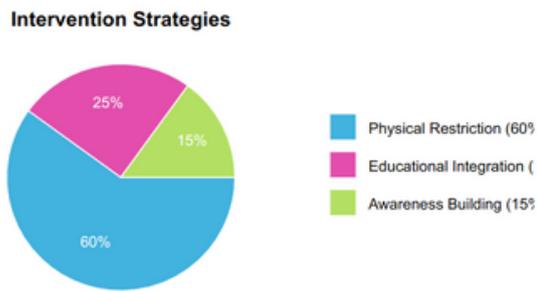
2. Social Isolation Despite Physical Proximity

A religion teacher described the paradox of modern classrooms as having "non-existent sociability but individualism despite being many in the classroom." Devices designed to connect people are creating profound social barriers in educational settings.

A mathematics teacher offered a telling example: "In the past, when going on field trips by bus, I had to remind students to be quiet. Now students are silent because they're always glued to their smartphones." What was once a vibrant social space now resembles a collection of individuals sharing nothing but physical proximity.

Intervention Strategies

Educators have developed various approaches to address smartphone use in educational settings:



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Figure 2: Intervention strategies used by educators

1. Physical Restriction

The most common approach involves implementing no-phone policies during class time. A special education teacher strongly advocated for this approach: "I absolutely recommend placing cellphones on the teacher's desk or in a box to improve student performance." These physical management strategies appear most effective for younger students and in subjects requiring sustained concentration.

2. Educational Integration

Some educators have found ways to incorporate smartphones constructively into learning activities. A mathematics and physics teacher described:

"Personally, in class I allow students to use smartphones to: analyze graphs, quickly consult formulas, find applications of studied concepts in everyday life on the internet. In this way, the device becomes a tool in favor of teaching."

A language teacher noted positive impact "when it was an agile tool used in school activities documented by the students themselves through photos, videos." These strategic integrations acknowledge the device's potential utility while maintaining educational purpose.

3. Awareness Building

Rather than simply restricting access, some teachers focus on developing students' critical awareness about technology use. One language teacher suggests "not to prohibit, but to educate on the use of the tool" and to approach the issue "without demonizing the tool, but emphasizing the importance of establishing a few clear rules for proper use."

This awareness-building approach focuses on long-term development of healthy technology habits rather than immediate classroom management. It appears particularly effective with older students who respond better to reasoned guidelines than outright prohibition.

4. Finding a Balance

The research suggests that addressing smartphone addiction requires a new approach rather than simple prohibition. As one art history teacher observed, "The smartphone should not be demonized, it would be a lost war. It can very well become a very useful educational tool." The most promising direction involves neither uncritical embracing of technology nor outright prohibition, but rather a thoughtful approach that acknowledges both potential and risk. Through collaborative effort among educators, families, and institutions, schools can work toward creating educational environments where technology serves learning rather than disrupting it.



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