Pupils react to French phone ban

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

• What do you predominantly use your phone for?
• What do you think 11–16-year-olds mostly use their phones for?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then, find them in the article to read them in context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>monumental</td>
<td>a short piece of music that is easy to remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adamant</td>
<td>reduce the time that you use or do something that is addictive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jingle</td>
<td>angry, surprised, excited or frightened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>credit</td>
<td>make you feel annoyed, worried or upset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>detox</td>
<td>existing in some places but not in other places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high-income</td>
<td>a movement that your body makes without you thinking about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freaked out</td>
<td>having a lot more money than the average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sought</td>
<td>determined not to change your belief or decision about something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manifesto</td>
<td>a formal statement expressing the aims and plans of a group or organization, especially a political party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bother</td>
<td>very significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patchy</td>
<td>tried to do or get something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflex</td>
<td>recognition for something you have done or achieved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do you predominantly use your phone for? What do you think 11–16-year-olds mostly use their phones for?
‘It’s pretty easy to talk instead’: pupils react to French phone ban

Students and teachers on the new law aimed at detoxing teenagers from their screens

Angelique Chrisafis
7 September, 2018

1 At the end of lessons at Claude Debussy middle school in Paris, a classical music jingle played instead of a bell and teenagers poured out of the gates. Several 13-year-olds quickly reached into their bags to check their mobile phones, which had been switched off for eight hours.

2 Children’s phones have now been banned from all state middle schools in France under a new law that President Emmanuel Macron said would help detox teenagers from their screens.

3 “I thought I would be freaked out but it has been fine,” said one 13-year-old girl, who got an iPhone when she was 11. “I left my phone in my bag all day and I was surprised to find it didn’t bother me. Normally, I’d be on Snapchat and Instagram. But my friends are here at school so it’s pretty easy to just talk instead.”

4 She said she would probably use her phone more at home. “My parents don’t set rules on phone use but I’ve made my own rule: I don’t check my phone after 11.30pm on a school night.”

5 Her friend, also 13, said she liked using her phone for watching shows on Netflix but the school connection was always too patchy for that so she used to look at photos and listen to music at break time. “I haven’t found it hard to ignore my phone this week,” she said. “But there is still a physical reflex sometimes to reach for it and get it out.”

6 The school in Paris’s 15th arrondissement – where 460 pupils aged 11 to 15 come from a mix of high-income backgrounds and poorer families – prepared for the law by introducing phone-free Mondays last term.

7 Previously, staff had noticed that children at break time would mostly be standing in the playground looking at their phones.

8 “About four or five weeks into our phone-free Monday experiment, we saw children bringing packs of cards into school to play in break time,” said the headteacher, Eric Lathière. “We hadn’t seen cards at school for years. Children brought books in to read and pupils stood around chatting far more than they had before.”

9 He said he approved of the new law: “It’s about educating people on phone addiction – and not just children; adults, too. Any moment in the day when you can try to do something without a phone requires an effort but it’s a habit worth forming.”

10 He was adamant, however, that the ban should not be seen as anti-technology. “We can’t go against digital; that would be like trying to keep schools back from the evolution of society. It’s about education around tech use.”

11 The centrist Macron made banning phones in schools part of his election manifesto not long after the New York City mayor, Bill de Blasio, did the opposite, overturning a ban on phones in state schools in 2015, saying parents wanted to keep in touch with their children.

12 The French education minister has called the ban a detox law for the 21st century, saying teenagers should have the right to disconnect. Children’s phones were already banned in classrooms – except for teaching purposes – but under the new law, they are banned everywhere inside the gates, including playgrounds and canteens. The French senate expanded this to allow high schools to ban phones if they choose but few, if any, are expected to do so. Many suggest 18-year-old pupils with the right to vote can make their own decision on phones.

13 Frédérique Rolet, the secretary general of the SNES-FSU teaching union, said the first week of the ban appeared to have gone smoothly but stressed the law wasn’t a monumental change: 60% of state middle schools had already decided in recent years to ban phones from playgrounds.

14 “The education minister sought to appeal to parents, saying he was aware of the problem of phone addiction,” she said. “But there are other important problems, such as growing class sizes, job cuts and the lack of teaching staff, which also need to be talked about.”

15 Schools that had previously banned phones said they had noticed more social interaction and empathy between children, and a readiness to learn at the start of lessons.

16 Jean-Noël Taché, the headteacher of a middle school with 800 pupils in a small town in rural
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Aveyron, has just introduced the phone ban. “There had been so much media talk about it that pupils and families were well prepared,” he said. “It’s as if children not using their phones at school has simply become habit.”

Previously, his pupils could use their phones at break time. “But we’d noticed that little by little, the phone use was moving from the playground into the hall, then into the corridors, the lunch queues, outside the classroom door. Pupils weren’t making calls; they were sending messages, playing on or looking at their phone – it was like it had become an extension of their hand.”

In Paris, Michèle Bayard, a modern literature and language teacher, said she hadn’t noticed pupils complaining about the ban. “This could bring a focus on new activities and interaction.”

But at the school gate, a 14-year-old girl felt more credit should be given to teenagers. “There is this idea that our generation can’t concentrate or has lost the ability to socialize. That’s not true,” she said. “When I’m with friends, showing them a picture on my phone or looking something up just adds to our conversation. It’s a shame that I can’t do that inside school anymore.”

Comprehension check

Answer these questions using information from the article.

1. In which schools has the ban on phones already come into place?
2. What did teachers notice the pupils doing instead of looking at their phones?
3. What further benefits have teachers noticed?
4. Why didn’t the ban take pupils and their parents by surprise?
5. Why should the ban not be seen as an anti-technology measure?
6. What do the pupils in the article say that they usually use their phones for?

Job titles

a. Find job titles in the article that describe these jobs.
1. the political leader of a country that does not have a king or queen
2. a teacher who is in charge of a school
3. the most important elected official in a town or city
4. an official in charge of a government department
5. an official in charge of a large organization such as a trade union

b. Who do these job titles specifically relate to in the article?
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

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5 Word focus

a. Underline 14 uses of the word ban, both as a verb and a noun, in the article.

b. Now, underline the main part of the phrase that contains the word ban. For example, for the first two occurrences, this would be ‘French phone ban’ (from the headline) and ‘Children’s phones have now been banned’ (para 2).

c. Summarize the article, using as many of the phrases from task b as you can.

6 Discussion

Discuss these questions, giving reasons for your answers.

• At what age do you think children should get their own smart phone?
• Why do you think parents buy phones for their children?
• Should phones be banned from schools?
• Should phones be banned from universities and colleges?
• Who do you think should decide when and where children use their phones?
• Where else would you like to see a restriction or ban on the use of phones?

7 Mobile phone rules

Write either a set rules governing the use of mobile phones or guidelines for mobile-phone etiquette for your school.
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KEY

2 Key words

1. jingle
2. detox
3. freaked out
4. bother
5. patchy
6. reflex
7. high-income
8. adamant
9. manifesto
10. monumental
11. sought
12. credit

4 Job titles

a.
1. president
2. headteacher
3. mayor
4. minister
5. secretary general

b.
1. Emmanuel Macron, president of France
2. Eric Lathière, headteacher at Claude Debussy middle school, Paris; Jean-Noël Taché, headteacher in a middle school in Aveyron
3. New York City mayor, Bill de Blasio
4. the French education minister
5. Frédérique Rolet, the secretary general of the SNES-FSU teaching union

3 Comprehension check

1. all state middle schools in France
2. playing cards, reading, talking
3. Pupils are more ready and willing to start lessons on time and there is more social interaction and empathy between children.
4. Children’s phones were already banned in classrooms (except for teaching purposes) and there had been so much in the media about the ban that they were well prepared.
5. Phones can still be used in the classroom to support the content of lessons. Going against digital would be like trying to hold schools back.
6. Snapchat, Instagram, watching shows on Netflix, looking at photos, listening to music, to add to their conversations with friends

5 Word focus

b. (suggested answers)
1. French phone ban
2. children’s phones have now been banned
3. the ban should not be seen as anti-technology
4. banning phones in schools
5. overturning a ban on phones
6. has called the ban a detox law
7. already banned in classrooms
8. are banned everywhere inside the gates
9. allow high schools to ban phones
10. first week of the ban
11. ban phones from playgrounds
12. schools that had previously banned phones
13. just introduced the phone ban
14. complaining about the ban