



Investigating EFL High School Students' Smartphone Usage for Learning Purposes and Social Activities

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Abstract

Smartphones contribute significantly to the improvement of learning quality as they provide learners with rich learning resources. However, their destructive uses also ruin the quality of learning. Therefore, this present study attempts to investigate EFL high school students' smartphone usage for learning purposes and social activities. This study applied the quantitative method. The cluster random sampling method was also employed. The samples ($n = 157$) were Cambodian EFL students in the 11th grade of Maung Russei High School. The questionnaire adapted from Ahmed (2015) was used as the research instrument. Three main results were indicated. First, in learning English, students mainly used their smartphones to listen to music in English, and use dictionaries or search for the meaning of vocabulary in order to learn it. Second, in social activities, they used their smartphones as a watch and alarm clocks, to make and receive calls, listen to music in Khmer, watch movies or videos in Khmer language, and take photos for pleasure. Third, students used their smartphones predominantly for social activities rather than academic purposes. The study suggested that English teachers should introduce positive uses of smartphones as learning resources to learners and take serious actions by not allowing them to use their smartphones during classes or making good classroom management and strict regulation concerning smartphone use in the classroom.

Keywords: Learning Purposes; ICT; Smartphones; Social Activities

Introduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has received high credit in education because of its multifaceted benefits. According to Tondeur et.al, (2007), in the field of education, ICT functions significantly in developing curricula. Furthermore, Kohnke, (2021) highlighted that ICT helps instructors in terms of professional development since it allows them to effectively accomplish their pedagogic objectives by transferring knowledge as well as skills into teaching practices. Additionally, Bindu (2016) claimed that ICT contributes positively to educational development by virtue of providing flexibility, accessibility, availability, and practicality. In this regard, learners and educators are provided with motivation and rich educational resources that lead to the improvement of the teaching and learning process. To sum up, ICT plays many crucial roles in education.

Having been facilitated by technological support, among many technological devices, smartphones contribute actively to the improvement of EFL or ESL education as they have a lot of



functions and benefits. Many studies pointed out the functions of mobile phones, especially smartphones, in learning vocabulary (e.g. Stockwell, 2010; Tabatabaei & Goojani, 2012; Wu, 2014; Wu, 2015). Another study by Kim & Yoon (2014) indicated that smartphone applications are proven to be vital resources to improve learners' English writing outcomes. Additionally, Wang & Smith (2013) revealed that learners gained positive experiences in English reading and grammar improvement facilitated by smartphones. Based on Reinders & Cho (2010), smartphones can provide students with opportunities to practice listening skills outside the classroom. Another example was shown by Shah et al., (2016) that smartphones encourage IELTS learners to enhance listening. Also, Hossain (2018) argued that many applications (Apps) can be installed and used on smartphones to learn English because students can improve four macro skills, learn vocabulary or pronunciation, practice tests, learn tips, and access lectures. Therefore, they can obtain both technological and linguistic knowledge with fun at the same time. In other words, they can learn anything at anytime and anywhere. In short, smartphones are useful for instructors and learners since this kind of gadget can offer people conveniences and rich resources.

Although smartphones are useful for academic purposes, their negative effects can ruin learning quality. According to Gowthami, & Kumar (2016), smartphones provide learners with great negative impacts such as accessing websites, sending text messages, playing games on the internet, watching television, cheating during exams, taking photos or videos, and bullying other people. Similarly, two studies by Abu-Shanab and Samaha & Hawi (as cited in Singh, & Samah, 2018) showed that smartphone addiction causes health problems, tension, low life fulfillment, and low learning achievement as students cannot concentrate on doing school tasks. Moreover, Alfawareh & Jusoh (2014) reported that learners use smartphones to call, take photos, and surf the internet rather than for academic purposes. Based on Dhiman (2021), only a small proportion of smartphone use is associated with access to online learning resources. Thus, the misuse of smartphones distracts the learning process and students' well-being.

Previous studies have focused on smartphones' positive impacts on students' learning (e.g. Reinders & Cho, 2010; Wu, 2014; Hossain, 2018). Other studies have emphasized on negative impact of smartphones on learners' academic objectives (e.g. Gowthami & Kumar, 2016; Singh & Samah, 2018). However, it lacks of a comparative study on both smartphones for academic objectives and social activities at the high school level. Therefore, this study attempts to look for smartphone involvement in English learning activities and daily activities and to compare both types of activities to see the dominant proportion. These informative findings assist EFL teachers and learners in appreciating the multifaceted merits of smartphones in education.

To respond to the study objectives, there questions are listed as follows:



1. What learning activities do EFL high school students frequently use their smartphones to improve?
2. What social activities in daily life do students frequently use their smartphones to do?
3. Which one is the predominant proportion between smartphone usage in learning purposes, and in social activities?

Method

The researcher employed the quantitative research method and intended to select 4 classes out of 12 as the samples. The purpose of the sampling method is to provide the same type of statistical information selected from the same unit. Therefore, the cluster random sampling method was applied. Sharma (2017) stated that the cluster random sampling method is an inexpensive and practical method for collecting data from large populations with reduced variability. Given the importance of the method, 157 respondents selected from 4 classes among 12, who are the 11th-grade students of Maung Russei High School were selected as samples. The questionnaire adapted from Ahmed (2015) was utilized as the research instrument. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section consists of 16 items that are related to smartphone involvement in learning activities. The second section comprises 14 items that are relevant to smartphone use in social activities. The process of collecting data from the participants was implemented individually. The researcher was allowed by the instructors to offer the questionnaires to the students while the procedure was conducted during the class. Each participant spent approximately 15 to 20 minutes responding to all opinions which were organized in the questionnaire sheets. The researcher explained and translated the questionnaire from English to Khmer for respondents to make them fully understand. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze and interpret data using SPSS. Additionally, tables were used to illustrate the results as they were convenient for the researcher to interpret, and for readers to understand.

Findings and Discussion,

Findings

Table 1. The frequency of smartphone usage for learning purposes

Item	Statement	Scales (%)		
		Never	Sometimes	Always
1	I use my smartphone to read digital English books, newspapers magazines and other reading materials.	61.78	35.03	3.18
2	I upload learning materials to social media.	82.17	15.92	1.91
3	I download English audio and listen to it.	49.68	40.76	9.55
4	I use my smartphone to download or watch videos in English.	16.56	61.78	21.66
5	I use my smartphone to watch TV in English.	57.32	36.94	5.73
6	I use it to listen to English music.	4.46	38.85	56.69
7	I use dictionaries for word definitions and learning	5.73	43.95	50.32

	vocabulary.			
8	I use it to take notes or write out my thoughts in English in class.	81.53	15.92	2.55
9	I capture whiteboard, textbook and take photos related to class content.	27.39	45.22	27.39
10	I use it to send text messages in English.	24.20	49.68	26.11
11	I record my English speech or my friends' and share it with them for feedback.	96.18	3.82	0.00
12	I record the interaction of native speakers for listening and reflection purposes.	90.45	8.92	0.64
13	I utilize my smartphone to use e-mail in English.	78.98	16.56	4.46
14	I use my smartphone to use Facebook in English.	21.66	68.79	9.55
15	I use it for checking website and browsing internet in English	37.58	47.13	15.29
16	I receive homework and documents from my teacher through my smartphone	70.06	26.11	3.82
	Overall average (%)	50.36	34.71	14.93

According to table 1, in learning English, most students mainly used their smartphones to listen to music in English and use dictionaries or search for the meaning of vocabulary in order to learn it. The majority of them reported that they sometimes use their smartphones for using Facebook, downloading or watching videos, sending text messages, and accessing the website/surfing the internet using English. Also, they sometimes use their phones to take photos of the whiteboard, textbook, and other activities related to learning content. However, most of them showed that they never utilize their smartphones for recording their English speech or their friends' and share it with them for feedback, recording the interaction of native speakers for listening to learn from them, uploading learning materials to social media, taking notes or writing out their ideas in English in class, using e-mail in English, receiving tasks and documents from their instructors, reading digital reading materials, watching TV in English, and downloading English audio to listen to it.

Table 2: The frequency of smartphone usage for social activities

Item	Statement	Scales (%)		
		Never	Sometimes	Always
1	I use my smartphone to make and receive calls.	1.91	18.47	79.62
2	I utilize it to use e-mail in Khmer language.	76.43	17.20	6.37
3	I use it to send text messages in Khmer language.	3.82	52.87	43.31
4	I use it for checking website and browsing internet to find documents in Khmer language.	30.57	52.87	16.56
5	I use Facebook in Khmer language by using my smartphone.	10.83	53.50	35.67
6	I listen to Khmer music.	1.27	24.20	74.52
7	I use my smartphone to watch movies or videos in Khmer language.	3.82	32.48	63.69
8	I watch TV in Khmer language through my smartphone.	45.22	33.12	21.66
9	I take photos for pleasure.	4.46	36.94	58.60



10	I record my voice in Khmer language.	38.22	38.85	22.93
11	I use my smartphone as an alarm clock.	21.02	31.21	47.77
12	I use my smartphone as a watch.	4.46	15.29	80.25
13	I use my smartphone to sell and buy online products.	62.42	34.39	3.18
14	I use my smartphone as a map to find locations	67.52	29.30	3.18
	Overall average (%)	26.57	33.62	39.81

Based on the findings on smartphone usage for social activities, the number of students predominantly used their phones as a watch and alarm clock, to make or receive calls, listen to music in Khmer, watch movies or videos in Khmer language, and take photos for pleasure. The majority of students revealed that by using Khmer language, they sometimes use their smartphones for using Facebook, sending text messages, checking websites and browsing the internet to find documents, and recording their voices. However, most of them also indicated that they never use their smartphones to use E-mail in Khmer, as a map to find locations, sell and buy online products, and watch TV in Khmer.

Table 3: The comparison of the overall average proportion between smartphone usage for learning purposes and social activities.

Nº		Never	Sometimes	Always
1	The overall average proportion of smartphone usage for learning purposes	50.36 %	34.71 %	14.93 %
2	The overall average proportion of smartphone usage for social activities.	26.57 %	33.62 %	39.81 %

Through the comparison of the overall average proportion between smartphone usage for English learning objectives and social activities, the predominant distribution is revealed. The highest percentage for academic purposes is on the scale “Never” (50.36%) whereas the highest proportion for social activities is on the scale “Always” (39.81%). This contrast trend indicated that students frequently use their smartphones for social activities rather than English learning objectives.

Discussion

The first objective of this study is to explore smartphone usage for learning English. In learning English, most students mainly used their smartphones just only to use dictionaries or search for the meaning of vocabulary or phrases in order to learn them. Besides, they sometimes use the camera function for capturing pictures relevant to the class contents. A huge number of them sometimes also improve their English indirectly by way of practicing English on social media for entertainment and communication (e.g. internet surfing, Facebook, texting, and English music/videos). On the other hand, a large proportion of them never uses their phones to access online English learning resources (e.g. read, send, receive, upload, and download materials), and record voice for English learning reflection. The result of students’ preference for vocabulary improvement



through smartphones in this study is in line with the study by Stockwell (2010), Tabatabaei & Goojani, (2012), Wu (2014), and Wu (2015). These studies claimed that vocabulary can be learned better by using smartphones. In addition, the preferable learning activities by virtue of the camera function and indirect English development indirectly by way of practicing English on social media for entertainment and communication (e.g. internet surfing, Facebook, texting, and English music/videos) are compatible with the study by Hossain (2018) which argued that smartphones can offer learners both technological and linguistic knowledge or skills with fun at the same time. Furthermore, the absence of smartphone functions in accessing online English learning resources (e.g. reading, sending, receiving, uploading, and downloading materials), and recording voice for English learning reflection are in contrast to the study by Reinders & Cho (2010), Wang & Smith (2013), and Kim & Yoon (2014). These studies clarified that learning activities facilitated by smartphones can contribute to the improvement of writing, listening, reading, grammar, and positive learning experiences.

The second research objective is to investigate smartphone usage for social activities. For social activities, the majority of students most frequently use their smartphones as a watch and alarm clock, to take photos for pleasure, make/receive calls, listen to music in Khmer, and watch movies or videos in Khmer language. It can be interpreted that most activities facilitated by their smartphones are for communication and entertainment.

The third objective of this study aims to compare smartphone usage for English learning and social activities in order to find out the predominant distribution. Related to smartphone usage, it is obvious that most learners prefer learning English less than social activities. Through these important informative results, EFL educators and learners can gain more positive ways to learn and teach in the presence of smartphones; they can reduce the negative use of smartphones also. The predominance of social activities over English learning activities is in line with a study by Singh, & Samah (2018) showing that smartphone misuse causes health problems, tension, low life satisfaction, and low academic achievement as students cannot concentrate on doing school tasks.

Conclusion and Suggestion

According to the findings, learners can only use their smartphones to learn English in a narrow way while they most frequently use it for entertainment and communication, but not for learning purposes. Through this phenomenon, it can be inferred that EFL students' academic performance can be negatively affected by smartphone usage if the school won't take appropriate actions. Therefore, the school including teachers should take serious action by not allowing students to use smartphones during class or making good classroom management and strict regulation concerning smartphone usage in the classroom. Since students cannot use the full potential of smartphones in learning, teachers should also orientate them on using smartphones for academic



benefits in order to increase positive impacts and decrease negative effects. Because of time constrain, classroom observation, and teacher interviews related to students' smartphone usage in the classroom have not been conducted. To gain more insights into smartphone usage in EFL education, future studies should investigate EFL teachers' smartphone usage in teaching activities to see how much they can employ it in their teaching.

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