

Smartphone Culture: Shifting Ways of Students in Learning English at an EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This article is aimed to investigate the shifting ways of students in learning English at the English Department (ED) of State Islamic University (UIN) DatokaramaPalu, Indonesia. It is aimed to explain how smartphones have remarkably changed the ways, experiences, and attitudes of students in learning English. To gain in-depth analysis related to the issues being investigated, this research employs a case study design while considering the views of constructivism. Data collection is based on the Google form-based semi-structured interviews along with observations in the classroom. The analysis covered three main issues: factors affecting the need for students to use smartphones for learning; attitudes of students towards learning, and social impacts due to the use of smartphones for learning English. The research revealed that there were a number of ways where students used smartphones for learning English. It also revealed that few factors triggered the use of smartphones for learning English which slowly changed their attitudes and brought a number of social impacts amongst the students. The implication of the research is to inform teachers, lecturers and educational stakeholders to include new technologies in EFL curriculum and create learning atmospheres and in which students could use their smartphones for effective English learning.

Key words: Learning culture, New ways of learning English, Smartphone culture,

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I. Introduction

For the last twenty years, the use of technology or so called digital devices has remarkably transformed the ways of people learn English and other languages (Amiri and Branch, 2012; Mehran et al, 2017). This transformation of learning has brought a great deal of ways, modes, experiences, attitudes, and probably social impacts amongst language learners. Moreover, new terminologies appear alongside the use of digital devices such as smartphones in language learning (AlTameemy, 2017; Lee, 2018, 2020; Sad et al, 2020 and Soyooft et al, 2021). Today, teachers and students are becoming used to with terminologies like e-learning, online learning, blended learning, hybrid learning, Google Classroom, Google meet, zoom, Learning Management System (LMS), Learning Record Store (LRS), learning data, Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI), synchronous and asynchronous learning and many more (Learningpool, 2022). At the same time, more and more online language learning platforms have introduced different ways of learning and these are all available online both for free and paid access.

It is important to note that the Covid-19 pandemic has remarkably triggered the upsurges of the online learning modes with diverse platforms (Mehran et al, 2017; Putri et al, 2020; Al Kumaim et al, 2021). In Indonesia, for example, one of the most well-known online learning platforms is **Ruang Guru**. For many students and parents alike, this learning provider has become the first alternative of students apart from the traditional way of learning English (Nurchaerani & Nursyamsi, 2021). It has remarkably changed the views of students about the importance of smartphones which are connected to online platforms in any learning activities (Mindog, 2016; AlTameemy, 2017; Shoumi, 2019; Ruslin et al, 2022). Shoumi (2019) particularly expounded that the use of multimedia (on or offline) in teaching would enhance teachers' techniques and strategies in teaching. She also explained that the use of multimedia like **Ruang Guru** would help students learn things effectively. Likewise, the development of 'thumb' technology (Warnick, 2001; Twiss, 2009; Al Shehri, 2011; Pilar et al, 2013 and Ilic, 2014) such as smartphones (Mindog, 2016; Klimova, 2018; Kirovska-Simjanoska, 2018; Rao, 2018, 2019; Kumar, 2019; Sad et al, 2020; and Ta'amneh, 2021) has shifted human interest in traditional ways of learning such as reading books in the library and making some notes as we had in the

past. Witanto (2018) in particular explained that the use of this *thumb* technology has diminished the role of the printed texts available in schools today (Ruslin, 2022: 738).

Despite the existing evidences, little is known about how smartphones, in which time, what applications, and how helpfullare exactly used by students to learn English. This is in particular at the case of the English Department (ED) students of the State Islamic University DatokaramaPalu (UIN DatokaramaPalu). Moreover, it is little known about how students transform their ways, experiences, and attitudes inlearning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) from the traditional mode tothe most advanced and sophisticated ones. In addition, social impacts due to the use ofsmartphones in EFL classroom are scarcely identified.

Based on the evidences, this article is aimed to investigate the shifting ways of the English Department (ED) students in learning English. In particular, it is aimed to explain how the use of smartphones has remarkably changed the ways, experiences, and attitudes of students in learning English as their major. To gain in-depth inquiry of the issues being investigated, this research used a case study design while implementing Google form-based semi-structured interviews along with observations in the classroom. The analysis covered three main issues: the factors affecting the need for students to use smartphones for learning; the attitudes of students towards learning, and the social impacts due to the use of smartphones for learning English.

II. Literature Review

The views of constructivists on learning

The views of constructivists on learning have been strongly influenced by the work of Jean Piaget and Vygotsky (Ruslin, 2017: 26). The work of Piaget brought forward two major principles that were claimed to have guided intellectual growth and biological development of children: *adaptation* and *organisation* (Bhattacharya and Han, 2001: 5-6). Piaget describes that learning is a process of adaptation and organisation. He theorised that cognitive stage of a child (more or less of adult in general) develops through four factors: *biological maturation*, *experience with physical environment*, *experience with social environment*; and *equilibrium between individual cognitive structure and his or her environment* (Bhattacharya and Han, 2001cited in Ruslin, 2017: 27).The central principle of Piaget's learning theory is the role of pre-existing knowledge of the individual which he termed '*schemata*' (Russ-Eft, 2014).

Meanwhile, Vygotsky, a Russian philosopher (1979) was concerned with social development ofmind, while adopting a more practical or materialistic approach inspired by Marxism. Vygotsky explained that for someone to learn effectively,two fundamental ways of developing higher mental functions: engagement in social speech and the use of signs in a talk are needed. However, Vygotskyreminds us that thesocial context of learning is very important for an effective learning to happen (Bredo,1997 and Russ-Eft, 2013: 123). The engagement in social speech in the time of Vygotsky is very much similar to the students' frequent engagements in the online applications available in their smartphones. Such engagements could also be observed in students' social network services (SNS) available in their connected gadgets.

Although Piaget and Vygotsky differed in terms of characterizing triggering points of learning, they are both critical to the role of education (in particular formal education) in the learning development of individuals. Piaget in particular criticized a common practice of teacher-led instruction in schools and emphasized the importance of independent efforts (*discovery*) of students in their learning (Crain, 2010; 2015). Meanwhile, Vygotskyrecognizedthe importance formal education in individuals' learning development. Yet, Vygotsky was critical that education has to provide learning experience to students that are close to their zone of proximal development (ZPD) or zone where his or her knowledge level is closer materials being taught by lecturers.

In many cases, teachers, instructors and probably lecturers in higher education think that students are kinds of empty buckets that should be filled with knowledge and skills. Constructivists, however, view that learning occurs through fitting new understanding and knowledge into and with, extending or supplanting, old understanding and knowledge (Fry et al, 2008: 10). In constructivist's perspective, as Savery and Duffy (1995) observed,understanding is a function of four important aspects of learning: the content, the context, and the activity of the learner, and the goal of the learner (p. 32). This means that one cannot talk about what he/she learns without knowing how he/she learns and therefore students' understanding is a key to their learning (Ruslin, 2017).

As this research aims to investigate how the students of ED at the UIN DatokaramaPalu experienced learning English via smartphoneswhile considering social contexts of students' learning (for example, help and support of lecturers), the constructivists' view provides two important aspects of learning which the research mainly concerns.First, students are not considered as empty buckets that are just to be filled with knowledge and skills. Rather, students who attend university and learn in campus come with their prior knowledge (Piaget and Cook, 1952) and understanding of things related to their field (Vygotsky, 1979), no matter rudimentary or wrong (Fry et al, 2008). This view suggests that students are basically ready to contribute to their learning activities. Moreover, constructivists view that the role of lecturers is important but is limited to manage and facilitate the learning environment and resources to the best advantage of students/learners and to ensure that

students are in control of their learning (Hartl, 2009). In the context of the current research, the role of schemata theorized by Piaget has a close relationship with how students engage in different applications available for learning English in their smartphones. It is the experience of students in engaging in different learning providers via smartphones that determines the effectiveness of these digital devices for their EFL learning. Similarly, the ZPD of Vygotsky in which social contexts of learning are made important implies the urgent needs of others (lecturers/teachers/instructors) apart from smartphones alone to support students' EFL learning. The existence of fellow students/peer tutors and helpful lecturers/teachers who clearly identify the level of their students would enable students learn faster.

The use of smartphones in learning EFL

Today, the use of smartphones in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been prevalent across the globe. Students of EFL are no longer solely dependent on teachers or lecturers. This circumstance has become more obvious due to the strike of pandemic Covid-19 at the end of 2019 which trigger the needs for online and hybrid learning modes. Consequently, there is only a little choice left for teachers or lecturers to conduct their learning and teaching process. In one hand, teachers and lecturers alike find it difficult to adapt themselves with this situation. On the other hand, this uncertain situation becomes a blessing in disguise for both students and teachers/lecturers. This unprecedented circumstance forces students and teacher/lecturers to quickly adapt with the demands of the current learning and teaching modes. The other blessings of the situation are the emergent of a great deal of language learning applications from which students could learn EFL faster than before.

Currently, various researches in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in relation to the use of smartphones for learning have come to an existence. These researches cover various perspectives about how smartphones have transformed the ways and approaches of students in learning EFL. Mindog (2016), for example, discussed the use of smartphones apps by four Japanese university students for learning EFL. She made mention that the smartphones applications have enabled the students to learn faster as they learn integrated English skills rather than discrete ones. Moreover, the study of Mindog (2016) revealed that students preferred to get connected with their fellow students through Social Network Services (SNS) for learning English.

In the case of Turkey, fresh graduate students attending the English preparation program were identified to have used their smartphones frequently (Sad et al, 2020). Sad et al (2020) investigated Turkish freshmen students entering university from which they identified the advantages of the use of smartphones in an EFL classroom. The study also revealed that students more frequently used their smartphones to engage in listening and speaking than reading and writing activities. Moreover, the study further showed that female students more frequently used their smartphones in comparison to male students (Sad et al, 2020). Apart from the advantages of smartphones for learning English, Sad et al (2020) expounded those students who frequently engaged in the online activities were prone to adversative in comparison to those who were not. In contrast, the study of Ta'amneh (2021) in the case of first semester students at a Saudi Arabian university showed that the students found no problems regarding the use of smartphones in learning English skills. Rather, this study revealed that students were very much helped by their smartphones as they would easily find solutions to their learning problems during the class session. In line with Ta' amneh (2021), Klimova (2018) found out that the use of smartphones brought positive effect on students' EFL learning. In particular, the study of Klimova (2018) revealed that students' vocabulary proficiency improved along with their motivation to learn English as a foreign language. Klimova (2018) in regards to the use of smartphones and its connected application for an EFL learning; Rao (2018; 2019) concerning the use of mobile phones in EFL classroom; Chakir (2018) about the integration of mobile phones in EFL contexts; and many more are just some examples of how students today are very mobile and being attached so much to their smartphones.

III. Research Method

This research used qualitative approach with a case study design while adopting constructivists' view. The use of the qualitative approach is based on the premise that this study was focused on a phenomenon (the experience of English Study Program students using smartphones for learning English) where the researchers have little control over the events (Yin, 1994 cited in Ruslin, 2017: 113). Moreover, qualitative approach as noted by Creswell (2005) and Creswell et al (2007), is used when the research is aimed to investigate not only individual experiences but also their social behaviors regarding the use of smartphones for learning English. In addition, since the experiences of students can only be obtained through a natural setting (school or classroom), the use of qualitative approach becomes paramount (Ruslin, 2019).

The research used two different types of data collection techniques: observations and interviews. The use of these techniques was based on the premise that it would contribute to the rigorousness of the research findings (Creswell, 2005; 2007). Observation would confirm or disconfirm the results of the interviews. Meanwhile, the results of the interviews would provide in-depth information in regards to subject matters being

investigated. The voices of the lecturers would reinforce the findings of the research especially in relation to how the ED students made use their smartphones for learning English.

The subjects of the research were ten selected students of ED at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training at UIN DatokaramaPalu. These students were purposefully selected for the online interviews implementing *Google forms* because they were categorized as active English learners. However, only four students returned the *Google forms* answered. To reinforce the data derived from the ED students, the voices of few English lecturers were strongly considered. Meanwhile, the data analysis was developed on the basis of the data resources: observations and interviews. The process of the data analysis involved systematic searching and compiling data obtained from the resources mentioned. In this stage, organizing data into categories, describing into units, conducting sites, compiling in, and sorting them out are very important (Creswell, 2005 and Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2018). These processes were carefully taken into account in order for the researchers to better recognize data and information needed to answer the research questions. Hence, the conclusions could be better made as the data were easily identified. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that the activities in qualitative data analysis were carried out interactively and continuously until they were finished and saturated. In addition, triangulation is needed to ensure that the uses multiple methods in a research could contribute to the robustness of the findings. In other words, triangulation can be interpreted as a part data analysis that combines several data collection techniques and existing data sources in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1995).

IV. Findings And Discussion

This article is aimed to investigate the shifting ways of students in learning English at the English Department (ED) of State Islamic University (UIN) DatokaramaPalu, Indonesia. It is aimed to explain how smartphones have remarkably changed the ways, experiences, and attitudes of students in learning English. To gain in-depth inquiry about the issues being investigated, this research used a case study design while applying *Google form*-based semi-structured interviews along with observations of the researchers in the classroom. The analysis covered three main issues: the factors affecting the need for students to use smartphones for their EFL learning; their attitudes towards EFL learning, and the social impacts due to the frequent use of smartphones for EFL learning.

Prior to the beginning of this unfunded case research, the ongoing observations of both researchers were conducted throughout their engagements with the ED students. Both researchers have had the experiences of chairing the English Department in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, UIN DatokaramaPalu. These experiences had brought significant contributions to the closest engagements with the ED students of all batches which in turn helped the researchers observe their EFL learning activities both in and out the classrooms. The observations of the researchers revealed that the majority of the ED students especially those selected for the research were actively engaged in learning with their smartphones. It is a fact that the students were so much dependent on their smartphones to the point that they were no longer interested in coming to the library for reading. Even if they come to the library, they would still use their smartphones searching the apps that they might need for their learning activities.

The interviews used *Google forms* and they were distributed via *Whatsapp* group. Prior to their participations, the students were requested to send their consents to participate in the interviews and they were free to decline their participations even after they have submitted their answers via online. Besides, the participants were required to confirm whether their participations in this research were truly based on their free wills. Therefore, only four out of ten students filled in the forms and sent them back to the researchers. The *Google forms* were designed to cover the issues being investigated. These forms contain ten questions related to the factors affecting the needs for using smartphones in learning English, their attitudes; and the social impacts emerged during their engagements with their smartphones. The questions provided were developed into English to better portray how the ED students responded the questions. This was also aimed to examine whether the meaning of the questions was effectively understood by the students or the other way round. Hence, these types of questions would be well-prepared for the future researches in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Despite the questions were deemed to have represented the issues being investigated, there were many needed probing questions to clarify, confirm, or disconfirm the opinions and the arguments of the students if the interviews were conducted in a face-to-face mode. In addition, these questions had not yet covered which applications, what topics, which language skills, which language components, for further responses needed. The results of the *Google form* interviews were presented in the following ways:

The Results of Google Form Interviews

Questions	Interviewees			
	S1 (NS)	S2 (IT)	S3 (AR)	S4 (MTR)
1. What does it mean learning English to you?	Learning English declares what people do when they want to use the English language.	Learning English is as an international language and using it to communicate.	Learning English is fun and meaningful because by learning English I can easily communicate with someone who is in a different country.	Learning English is one of the languages used in almost all countries. English is used for interaction in daily activities and other things.
2. In your opinion, is it easy to learn English or is it difficult?	Learning English is easy as long we can enjoy learning it.	Learning English is easy or not depend on what students learn.	Learning English is difficult.	Learning English is easy.
3. What is the best way for you to learn English?	Study in short regular periods, study in place where you feel happy and comfortable, study in pairs or groups make an English only rule, and go online and find the lyrics to your favorite English songs and sing along them (use a YouTube) or use learning English applications like Learning English and Duolingo.	Repeat vocabulary bank and also practice intensively with my fellow students.	Through habitation in daily activities.	Having talked with strangers using English conversation.
4. Do you often use your smartphone for learning English?	Not really. Because sometimes I study in pairs or in groups, make English only rules.	I often use smartphone in learning English.	I often use smartphone in learning English.	I often use smartphone in learning English.
5. How often do you use your smartphone for learning English?	In short and regular periods.	Almost every day.	It just search difficult English structure/grammar, and practice with my fellow students.	Always using smartphone in learning.
6. What things do you usually use your smartphone for learning English?	Go online and find the lyrics to my favorite English songs and sing along them use a YouTube or use learning English applications like Learning English and Duolingo.	Searching difficult English structure/grammar.	Listening to music and watching English videos.	Sometimes using chatting applications. Beside learn can meet also a new friend.
7. How does your smartphone change your ways of learning English?	I am obsessed with doing everything quickly, learning English included. From my experience as little as one hour a day of self-study can boost my progress immensely	It is effective but should be practice with my fellow students or my teacher, tutor or lecture).	Getting access in supporting applications.	It can make things easier in learning English.
8. How does your smartphone change your attitude of learning English?	Having a smartphone bringsimpairs and reduces attentions and subsequent memory during lectures. Notably being distracted by text messages further reduces effective learning.	It is a big impact to change my attitude.	Learning through smartphone reduces the pressure in the learning process.	Learning through smartphone has good impact to change attitude.
9. What are the social impacts of the use of smartphone for learning English?	First, It decreases the quality of what you talk about, because you talk about things where you would not mind being interrupted, which make sense. Secondly it decreases the empathic connection that people feel toward each other.	The impacts are lack of interaction between each other because learner focusing on social media or mobile phone.	It is very easy for us in getting learning materials.	It has good impacts in learning English.
10. How do you handle the social impacts for your better learning?	By reading to embrace learning not only in my impact assessment.	Reducing the use of smartphone in maintaining friendship with social.	Determining what applications or media need to learn.	Just enjoy it.

The first issue investigated was about the ways of the ED students engaged in learning English via their smartphones. The results of the research showed that the majority of the ED students made use of their smartphones for learning English. The result of the research showed that the students were the frequent users of smartphones although there were cases where they did not really need to engage in learning via their smartphones. The situation was very much the same as in the case of four Japanese students described by Mindog (2016), Sad et al (2020) in the case of Turkish freshmen students in English language preparation entering the university, Ta'amneh (2021) in the case of freshmen in a Saudi university, or Klimova (2018) in the context of prevalent use of smartphones in EFL learning activities across the globe. The result suggests that the higher education stakeholders need to include new technologies in the English Language Teaching curriculum if the better EFL learning is aimed to achieve. The inclusion of new technologies in EFL learning design is a sign of a strong attachment to constructivism of Piaget and Vygotsky. This is true as these two prominent theorists glorified the environment (social)/situation that support students to learn effectively.

Another issue that was equally important to examine in this research was the attitudes of the ED students towards learning English via smartphones. The result of the research showed that there was a case where the student found their smartphones distracted his/her learning instead of contributing to an effective and efficient learning. Here is the excerpt of the interview presented as follows:

“Having a smartphone brings impairs and reduces attentions and subsequent memory during lectures. Notably being distracted by text messages further reduces effective learning” (Interview: S1/NS, 22 July 2022)

The result of the interview suggests that there are times where students need to get disconnected with their smartphones. This situation confirmed the argument of Sad et al (2020) where they found out students who frequently engaged in the online activities were prone to adversative in comparison to those who were not. This means that the use of smartphones during the classroom session should be limited to the urgent needs for learning or it should be adjusted with the needs for the subject matter being discussed. Otherwise, the unnecessary use of smartphones during the English class session would become hostile to students as in the case of Turkish freshmen students. Despite the case, three out four students who claimed to have a positive impact of smartphones in learning English became a strong indicator regarding the urgent needs for smartphones in learning English. In addition, the social impacts due to the frequent use of smartphones in learning English amongst the ED students were not fully revealed. This was due to the absence of probing questions for further clarifications in the online interviews. However, the responses provided in the above table showed that there were differences in the ways the ED students responded the questions. Here are the two excerpts of the interviews presented as follows:

“First, it decreases the quality of what you talk about, because you talk about things where you would not mind being interrupted, which make sense. Secondly it decreases the empathic connection that people feel toward each other”. (Interview: S1/NS, 22 July 2022)

“It is very easy for us in getting learning materials” (Interview: S3/AR, 20 July 2022)

The interviews revealed that the social impacts the students experienced might be different. The ways they perceived their experiences using smartphones for learning English depended so much on how these digital devices had helped them learn English. However, this could also have a strong relationship with students' learning styles and personality which in this research was failed to explore due to the mode of interviews selected and time constraints.

V. Conclusion

The research revealed that there were a number of ways where students used smartphones for learning English. The ways the ED students perceived their learning needs, their learning styles, and personality become a few factors predominantly affecting their engagements in learning English via smartphones. This suggests that the more students understand and be aware of their English learning goals the more probably they use their smartphones for learning English effectively. It also revealed that the use of smartphones for learning English slowly changed their attitudes towards the use of the devices and its necessities for learning. This situation has brought a number of social impacts amongst the students which sometimes they were not aware of. The implication of the research is to inform teachers, lecturers and educational stakeholders to include new technologies in EFL curriculum and create learning atmospheres in which students could use their smartphones for effective English learning.

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