The Role of Smartphones in Learning English:
A Study of Learners' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Researchers and practitioners' interest has shifted from Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) due to the rapid development in the field of digital literacy. Increased availability of educational application (Apps) and internet connectivity on Smartphones gave birth to borderless and flipped learning. Smartphones provide makes learning possible anywhere, anytime for the digital natives of today. The current study investigates students' perspective regarding the role of Smartphones in English language learning. This study was descriptive in nature and a mixed method approach is used for data collection. Data were collected through self-reported questionnaires for students. The questionnaires were distributed to a sample consisting of 480 students of BS and MA English final year from 6 Universities in Punjab, Pakistan. Sample was selected through convenient cluster sampling technique. Data were analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22.0) by applying frequency, percentage, mean score, standard deviation, independent sample t-test and One Way ANOVA. The results of the study indicated the potential of MALL as a promising approach to learning English. Students were found willing and motivated to adapt their Smartphones for learning English. On the basis of findings researcher concluded that Smartphone plays a positive role in helping students learn English. Majority of the students showed a positive attitude towards the role of Smartphone in English language learning. This study is significant for ESL learners as it offers innovative way of teaching but a sound pedagogical infrastructure and training is needed. It was recommended that must be engaged as an effective learning tool in ESL classrooms for learning English. Further, experimental research can be done to analyze the effectiveness of smartphone for learning English.

Keywords: Smartphone for Learning, Text messaging, Mobile learning, Digital literacy, 21st century learning.

Introduction

Language enables us to interact with people. The importance of English language cannot be ignored, due to its role in social, political economic and environmental development. English language functions as a vehicle of interaction and an instrument of communication. (Muhammad, Sani Ya'u, Aliya, Hassan 2018) English is lingua franca for most part of the world. The need to communicate effectively in the modern world is inarguable and in this context the demand of learning English as an international language among the non-native speakers of English is growing daily (Richards, 2006 as quoted in Rahman, Singh, & Pandian, 2018). Britishers and Amercans sponsor English language teaching and programs for promoting English language learning (Marsh & Lange, 2000; Shamim, 2011). Many English language programs are currently running in Pakistan too.

Use of mobile technology started in 21st century and it gave birth to Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) which refers to learning languages via mobile devices/phones. Mobile Learning makes learning more private and individual matter as well as it makes learning possible in formal and informal situations. Students are found using Smartphone for learning translation and retranslation, reading online books, and practicing their communication skills via smartphones (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). As smartphone offers private learning opportunities in the same way it offers collaborative learning opportunities too. Students are now more able to engage in online discussions on social media like facebook, discussion forums and they are able to practice and learnt better pronunciation through English language learning Youtube channels. These social aspects help promote collaborative learning among ESL learners (Baruah, 2012).

Pakistani learners learn English as a foreign language due to which they lack proficiency as well as teaching time is also not sufficient to practice English consequently, it becomes difficult for them to learn English (Marsh & Lange, 2000; Swarts, 2000). Due to the use of technology being common these days researchers and teachers are using it for language teaching/learning effectively. Using mobile gargets like smartphones for learning languages is now very common in students to so to investigate whether smartphone really helps students in learning English or not, this study is conducted. Students of today are technology addicted and use several learning Apps on their smartphones these days (Shamim, 2017). English language learning Apps available on smartphone connected with internet has made learning easy for students so researchers are also taking interest in knowing the potential of smartphone for learning English (Chaudron, 2015).

Smartphones are now not only used for the basic purpose of communication but also as an effective learning tool as they have all the features of computers inbuilt in them. This study explores students' perspective about learning English via Smartphone at university level as perception reflect people's attitude and acceptability towards something and it effects their decisions too. Bogardus (1931) said attitude shows one's favorable or non-favorable attitude towards something. So it is necessary to investigate students' perspective about learning through Smartphone.

In 21st century teaching practices are revolutionized as classes are more students centered instead of being teacher centered. Teachers are now only the facilitators and learners have become more independent and autonomous. Studies are already conducted to investigate about smartphone features for promoting learning teaching in the classroom, SMS are used by teachers to control classes and Stockwell

(2007) also conducted a study about how text messages help teachers in teaching. Conole, de Laat, Dillon, and Darby (2008); Ros i Sole, Calic, and Neijmann (2010); Song and Fox (2008) explored the use of Smartphones as a learning instrument. Smartphones provide access to advanced technology so to take advantage of it we need to explore how learners use Smartphone and how it helps them in learning. This aspect of mobile learning needs to be investigated.

Purpose of the Study

With the passage of time learning teaching practices are being revolutionized as now in the current century learning has become a social activity and mobile. This study explores students' perspective about how Smartphones are playing an important part in learning English. It also investigates how learners are using smartphones for developing proficiency in English, their interest in useing learning apps, their learning activities and patterns. Kukulska-Hulme (2010) argued that learners can be engaged in learning activities and they can be guided in a better way after exploring their current practices of learning English via Smartphones.

This study is significant as its results would contribute to m-learning research, which is the latest field of investigation and inquiry in this era and studies are required to be conducted in this field. Research conducted about it in Pakistan is very rare so current study would work as a basis for future researchers. This study is innovative in the sense that it analyzes the role of Smartphones in learning English in Pakistan. This study would be helpful for ELT students, teachers, researchers and practitioners to get clear picture of the situation that how smartphone helps in learning English. Students will get advantage of this study by learning how others are using smartphones for learning English inside classroom as well as outside and would get to know and explore new learning Apps on their smartphone. This study will also increase acceptance among students and teachers about learning via smartphones and it will result in effective teaching and learning.

Smartphones are universal so researchers are now incorporating them into their research project to investigate its potential for helping in learning (Barseghian, 2012b; Keegan, 2002; Pollara, 2011; Traxler, 2009; Weier, 1991). Keegan (2002) called m-learning as harbinger of future learning. Researchers also compared m-learning with conversation and activity based learning (Sharples, Taylor, & Vavoula, 2005b; Uden, 2007; Zurita & Nussbaum, 2007). Teachers need a proper pedagogical framework to utilize smartphone for learning in classes in a better way (Kulowiec, 2011).

Literature Review

It is crucial to investigate students' perspective because they are an important part of learning or teaching process and their perspective would indicate acceptance and preparedness for using smartphones as learning tool. Researchers stated that mobile learning is very effective but in some areas educationists still need to be convinced regarding its potential as an effective learning teaching tool and cross-cultural view of it may convince them to use it in their settings too.

Dashtestani (2013) conducted a study on 73 EFL teachers and 126 students to explore their perspective about using online dictionary. Positive results were found regarding learning English

vocabulary via online dictionaries as they are available for students in their smartphones without time or place restrictions. Researchers reported that there are standard or authentic English dictionaries available online as well as substandard and unauthentic too so the user needs to be careful while installing a dictionary on his smartphone.

Johnson (2014) conducted a study on students of 9-12 grade and teachers in Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College to investigate their perspective about how using social media on mobile devices can enhance learners' engagement in learning. Findings of that study indicated that teachers were highly in favour of using social media via mobile devices for learners' engagement in learning in their classes. It was found that using mobile devices for learning increase students' interest in learning and they are found more motivated.

Kanchana and Saha (2015) investigated how integration of Smartphones in learning facilitates learners in learning English as a foreign language in India. They concluded that integrating mobile phones in teaching learning process makes teaching more effective so it is helpful for teachers as well as students. Due to internet connectivity and learning apps in phones EFL teachers need to re-design their teaching styles and strategies to get benefit of technology in classroom. It helps learners to work independently as autonomous learners and teachers are only the facilitators to help them when they need.

Nalliveettil and Alenazi (2016) explored students' views about using mobile phone for learning English at Aljouf University in Saudi Arabia. Survey method was used for data collection from a sample of 52 undergraduate students majoring in English and results were found positive, students were found supportive towards learning via their hand help mobile phones.

Al-Tameemy (2017) explored learners' attitude towards using mobile phones for learning purposes. Students showed positive attitude, they liked learning via mobile phones and were found motivated. Khalid (2018) explored the use of mobile phones for improving students' writing skills. He used a questionnaire for data collection from Intermediate level students studying in Pakistan. Again positive results were found as majority of the students were found in favour of improving their writing skills via their mobile devices. It was concluded that learning via Mobile-phones really helps students in improving their writing skills in English as a second/foreign language and integrating mobile learning in learning English was strongly recommended by the researcher.

Ishaq (2018) explored the use of mobile dictionaries for learning English as a second language. Survey method was used for data collection from the sample size of 100 BS English students studying at University of Gujrat, Pakistan. Positive findings were reported because students were in favour of using electronic dictionary for improving their vocabulary by learning new linguistic items on daily basis via their mobile phone dictionary.

Research Questions

Research question were:
1. How Smartphone helps students in learning English?
2. What are students' perspectives about the role of Smartphones in learning English?
3. What attitude learners show regarding learning English via Smartphones?

4. Is there any similarity or difference among their perception about the role of Smartphones in learning English?

Hypothesis

H1: Smartphones play an important role in learning English.

Research Methodology

This is a descriptive study and a comprehensive self-reported questionnaire was used to collect data.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

480 students studying in final year of BS and Masters in English were selected from 6 universities in Pakistan through convenient cluster sampling method.

Detail is given in the following Table 1.

Table 1: *Sample Detail*

Demographic variables		Frequency	Percentage
Class			
	BS	176	46.0
	MA	207	54.0
Gender			
	Male	138	36.0
	Female	245	64.0
Locality			
	Rural	104	27.2
	Urban	279	72.8

Research Instrument

Data were collected through a Questionnaire which was designed after reviewing already designed and tested questionnaires after changing them according to this setting and the nature of current study. Then it was checked by professors and then pilot tested. was divided in major factors through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for the sake of analysis namely SMS and email, pronunciation and online materials, vocabulary, grammar and translation, Oral/written skills, collaborative learning, independent learning, helpful learning tool, training and use. This questionnaire had 3 main sections.

1. Section 1 was about participants' class, gender and residence.
2. Section 2 included 77 questions and responses were to be measured on 5 point likert scale strongly agree to strongly disagree.
3. Section 3 included 3 open ended questions to get a clear view of the situation.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Researcher distributed 480 questionnaires personally and received 383 back. Mean score, frequency, standard deviation were measured through One Way ANOVA, independent as well as paired sample t-test.

Results

Each reading skill was analyzed individually. Moreover, comparison between male and female students was also made in order to measure their proficiency in reading comprehension. The results are presented in tabular forms as follows.

Table 2: Mean of students' response

	No. of students	Mean	SD
Students' response regarding the role of Smartphone in learning English as a whole	383	3.99	0.874

Table 2 indicates students' perspective regarding the role of smartphone in learning English and it is found very high as mean was 3.99, and standard deviation 0.874. It shows participants' positive response.

Table 3: BS vs. MA Level Students

Factors	t-value	p-value	Mean
Attitude for learning via Smartphone	.573	.567	BS = 54.43, MA = 54.04
SMS and email	1.153	.250	BS = 24.38, MA = 23.99
Pronunciation and online materials	-.614	.540	BS = 40.16, MA = 40.45
Vocabulary, Grammar and Translation	-1.403	.161	BS = 28.84, MA = 29.34
Oral and written Skills	-.502	.616	BS = 39.88, MA = 40.12
Collaborative Learning	-.395	.693	BS = 43.41, MA = 43.63
Independent Learning	.656	.512	BS = 27.28, MA = 27.01
As helpful learning tool	-.828	.408	BS = 32.43, MA = 32.77
Training and Use	-.262	.794	BS = 16.02, MA = 16.09

Table 3 show a comparison of BS and MA level students and non-significant differences were seen about 9 major factors written in above table.

Table 4: Males' vs. females' preferences

Factors	t-value	p-value	Mean
Attitude for learning via Smartphone	-.163	.870	M = 54.14, F = 54.26
SMS and email	-1.791	.074	M = 23.77, F = 24.40
Pronunciation and online materials	-1.364	.173	M = 39.88, F = 40.56

	t-value	p-value	Mean
Vocabulary, Grammar and Translation	-1.756	.080	M = 28.70, F = 29.35
Oral and written Skills	-1.520	.129	M = 39.52, F = 40.28
Collaborative Learning	-.287	.775	M = 43.43, F = 43.59
Independent Learning	-.590	.556	M = 26.98, F = 27.22
As helpful learning tool	-.748	.455	M = 32.41, F = 32.73
Training and Use	-1.604	.110	M = 15.80, F = 16.20

Table 4 indicates that non-significant difference was found in male and females' perspectives 9 factors of questionnaire as reported in above table No. 4.

Table 5: Rural vs. urban students Comparison

Factors	t-value	p-value	Mean
Attitude for learning via Smartphone	2.074	.039	R = 55.38, U = 53.79
SMS and email	.012	.990	R = 24.17, U = 24.17
Pronunciation and online materials	.266	.790	R = 40.42, U = 40.28
Vocabulary, Grammar and Translation	.471	.638	R = 29.25, U = 29.06
Oral and written Skills	-.062	.950	R = 39.98, U = 40.01
Collaborative Learning	.354	.723	R = 43.69, U = 43.47
Independent Learning	-.941	.347	R = 26.83, U = 27.25
As helpful learning tool	1.529	.127	R = 33.13, U = 32.42
Training and Use	-.575	.565	R = 15.94, U = 16.10

Table 5 shows results of t-test about participants' residence. Rural and urban students' opinions were compared and non-significant differences were found in their opinions.

Discussion

Findings show that Smartphone helps students' in learning English and students' had a positive attitude regarding the use of Smartphone for learning purposes. Smartphones due to its size and internet connectivity makes learning easy for students. Students use online learning resources according to their convenience. It also promotes collaboration in learning tasks. Students as independent learners learn English with fun without limitations of time and place by using these online learning materials as their smartphones learning Apps as well as YouTube channels for learning English. Students agreed that their vocabulary is enhanced by using online dictionaries translators. They practice communication skills online as it provides them opportunities to communicate in English on social media to online community of professors, lectures, other students and they also participate in massive open online courses (MOOC). All this helps them improve their accent and pronunciation and motivate them to communicate effectively and with confidence. So smartphone has potential to be used as learning/teaching tool. Students agreed that training workshops are needed for effective utilization of smartphones as a learning tool helpful learning Apps, Software, websites and online resources etc. Researcher discusses research question in accordance with the findings of current study in the following paragraphs.

First research Question is 'How Smartphone helps students in learning English? Findings show that majority of participants have positive attitude towards learning English via their smartphones and they consider it a good tool for practicing their 4 language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, writing and

it also enhances their vocabulary. Smartphone helps students to learn new words and meanings and their vocabulary is enhanced by using mobile dictionary as well as due to chatting in English on their Smartphone (Small, 2014). Their communication skills are polished due to continuous practice as their oral skills are polished by listening English audio/video on their Smartphone (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012) also agreed that their speaking skill is improved by communication in English language via their Smartphone. Electronic books available online help students develop good reading skills. Smartphone facilitates students to read for fun or information in English. Students practice reading and writing emails, formal or informal notes, messages, and comments in English language on their phone which helps them practice their written skills in routine life. Previous researches also concluded that smartphone helps in improving students' language skills (Plana, Escofet, Figueras, Gimeno, Appel, & Hopkins, 2013). Khalid (2018) stated that students' writing skills is improved by writing correct English in messages via their phone and students also showed positive and favorable attitude about learning via Smartphone.

Students were found willing and motivated to learn online materials via their Using smartphone for learning is better than computers as it provides quick help access materials, learn meanings of words and to translate and retranslate. Online materials are used as additional with printed one as it is useful for learning/teaching purposes. The use of Smartphone inside classroom is better than computers due to its

availability and light weight. Students agreed that they would be more excited to use their Smartphone for learning activities. Most of professors allow their students to use their smartphone for learning purposes in and outside classroom. Students freely communicate in English via their smartphone as compared to face to face communication. Kam, Kumar, Shirley, Mathur, and Canny (2009) stated that Smartphones provide access to English learning materials outside classroom as well.

Research Questions basically are to investigate students' attitude and perceptions about building English language proficiency through Smartphone. Findings show that students learn correct spelling and grammar through correction software available in their Smartphones. Authentic English online materials are according to students' level of understanding. Use of   social media like Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter on students' mobile phones promotes collaborative learning and correct use of English language in them. Students write and read posts on Facebook in English. They showed positive attitude about learning English via their smartphones.

Next research question was what are similarities or differences of students' opinion about learning English via smartphones? Students showed positive response towards learning English via their smartphones and findings show that 78% students use English learning Apps on their smartphones. They use it for getting extra information as well as playing educational games. Eighty percent students agreed that smartphone should be allowed for learning in the classroom and 65% students agreed that it diverts their attention from education to social activities. Ninety percent students agreed that teachers ask them to use smartphone to access learning materials available online like using dictionary, audios/video lesson lectures, learning websites and software. They prepare presentations, projects and assignments by downloading relevant materials on their smartphones easily. Learning via smartphone makes learning a private matter as Kress and Pachler (2007), Naismith, Lonsdale, Vavoula, and Sharples (2004), Okabe and Ito (2006), Sole (2009) also agreed and argued that it privatize students' learning when they learn materials on their phone. Students like to use it as a learning device due to its potentials its being all time available handy and portable thing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Learning English is essential for Pakistani learners now due to being an official language, language of science and social interaction. Smartphones are found helpful in learning English according to learners' own convenience and ease. They showed a positive response towards learning English via their smart devices due to internet connectivity, quick access to learning materials and apps, software and sites. Basic purpose of this study was to investigate the role of Smartphone in English language learning, and students' perspective about it. On the basis of findings of this study it is concluded that Smartphones play a vital role in helping students learn English in formal as well as in informal settings as an effective educational tool. They practice communication skills independently (Kress & Pachler, 2007; Naismith et al., 2004; Okabe & Ito, 2006); also found that learners use their smartphones for their individual learning needs. Learnres enjoy learning through their smartphone due to its portability and convenience of use as compared to computer or a book in hard form.

Looking at the findings it is recommended that training is required for better and effective utilization of smartphone for learning English and also to make learners more independent and autonomous. Kukulska-Humle's (2009) also stated that learners need to be guided to use smartphone effectively for learning purposes. So, proper training, and pedagogical framework is a must to take advantage of learning via smartphones. Future research may be conducted to inquire the actual use of smartphone for learning English and students' learning achievements via smartphones. Experimental and longitudinal studies may be conducted to see the potential of smartphone for learning English with the passage of time. Research may be conducted to investigate effectiveness of integrating smartphones in English language learning activities in classrooms. Smartphones improve students' English proficiency at BS and Master level in Pakistan and role of smartphone in enhancing students' English language learning should be investigated in other parts of the world as well to get more reliable results.

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