ROLE OF SMARTPHONES TO SUPPORT EFL STUDENTS ENGLISH LEARNING AT BORDER AREA

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Abstract

The emergence of the covid-19 outbreak has affected the educational system in Indonesia. The learning process which used to be carried out via face-to-face interaction, needs to be altered to an online way. Because of that, the role of smartphones is very important in learning activities that must be undertaken online. As a place for ongoing learning, the role of smartphones is now widely used to support online learning systems. Hence, this study aims at examining the role of smartphones in the online learning of EFL students at the University of Timor as well as figuring out problems encountered by the subject of the study. In procuring data, the researchers employed a qualitative method. The data was collected from a questionnaire with 21 responses from EFL students from Timor University. Additionally, the researchers also employed interviews and participant observation to enrich the required data. The product of the research indicated that almost all of the students, which was 20 out of 21 (90%) avowed that smartphone gave them benefits especially dealing with their portability. Moreover, the students mentioned running out of credits, dreadful internet connection as well as plenty of distraction coming from social media notifications as existing problems they met while operating smartphones for online learning. Thus, the study results also delineated that smartphones use in online learning during the pandemic was very high and pivotal.

Keywords: *Smartphone, Online Learning, EFL Students*

INTRODUCTION

The existence of smartphone to assist English online learning is rapidly increased (Luef et al., 2019; Metruk, 2021). Instead of using computer with its big screen which make it is difficult to carry everywhere, smartphone provides a better option. Equipped with small screen with rich usefulness have made smartphone a fruitful tool to make learning process runs handily.

In addition, due to its portability, smartphone becomes an appropriate device to back up the learning process included English. The students can fully maximize the portable system of smartphones to assist them learning anywhere and anytime. As put forward by Schrock (2015), portability is one feature possessed by smartphone. It facilitates the students to complete assignment given by their English teacher as well as encourages learning process which is conducted in an online way. Having a look at the easiness of smartphone to assist students in English learning, we need to figure out what actually a smartphone is.

A smartphone links services of telephone with services of computer in a freestanding device (Soukup, 2015). Since it is a freestanding device, it provides easiness to underpin the students' English learning process. Equipped with sophisticated features of smartphones nowadays, the presence of smartphone has supported online learning along modern times particularly in the millennial era.

Vis-a-vis online learning, the study of Lekawael (2017) assert that the learning of English language should emphasize on the utilization of resources of English obtained from smartphone, as a media which is familiar to the students. It is envisaged that teachers and students would be brisker and more innovative to delve into their knowledge via such media. Pedagogically, there is an exigent need for English teachers to apply smartphone-based language learning to attract the students to have critical thinking concerning English material. Then, it can encourage the students to build and upgrade the awareness of technology used to reinforce English language learning in the classroom (Lekawael, 2017).

This online learning system has been implemented since the middle of the 18th century. Started from the beginning, distance learning has always used technology for the implementation of learning commenced

from the simplest technology to the latest. Distance learning by utilizing digital technology networks is defined as the learning concept uses e-learning materials and assignments between teachers and students (Belawati, 2019).

As previously mentioned, online learning has been widely promoted to replace face-to-face learning during the Covid-19 period. Every educational institution carries out students learning activities through smartphones. Dong, Cao & Li (2020) stated that smartphones play role as student teaching and learning activities during the Covid-19 pandemic to maintain children's learning and playing at home. Smartphones are also very fruitful in today's technological era, albeit it cannot replace all the functions of a desktop or laptop. Most useful personal applications can be carried out by a smartphone. Unlike desktops or laptops, smartphones can be carried conveniently, either as a device for communicating, recording, playing, or to some extent manipulating sound, images, and videos, which today's generations demand (Lee, 2014).

Furthermore, smartphones are phones that can make voice calls. For a lot of smartphone owners, that has become the least important feature of the device. Text messaging (now multimedia-enabled) is much more widely used as a form of communication, particularly through mobile apps such as WhatsApp. Exchanging images and videos is an everyday occurrence for many smartphone users (often using Instagram or snapchat) as is regular consumption of social media like Facebook and Twitter. A host of other actions are commonplaces: listening to music, watching videos, and using a GPS to find one's way, taking (and editing) photos and videos, checking an electronic calendar, taking notes, reading a book, and playing games. The internet, and the web are accessed through browsers, and increasingly, through mobile apps, third-party apps extend ad infinitum device functionality (Godwin-Jones, 2017).

Presented with plenty of smartphone features and how it can support English online learning, the present study was undertaken to figure out the role of smartphones to support English learning of the English department students in Universitas Timor as well as delve into issues which were experienced by the students while taking part in online learning using smartphone.

METHOD

This research is a type of descriptive research with a qualitative research approach. As put forward by Leavy (2017), descriptive research is suitable when a description of people, group, activities, event or situations are required. The data used in this research were qualitative data through a questionnaire as the main research instrument. An interview was also carried out to obtain additional information from respondents. The researchers applied unstructured interview as a depth-understanding was warranted to obtain necessary data. Participant-observation carried out during English class, into the bargain. The purpose of doing the observation was to examine the behavior of the participants associated with how they employed smartphones to support them in English online learning. As stated by Kumar (2011), an observation is undertaken especially when a research aims at scrutinizing the behavior of the respondents of a particular study.

Respondents

This research was conducted at Timor University. The choice of research location was carried out deliberately based on the consideration that Timor University is the only public university close to the border area of Republic Democrat Timor Leste. The population in this study were all fourth semester students of the English study program who possess smartphones. The sample was taken from 2 classes with a total of 62 students consisting of 30 students from class A, and 32 students from class B. Thus, the researchers only took 21 students to be the subject of the present study.

This deliberate sampling was due to the tight schedule of the final semester exam, so that researchers were given limitations by the head of the study program to find respondents. For a large population and it is difficult to find individual samples through random methods, it can be done by accident or simply found. This research can also be regarded as a preliminary study or study, so it is not intended to generalize widely and requires subsequent studies to study further.

Instruments

The instrument which was applied in this research comprised two types mentioned as primary sources and secondary sources. The primary sources embraced questionnaire, interview, and observation. The secondary sources were documents to support the research such as information taken from articles or books (Kumar, 2011). To address the first research question concerning role of smartphone in English learning, the researchers applied

the three instruments. In the interim, the second research question was answered by using interview and observation. On top of that, the researchers also read some articles and book related to the topic being researched. The articles related to the topic being examined.

Procedures

The research was commenced by distributing questionnaires to 21 students of the fourth semester English Study Program. The next phase was interviewing four students to enrich the data. Moreover, the researchers also observed a learning process in which students incorporated their smartphones to spur them learning English.

Data analysis

This section examines the description and analysis of data obtained from primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data of this research were the result of a questionnaire distributed to 21 students of the University of Timor, participant observation, and interview with four students. As previously stated, data was said to be main data where the analysis is supported by secondary data obtained from several library sources to strengthen and deepen the outcomes of the analysis. Respondent data obtained through questionnaires were analyzed descriptively. Descriptive data analysis aims to provide an overview of the object of research based on data and variables obtained from the group of subjects studied to facilitate the researchers in interpreting the research results. Other data obtained from the literature study was used as secondary data to complement and support primary data. The researchers found information in some articles and books which reinforced data taken from questionnaire, interview, and participant observation.

The questionnaires and interviews consisted of a number of questions and statements with respect to the characteristics of the respondents (internal and external), and the level of the role of smartphones in Timor universities in order to meet the need for information regarding the general description of the research. On top of that, the researchers also did a participant observation as well as interview to work out troubles encountered by the students in learning English by assistance of smartphone.

The technique of collecting data on these variables used a questionnaire method with a Likert Scale. *A questionnaire is a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by respondents. In a questionnaire respondents read the questions, interpret what is expected and then write down the answers* (Kumar, 2011). The instrument has a measuring range in 5 options based on a Likert scale or a scale of 5, the instrument is arranged in the form of positive (favorable) and negative (unfavorable) questions related to the two research variables and each instrument behavior has an assessment score.

The form of the questions is arranged in the form of a statement to be answered by the respondent. This instrument, among others, is for measuring social interaction variables as the dependent variable, while the independent variable is the smartphone role instrument. The score was obtained by the respondents after answering the questionnaire. The measurement result score is a score on an ordinal scale.

Kumar (2011) *states that an ordinal scale has all the properties of a nominal scale – categorizing individuals, objects, responses or a property into subgroups on the basis of a common characteristic – but also ranks the subgroups in a certain order. They are arranged in either ascending or descending order according to the extent that a subcategory reflects the magnitude of variation in the variable*. From the above understanding, it can be concluded that in this study an ordinal scale was used because the data was taken based on ranking, from the higher level to the lowest level or vice versa.

The score is set based on a scale of five (5) which is manifested in five options, to wit: very helpful with a score of 5, helpful to have a score of 4, sometimes with the score of 3, less helpful to have a score 2, and never had a score of 1. Dealing with the role of smartphone in online learning, there were also five options to be used mentioned as: very important with a score of 5, important to have a score of 4, sometimes important with the score of 3, less important to have a score 2, and not important scored 1.

The primary data that has been procured was made in the form of a table and then the data was analyzed descriptively. The description analysis that was presented from the results of this study was to provide a general description of the distribution of the data obtained in the field. While the data from the interviews were used as illustrations to complete the statistical results. The outcome of the questioner was illustrated in findings and discussion part.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research was performed to deal with the role of smartphone in English online learning as well as figuring out any obstacles experienced by the students in the process of English online learning.

The role of smartphone in English online learning

To answer this research question, the researchers referred to the outcome of distributed questionnaire which was broken down into two parts as displayed below.

Do smartphones help you in the online learning process.?

Table 1. The result of questioner- how helpful smartphones in online learning

Smartphone role assessment criteria	Frequency respondence of the students	Percentages
Very helpful	20	90%
Helpful	1	10.%
Sometimes		
Less helpful		
Never		
Total	21	100%

Based on the information on the table above, it could be spotted that a very large number of students admitted how advantageous the role of smartphone in online learning process (90%). The students did agree that smartphones were very helpful to support them in English learning process. This finding is in conformity with the study of Metruk (2020) in which the participants of the study performed a favorable behavior associated with English foreign language learning by assistance of smartphones.

What do you think about the role of smartphones in English online learning process?

Table *2*. The result of questioner- role of smartphones in online learning process

Smartphone role assessment criteria	Frequency respondence of the students	Percentages
Very important	15	71,4%
Important	3	14,3%
Sometimes important	2	9,5%
Less important	1	4,7%
Not important		
Total	21	100%

The students also acknowledged that smartphones played an important role in online learning process since they did not have to carry a heavy computer to learn. They only have to put a light smartphone in their hands and the learning could happen on the spot.

Inasmuch as the results of the research were about the influence of the role of smartphones on the online lecture process, the researchers also interviewed four students with regard to the role of smartphones. The following section was the result of interviewing students to figure out obstacles they experienced when working with their smartphone to support their English learning.

1. In your opinion, how important is smartphone in online learning?

Answer by student 1: very important.

Answer by student 2: very important.

Answer by student 3: as an intermediary between humans and science.

Answer by student 4: This is very important because it can be used to access learning materials and applications anytime and anywhere.

2. Is there a problem when using the smartphone?

Answer by student 1: Yes

Answer by student 2: Yes, of course

Answer by student 3: need adjustment.

Answer by student 4: I was distracted by social media notification while using my smartphone to learn

3.   What problems do you face when using smartphones in online learning?

Answer by student 1: I often run out of quota.

Answer by student 2: I failed to access information due to bad network.

Answer by student 3: the bad network and often run out of quota.

Answer by student 4: bad network

Problems experienced by the students in English online learning by assistance of smartphone

Hinged on the outcome of the interview and participant observation, it was figured out that most of the students experienced bad internet connection while accessing smartphones for online learning. This finding is in line with the work of Pale (2021) which pinpointed that atrocious internet connection was the primary problem encountered by students in online learning. Furthermore, other students also verbalized that they were lack of internet quotes to support them operated their smartphones in English online learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research undertaken at the University of Timor with respect to the role of smartphones, it can be seen that the role of smartphones as a medium of communication technology is currently felt to be very important among students during online learning. The role can strengthen the interaction relationship between students and lecturers as well as teachers and students in teaching and learning activities, especially students of the fourth semester of English educational study program. The present study also revealed that students need to use smartphone as a tool to encourage them learning, not only to access social media. On top of that, atrocious internet connection and lack of credits in the students' smartphone were found as factors that hinder the students to fully maximize the smartphones in English online learning. Further, it is envisaged for next researchers to carry out studies associated with more benefits of smartphone to support English online learning, include employment of a variety of English application in smartphones. The outcome of the current study is also significant for the students of Universitas Timor as well as the lecturers there. A number of advantages on smartphone deployment in online learning should be applied maximally. Moreover, being experienced with dreadful internet connection, the students would be encouraged to become more responsible for their own learning by having more preparation before going through English online learning, in which finding site with good internet connection. Moreover, lecturers attain information to motivate the students to be well-prepared and be liable for their online learning.

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