

Investigating Students' Beliefs Regarding the Effects of Using Smartphones for English Learning

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: April 13, 2024 Accepted: May 22, 2024 Volume: 5 Issue: 1	This study investigates student perceptions of smartphone utilization in English language learning at the University of Labor and Social Affairs (HCMC Campus-ULSA2). Through questionnaires, 102 students' attitudes were assessed, revealing a moderate inclination towards smartphone use (average score: 2.92 out of 5). Smartphones were viewed favorably for translation (mean score: 3.91) and other language learning tasks. While no significant gender differences were found, rural students showed a more positive attitude. These findings emphasize the potential benefits of smartphones in language education but also highlight challenges such as distractions. Understanding student perceptions is crucial for effective integration of technology in language learning.
KEYWORDS	
Smartphone utilization, English language learning, Student perceptions, Language education, Technology integration, ULSA2.	

1. Introduction

Using language, we may communicate with others. English's significance in terms of social, political, economic, and environmental development cannot be understated. The English language serves as a medium for dialogue and a tool for communication. The majority of the globe speaks English as their primary language. It is beyond dispute that efficient communication is necessary in today's world, and as a result, non-native English speakers' desire to study English as a second language is increasing daily (Richards, 2006, as cited in Rahman, Singh, & Pandian, 2018). English language education and programs to promote English language learning are sponsored by Americans and Britons (Marsh & Lange, 2000; Shamim, 2011). There are numerous English-language programs now available in Vietnam.

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, or MALL, is a modern phenomenon where languages are learned through mobile devices. With tailored education offered through mobile learning, students can learn in a variety of contexts. According to Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008), students utilize smartphones for language-related tasks like communication, reading, and translation. Smartphones allow for both private and group learning, as well as online conversations on social media sites like Facebook and pronunciation training through English language learning YouTube channels. According to Baruah (2012), these social factors encourage ESL collaborative learning.

ULSA2 students face challenges in English language proficiency due to limited teaching time. To address this issue,

researchers and teachers are increasingly turning to technology for effective language instruction. The prevalence of smartphones among students has led to the exploration of their utility in English language learning. Given the tech-savvy nature of today's students and the availability of language learning apps, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of smartphones in facilitating English language learning. The convenience of English language learning apps on internet-connected smartphones has made language acquisition more accessible for students, sparking interest among researchers in assessing the potential of this learning tool (Chaudron, 2015; Shamim, 2017).

As they have all the functions of computers built in, smartphones are now employed as powerful learning tools in addition to their primary function of communication. In this study, students' perspectives about studying English on smartphones at the university level are examined. Perceptions are how people view and accept things, and how they affect their decisions. According to Bogardus (1931), one's attitude toward anything might be either positive or negative. Therefore, it is important to look at students' perceptions of learning via smartphones.

This study examines students' perceptions on how smartphones assist in learning the English language. As a result, the research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are the students' habits of using smartphones in learning English language
- 2) What are the effects of smartphones for English language acquisition as perceived by non-English majors?
- 3) Are there significant differences in perceptions of students in utilizing cellphones in Language learning in terms of residences and gender?

2. Literature Review

Because students are an essential component of the learning or teaching process and because their perspectives would suggest approval and readiness for using smartphones as learning tools, it is imperative to look at students' perspectives. Researchers found that mobile learning is quite effective, but in some places, educators still need to be persuaded of its potential as a useful teaching and learning tool. A cross-cultural perspective of it might persuade them to adopt it in their settings as well.

In order to understand how 73 EFL professors and 126 students felt about utilizing online dictionaries, Dashtestani (2013) conducted a study. Positive outcomes were observed when using online dictionaries to teach students English vocabulary because there are no time or location limits and students can use them from their smartphones. Researchers found that there are both legitimate and standard English dictionaries available online, as well as inferior and unreliable ones, so users should exercise caution when installing dictionaries on their smartphones.

In their study, Kanchana and Saha (2015) examined how using smartphones in the classroom helps Indian students learn English as a foreign language. They came to the conclusion that incorporating mobile phones into the teaching and learning process increases instructional effectiveness, which benefits both teachers and students. Due to internet accessibility and learning apps on smartphones, EFL teachers must redesign their instructional methods in order to take advantage of technology in the classroom. It benefits students to work on their own as autonomous learners, with teachers acting merely as facilitators to assist them when necessary.

In order to better understand how using social media on mobile devices might increase learners' involvement in learning,

Johnson (2014) performed a study on 9–12 grade students and teachers at Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College. According to the study's findings, teachers strongly supported using mobile devices for social media to increase student involvement in their classes. The use of mobile devices for learning has been demonstrated to boost students' motivation and interest in their studies.

In Al-Tameemy's 2017 study, students expressed a positive attitude toward using their mobile devices for schoolwork, showing a preference for mobile learning and displaying motivation. Khalid, in 2018, focused on enhancing students' writing abilities through mobile device use, particularly among Pakistani Intermediate level students. Khalid employed a questionnaire to gather information and found encouraging results, with most students agreeing that utilizing mobile devices to improve their writing skills would be advantageous. Based on these findings, the researcher strongly recommended integrating mobile learning into English language education, as it was proven to enhance students' writing skills in English, whether it's their second or foreign language.

In their 2017 study, Machmud and Abdulah examined the impact of smartphone use on English instruction and learning. In this study, sixty-three students took part. Based on a scale of classroom anxiety related to foreign languages, the researchers divided the students into two groups. The findings demonstrated that while utilizing smartphones, students in both the high anxiety and low anxiety groups scored higher than when using a traditional teaching methodology. According to the study's findings, teaching via smartphones helps pupils feel less nervous about picking up speaking abilities.

The benefits of utilizing cellphones in an English classroom were examined by Leis and Tohei (2015). Two groups were formed out of the participants. The first group was not allowed to use their phones in class, whereas the second group was encouraged to use them for educational purposes. In comparison to the group that was forbidden from using cellphones in class, the second group's findings showed that they were more independent learners and that they wanted to learn more outside of the classroom. In order to help kids acquire the English language, the study recommended teachers to encourage their students to utilize cellphones in class.

3. Methodology

To investigate how students view the role that smartphones play in learning English. Self-reported questionnaires were given to 102 non-English students majoring in Human Resource Management and Labor Economics in the last two years at the University of Labor and Social Affairs (Ho Chi Minh City Campus) (ULSA2) using a descriptive approach and a mixed-methods data collection strategy. The descriptive method was employed to collect data. To gather data, a questionnaire created especially for this study was used. The SPSS 2.0 was employed to analyse the data collected from the participants.

This questionnaire had 3 main sections:

Section A including the participants' background information in terms of gender, major and residence.

Section B consisted of a total of 20 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; and Strongly Agree = 5).

Section C including a follow-up interview was conducted. Section 3 included 3 open ended questions to get a clear view of the situation.

The study was conducted at ULSA2, which is situated in District 12, HCM City, Vietnam. Between October 2022 and May 2023, it happened. The researcher had the survey directly delivered using a Google Form to 102 students majoring Labor economics and Human Resources Management. One Way ANOVA, independent as well as paired sample t-tests were used to calculate the mean score, frequency, and standard deviation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Students' habit of using smartphones in learning English language

Table 1. Students' habit of using smartphones in learning English language

		N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
1	I use smartphones to communicate to foreigners	102	1.00	4.00	1.56	.77727
2	I just use smartphones for entertaining purposes	102	2.00	5.00	3.71	1.16362
3	I often use smartphones for pronunciation learning	102	2.00	4.00	2.61	.77132
4	Smartphones is a useful tool for vocabulary acquisition	102	1.00	4.00	2.36	.68635
5	I often use smartphones for downloading materials	102	2.00	5.00	3.53	.75349
6	I often use smartphones for grammar practice	102	2.00	5.00	3.83	.50899
7	I often use smartphones for translating purpose	102	2.00	5.00	3.91	.44728
8	I often use smartphones to improve my speaking skill	102	2.00	4.00	2.71	.82507
9	I often use smartphones to improve my listening skill	102	1.00	4.00	2.76	.92465
10	I often use smartphones to improve my writing skill	102	2.00	4.00	2.59	.58462
11	I often use smartphones to improve my reading skill	102	2.00	4.00	2.55	.62257
Total		102	2.18	3.55	2.92	.30320

Table 1 represents the responses of 102 students from ULSA2 to a series of questionnaires, revealing a prevailing moderate attitude towards utilizing smartphones for enhancing English language skills, as evidenced by an average score of 2.92 out of 5. This falls within the moderate range, as defined between ranks 2.8 and 3.9, consistent with findings from Mohammad Abd Alhafeez Ali Ta'amneh's (2020) study, affirming a similar moderate inclination among participants towards employing smartphones for English practice.

Furthermore, the data suggests that smartphones serve well as translation tools, garnering a notably high mean score of 3.91. This indicates a favorable perception of smartphones' capability in facilitating translation tasks, with associated applications receiving positive feedback, reflecting their efficacy and user satisfaction. Additionally, functionalities such as grammar practice

(M=3.83), entertainment (M=3.71), and material acquisition (M=3.53) are rated fairly good, indicating a positive reception towards these aspects of smartphone utilization for language learning purposes.

4.2 Students' perspectives about effects of utilizing mobile devices in language learning

Table 2. Students' perspectives about effects of utilizing mobile devices in language learning

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students' perspectives about effects of utilizing mobile devices in language learning	102	2.00	4.60	3.6196	.42076
Valid N (listwise)	102				

Based on the empirical data obtained from Table 2, it is evident that the mean perception score concerning the efficacy of utilizing smartphones in the context of English language acquisition amounted to 3.61, accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.42076. These statistical indicators imply that, on average, respondents held a favorable perception towards the integration of smartphones in English learning endeavors. Moreover, the relatively modest standard deviation suggests a notable consistency in participants' viewpoints, indicating a consensus regarding the perceived beneficial impact of smartphone utilization in English language education. Specifically, Table 3 below shows that the majority of the 102 ULSA2 students who answered the questionnaires valued the use of smartphones in university English language instruction. Of them, eighty-eight (91.1%) thought of smartphones as instruments that promote independent learning. Students have the option to select materials and resources based on their interests and skill levels. Ninety-eight of them (88.2%) agreed that smartphones are an additional resource for language learning, and the majority of them also thought of smartphones as a tool that allows for personalized learning experiences, as well as an efficient means of practicing grammar, acquiring vocabulary, and even immersing oneself in a new culture (N=88; 86.3%). But according to 14 of them (13.7%), smart phones can be used as a tool to encourage pupils to learn. This situation requires university to raise awareness for students about the necessity of mobile devices at university.

Table 3. Students' perspectives about effects of utilizing mobile devices in language learning

Smart phones can be seen as		N	Percent
1	a tool that enables personalized learning experiences.	88	86.3%
2	a tool that creates independent learning.	93	91.1%
3	a tool that motivates students to learn.	14	13.70%
4	a supplementary tools for learning.	90	88.20%

5	an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition, grammar,...	86	86.30%
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4.3 Students' perspectives about challenges of utilizing mobile devices in language learning

Table 4. Students' perspectives about challenges of utilizing mobile devices in language learning

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students' perspectives about challenges of utilizing mobile devices in language learning	102	2.00	4.75	3.7402	.88015
Valid N (listwise)	102				

Table 4 above shows that students' opinions regarding the difficulties of using mobile devices for language learning are the well-reviewed content, with a mean score of 3.74. This implies that although mobile devices facilitate language learning activities, there are disadvantages associated with their use. Specifically, Table 5 indicates that the contents have been graded at a quite high level. In the classroom or during study sessions, smartphones can be a distraction (mean=3.9); Some students may find it difficult to read lengthy texts or type responses on mobile devices (mean=3.69); Students may find it difficult to access advanced language learning tools on mobile platforms, such as thorough grammar explanations, detailed feedback, or interactive exercises (mean=3.68); Students may have trouble downloading language learning apps, accessing online resources, or experiencing crashes and bugs occasionally (mean=3.67).

Table 5. Students' perspectives about challenges of utilizing mobile devices in language learning

		N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Smartphones can be a distraction in the classroom or during study sessions.	102	2.00	5.00	3.9	.47741
2	Students may encounter difficulties with downloading language learning apps, accessing online resources, or experiencing crashes and bugs during usage	102	2.00	5.00	3.67	1.15323
3	Some students may struggle with the small screen size of mobile devices, especially when engaging in activities that require reading lengthy texts or typing responses	102	2.00	5.00	3.69	1.16712
4	Students may find it challenging to access advanced language learning tools, such as comprehensive grammar explanations, detailed feedback, or interactive exercises, on mobile platforms	102	2.00	5.00	3.68	1.16874

	Valid N (listwise)	102				
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4.4 Differences in perceptions of students in utilizing mobile devices in language learning in term of their gender

Table 6. Differences in perceptions of students in utilizing mobile devices in language learning in term of their gender

Group Statistics					
Students' perceptions of students in utilizing mobile devices	Are you male or female?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Male	33	3.6061	.44577	.07760
	Female	69	3.6261	.41147	.04954

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Students' perceptions in utilizing mobile devices between males and females	Equal variances assumed	.050	.823	-.224	100	.823	-.02003	.08948	-.19754	.15749
	Equal variances not assumed			-.218	58.799	.829	-.02003	.09206	-.20425	.16420

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there is a difference in perceptions of students in utilizing mobile devices in language learning between males and females. The results indicate a not significant difference between male ($M=3.6061$, $SD=.44577$) and female ($M=3.6261$, $SD=.41147$), [$t(100) = -.224$, $p = .823 > .05$]. The 95% confidence interval of the difference between means ranged from $[-.19754$ to $.15749]$ and did not indicate a difference between the means of the sample. Consequently, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference between the sample

4.5 Differences in perceptions of students in utilizing mobile devices in language learning in term of their residence

Table 7. Differences in perceptions of students in utilizing mobile devices in language learning in term of their residence

Perceptions of students in utilizing mobile devices between rural and urban	Where are you from, rural or urban?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Rural	41	3.8000	.25298	.03951
	Urban	61	3.4984	.46708	.05980

Independent Samples Test										
Perceptions of students in utilizing mobile devices between rural and urban		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
	Equal variances assumed	7.926	.006	3.776	100	.000	.30164	.07989	.14314	.46014
	Equal variances not assumed			4.208	96.290	.000	.30164	.07168	.15937	.44391

An independent-samples t-test (as can be seen from Table 7) was conducted to determine whether there is a difference in in perceptions of students in utilizing mobile devices in language learning between rural and uban. Surprisingly, the results indicate a significant difference between rural (M=3.8000, SD=.25298) and female (M=3.4984, SD=.46708), [t(100) = 3.776, p = .000< .05]. The 95% confidence interval of the difference between means ranged from [.14314 to .46014] and indicate a difference between the means of the sample. Consequently, we accept the null hypothesis that there is difference between the sample means.

5. Limitations and Recommendations

Suggestions for enhancing smartphone integration in English language learning at ULSA2 include implementing awareness campaigns to educate students on effective smartphone use, developing or recommending customized language learning applications tailored to student needs, integrating smartphone-based activities into the curriculum, and providing

faculty training on smartphone integration. These initiatives aim to maximize the educational benefits of smartphones by promoting active engagement, autonomy, and effective language learning strategies. However, several limitations should be considered. The study's sample size of 102 students from ULSA2 may limit the generalizability of findings to broader student populations. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires may introduce response bias, and the study's focus on a single institution may not account for variations in socio-cultural contexts and technological infrastructures across different educational settings. Furthermore, while assuming widespread smartphone access among participants, variations in device ownership and familiarity with smartphone applications could influence perceptions and usage patterns. Future research should address these limitations by employing larger, more diverse samples, incorporating multiple data collection methods, and considering contextual factors when interpreting findings.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, while the study underscores the potential of smartphones as valuable tools for enhancing English language learning at ULSA2, several suggestions can be made to optimize their integration. Implementing awareness campaigns, developing customized learning resources, integrating smartphone-based activities into the curriculum, and providing faculty training are key strategies to harness the educational benefits of smartphones effectively. However, the study's limitations, including sample size constraints and reliance on self-reported data, should be acknowledged. Addressing these limitations through further research with larger, more diverse samples and considering contextual factors will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of smartphone utilization in language education. Overall, by recognizing and addressing these challenges, ULSA2 can capitalize on the potential of smartphones to enrich language learning experiences and empower students in their linguistic development.

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