

## Smartphone as additional learning tool with reference to EFL students in selected Universities in Chad

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**ABSTRACT:** *Today, mobile technology is a growing trend in learning languages. A mobile technology like smartphone is used by university students in their daily lives anywhere and anytime. There are number of language learning applications on smartphone that can help develop students' language skills. The present study aims at investigating how the students perceive the usefulness of smartphone for learning English and how they use it to improve their linguistic skills. A 30-item questionnaire was administered to 513 students in the university of N'djamena and Doba. The data collected from respondents were analysed using basic descriptive statistics. The Findings reveal that there is a high positive agreement toward engagement in using smartphone as tools for learning among EFL students. In addition, it was found that students mostly embark into some linguistic activities (listening and reading) which help gain more practice on some skills than the others (writing and speaking) through their smartphone.*

**KEY WORDS:** mobile learning, smartphone, English as a foreign language, perceived usefulness.

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### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, modern technology has brought incredible changes in the field of education. It has changed the entire educational system so that the teachers as well as the learners are able to gain knowledge about the subjects without going to any place or asking anybody for help. With the advent of smartphone, most of the research in education has become easier and more flexible for those who wish to do genuine research in order to bring the desired changes in methodologies and teaching strategies.

Smartphone has emerged as highly popular devices because of their capacity to facilitate high-quality communication in addition to being portable, interactive, user-friendly, and highly customizable. When used in the learning environment, it has additional advantage of facilitating learners to access a variety of apps for creation and review of learning content from any location and at any time of their convenience.

Smartphone could therefore greatly impact learning and teaching of English language. Chi-Yen Chiu (2015) held that the use of smartphones for language learning and teaching can be of great benefits especially in vocabulary acquisition, spelling and pronunciation, grammar,

listening and reading skills. Smartphone is certainly one of useful tools for language learners as they can use their smartphone to get access to language learning practice and to gain some help on the language use. There are also a large variety of language learning applications for them to download. That allows EFL students to learn languages easily on their own smartphone. The present study aims at investigating how Chadian EFL students perceive the usefulness of smartphone for learning English and how they use it to improve their linguistic skills.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The spread of mobile technology and the growing students' population owning a sophisticated cell phone have caused smartphone to be language-learning tools that are equipped with sound multimedia function. A smartphone is defined as a mobile phone that is able to perform many of the functions of a computer, typically having a relatively large screen and an operating system capable of running general-purpose applications (Lee, Hsu & Shih, 2014). Due to the trends in mobile learning, many learning materials have been designed in the form of Podcast, widget, and APPs, while others contain the features of interactions and communication to increase the efficiency of language learning by using mobile devices.

Many researches have been conducted to assess how smartphone is used as additional tools for language learning in developed and developing countries. For example Hulse (2018) sought to find out how smartphone is used among Japanese EFL students. The results of the research proved that the majority of participants showed positive perceptions towards smartphones as a tool for academic activities. The study also reported that most students used their smartphone to access academic information and does other academic activities like recording class notes. In addition, Nurhaeni and Purnawarman (2018) found in their study that the students considered smartphones' functions as fast and easy for them to learn English. Their study also indicated that the smartphone use can influence the students' learning strategies in autonomous learning their cognitive and social/affective strategies can be influenced the most.

Further, some researchers claimed that through smartphones students can easily learn new words in English, translate, and listen to radio (BBC or VOA), watch films and smartphone apps such as whatsapp, Facebook, and Twitter to improve their language proficiency. This could be seen in Alshabeb & Almaqrn (2018) research who explored the use of social media application in language learning among university students. They focused on the use of mobile devices in students' learning. One hundred and two students responded to a questionnaire and five participants were interviewed to know their responses about the use of social media in facilitating the process of learning. The results showed that students had positive attitudes towards using and integrating technological tools to their English courses. Besides, students mostly use smartphones to translate English words from Arabic or Arabic from English vice versa.

Similarly, Farrah and Abu-Dawood (2018) investigated the usage of mobile phone applications in educational processes to identify the advantages, disadvantages, and difficulties of using smartphones. They used a questionnaire to know the general students' perspectives about the

effects of using mobiles inside the classroom. Besides, they used interviews to show the participants' attitudes towards the troubles and the explanations. The results revealed that the majority of students responded positively to utilize mobile phone applications in their learning. Additionally, the results showed that learners study better through using their mobiles and mobile phone applications. The students therefore confirmed that that through smartphone, they can study alone without the intervention of teachers. The researchers advised decision-makers to use this kind of learning which depended on educational technology to help students in their learning.

Likewise, Ahmed (2019) claimed that social media apps in smartphones such as whatsapp, Facebook, and Twitter help achieve this aim by offering adequate room for conversation, engagement, and free learning. This claim has been confirmed by Aljaber (2020). The result of their research show that using Whatsapp application enhances students' learning and enthusiasm, helps students to develop English skills, enriches their vocabularies, and learns from their mates' mistakes. The research also concludes that there are some advantages of utilizing whatsapp in learning of English. Whatsapp application helps students overcome their fear of using the language, enabling students to learn from their colleagues' mistakes, helping the students to believe in their abilities and to have confidence, and increasing students' motivation in language learning.

Some other researchers offer specific advantages of smartphone in the context of language learning and offer specific applications that support the development of EFL skills such as reading, listening, speaking and writing. Students also use dictionary application and Google translation to translate unfamiliar words. It becomes habitual among students to use their smartphones to change the meaning of English words into another language. Using dictionaries in smartphone as vocabulary learning tool is more effective than the one which still apply traditional vocabulary learning tools. Refika & Destina (2020) took the opportunity to understand the information that had been shared by utilizing some of the supporting features that they had previously installed on their Android devices. These supporting features include search engines like Google, online and offline dictionaries, and others. It was found that students' learning outcome on translation subject was improved.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study are:

- 1) To investigate how EFL students perceive the usefulness of smartphones for English language learning in selected universities in Chad.
- 2) To examine how EFL students use their smartphone to improve their linguistic skills in selected universities in Chad.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The participants of the study were English major students at the University of N'djamena and Doba. They were level 200 and 300 students. The students were asked to complete a survey questionnaire with Likert-scale items. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part

deals with students' opinions on the benefits of using smartphone as tools to learn English and the second part examines how they use their smartphone to improve linguistic skills.

The data responses from the data were collected from 513 EFL students. The collecting data were analysed using basic descriptive statistics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1- Students' perceptions of smartphone use for English language learning

The results presented in Table 1 show how Chadian EFL students perceive the usefulness of smartphone as additional tools for learning for English language learning. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly neutral" was adopted for this part of the survey. According to the results, the majority of students' participants show positive perceptions. They believe that smartphone could help them accomplish EFL task quickly (, supplement textbooks, allow to access an update learning resources from anywhere and anytime, gather information to complete what have been done in classroom, study alone English without the intervention of teachers .The overall responses are summarised in a table below.

**Table 1:** Student's perceptions of smartphone use for English language learning

| Statement   | Strongly agree | Agree  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral |
|---|----------------|--------|-------------------|----------|---------|
| Smartphone provides enhancement material to supplement textbook                                   | 50%            | 39%    | 11.1%             | 0%       | 0%      |
| Using smartphone would help me to accomplish EFL task quickly                                     | 33.9%          | 65.7%  | 0%                | 0.4%     | 0%      |
| Smartphone enables to listen to English native speakers talking about various topics              | 41.1%          | 59%    | 0%                | 0%       | 0%      |
| Using smartphone would make it easier for me to study EFL courses content                         | 5.8%           | 82.8%  | 9%                | 11.4%    | 0%      |
| Using smartphone could allow me to access an update learning resources from anywhere and any time | 42.54%         | 36.84% | 8.77%             | 11.85%   | 0%      |
| Smartphone helps me to gather information to complete what have been done in classroom            | 37.42%         | 30.99% | 16.99%            | 14.03%   | 0.58%   |
| Through smartphone I could study alone English without the intervention of teachers               | 20.66%         | 39.57% | 20.85%            | 19.9%    | 0%      |
| smartphone would assist me to improve four skills in English                                      | 37.24%         | 30.99% | 16.95%            | 14.03%   | 0.58%   |
| Smartphone enable me to collaborate with the teacher and peers in the classroom.                  | 20.6%          | 39.57% | 20.85%            | 18.9%    | 0%      |
| Smartphone is necessary for me to translate English words into French or French into English      | 46%            | 41.3%  | 12,3%             | 0.4%     | 0%      |

Overall, the students agree that smartphones can help in learning the language. These results on the students' perceptions correspond with the results reported in Hulse study (2018), in which 95% of the participants considered smartphones effective for English language learning. The study by Nurhaeni and Purnawarman (2018) also confirmed that 100% of the students showed

their positive attitudes towards using the mobile devices for language learning. The students considered smartphones' functions as fast and easy for them to learn English.

2- How EFL students use their smartphone to improve their linguistic skills:

The second part of the questionnaire examines how Chadian EFL students use smartphone to improve linguistic skills. A three- Point Likert Scale was adopted for this part of the survey: 1 "Always", "Often", and 3 "Rarely".

When participants were asked how they use smartphone to improve linguistic skills, some of students agreed that they always use smartphone for reading electronic dictionaries (77.70%), reading e-books (70.57%), taking photos and videos of the important lectures (67.29%), accessing reading file offline (56.14%). In addition, the results proved that (100%) of the participants rarely use smartphone to post on tweeter, (92.59%) play gap fillings game, (91.43%) rarely write notes note stories and even chat through smartphone, (83.62%) rarely use smartphone to call lecturers and discuss issues in English, (73.2%) rarely record their own voice and forward it to the teacher for correction, and (60.61%) rarely use their smartphone to repeat after recorded materials. The complete results are seen in the table below

**Table 2:** use of smartphone to improve linguistic skills

| Rank | Statements   | Always | Often  | Rarely |
|------|--|--------|--------|--------|
| 1    | I use smartphone to check pronunciation by talking dictionaries  | 39%    | 36%    | 25%    |
| 2    | I use the Voice Memo Recorder to record students' performance and listen to it later                                       | 38.22% | 32.16% | 29.62% |
| 3    | I listen to English songs from my smartphone   | 37.32% | 38.59% | 24.09% |
| 4    | I use smartphone to listen to radio stations broadcast in English  | 33.72% | 49.91% | 16.37% |
| 5    | I use smartphone for listening and watching speeches conducted in English  | 22.82% | 41.52% | 35.66% |
| 6    | I use smartphone to listen to postcard or YouTube posted in English  | 19.52% | 38.88% | 41.6%  |
| 7    | I use smartphone to participate in LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Facebook, and other online groups that talk about language learning | 21.05% | 30.03% | 48.92% |
| 8    | I use smartphone to repeat after recorded materials  | 20.1%  | 19.29% | 60.61% |
| 9    | I use smartphone to chat with friends in English   | 16.72% | 52.11% | 31.17% |
| 10   | I use smartphone participate in debates conducted in English   | 13.08% | 15.78% | 71.14% |
| 11   | I use smartphone record my own voice and forward it to the teacher for correction  | 9.5%   | 17.3%  | 73.2%  |
| 12   | I use smartphone to call my lecturers and discuss some issues in English   | 8.78%  | 7.60%  | 83.62% |
| 13   | I use my smartphone to read electronic dictionaries  | 77.70% | 14.42% | 7.79%  |
| 14   | I use my smartphone for reading e-books  | 70.57% | 19.69% | 10.14% |
| 15   | I use my smartphone to take photos and videos of important classwork in my language classes.                               | 67.29% | 24.76% | 7.79%  |
| 16   | I use smartphone for to access reading files offline   | 56.14% | 39.57% | 4.28%  |
| 17   | I use smartphone for playing quiz game   | 3.70%  | 91.92% | 4.68%  |
| 18   | I use smartphone for playing gap filling games   | 3.31%  | 4.09%  | 92.59% |
| 19   | I use smartphone to write notes note stories and even chat   | 1.95%  | 6.63%  | 91.43% |
| 20   | I use smartphone to post on tweeter  | 0%     | 0%     | 100%   |

According to the results presented in the table 2 above, students use their smartphones mainly to practice their reading and listening skills. The most ways for practicing linguistic skills through smartphone are reading e-books, watching videos, checking pronunciations by taking dictionaries, reading files offline. In addition, students commonly use the Voice Memo Recorder to record their performance and listen to it later. It is interesting to point out that students tend to love practicing their English skills in entertaining activities like listening to radio stations broadcast in English, participating in LinkedIn, Whatsapp, Facebook, and other online groups that talk about language learning.

The result is consistent with Ahmed (2019) who in his investigation that social media apps in smartphones such as whatsapp, Facebook, and Twitter help achieve this aim by offering adequate room for conversation, engagement, and free learning. Similarly, Aljaber (2020) showed that using Whatsapp application enhances students' learning and enthusiasm, helps students to develop English skills, enriches their vocabularies, and learns from their mates' mistakes.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The perceived benefits of using smartphone as additional tools for EFL learning are clearly represented in this study. Participants agree that smartphones can help them improve their English skills. Practically, students use smartphone to access relevant content anywhere and anytime to complement what have been seen in larger amphitheater setting.

The results also revealed the students tend to embark into some activities (listening and reading) which help gain more practice on some skills than the others (writing and speaking). This may be because of the availability of learning applications and the students' interest.

Smartphones are important digital devices for English language learning as they allow language learners to get access to language resources anywhere at any time. Using digital devices in EFL learning provides more advantages than disadvantages as it can get students closer to real life situations and allow them to continually develop their language competence (Bucur and Popa, 2017).

This study is descriptive in nature and limited itself to only to 200 and 300 level EFL students. In future studies, other research tools may be adopted; larger number of participants may be involved and comparative or experimental studies should also be conducted in future in order to compare other mobile devices for EFL learning in improving EFL learners' linguistic skills.

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