

THE IMPACT OF SMARTPHONE ON ENGLISH READING SKILL: PERCEPTIONS OF SOPHOMORE STUDENTS

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Abstract: *This study aimed at finding out the sophomore students' of the Department of English in Universitas Negeri Malang perceptions on the impact of using mobile phones for improving reading skills. This research employed a descriptive qualitative and used the open interview to obtain the data. The subjects of this research were ten sophomore students of the Department of English in Universitas Negeri Malang, the academic year 2019/2020. The respondents were divided into two groups. The low achievers' group consists of five students whose reading grades are below 78 that were chosen randomly. The higher achiever's group consists of five students whose grades are higher than 78 that were chosen. The result showed that both groups had positive perceptions of mobile phones' applications that were most likely be used for improving reading skills such as; electronic dictionaries, electronic newspapers, electronic journals, and other electronic reading sources. However, some members of the low achievers' group had negative perceptions of electronic journals because of language complexity. For improving reading skills meaningfully by using mobile phones, the teacher should combine online and traditional classroom, know the students' level, and give proper instructions for them.*

Keywords: *Smartphone, Reading skill, Sophomore students.*

INTRODUCTION

Many programs and applications nowadays exist to strife in improving the feasibility of users, especially students from various backgrounds. Universities around the world have provided ample resources in providing digital information that is easily accessed by the students.

In using most applications in mobile phones, readers spend some time to understand their usage and contents. To understand them, readers are required to use their reading skills. It happens since they should read the terms first to access dozens of applications. Those terms, such as terms and conditions, are used when the users need to deal with the legal permission to use an application and it should not be taken easily. When they violate the terms whether it is intentional or not, it will ruin both parties. When it comes to understanding such contents, reading skills are without a doubt is needed, from reading text messages, terms, and conditions, etc. Apart from that, by having such feasibility, the reading materials are also accessible. Thus, mobile technology, by any means, should provide adequate materials for students to improve their reading skills.

The undergraduate students in Indonesia (who are mostly 18-23 years old) have a high sense of curiosity. They tend to scroll around the social media that have no significant improvement for their studies. With the help of mobile phones, learners can accomplish their difficult homework and read from various materials. With such drastic changes, the reading materials change as well from authentic ones like websites, online catalogs, online magazines, etc. to social media. From the previous statements, it remains unclear whether the use of mobile phones gives a positive impact on students' English reading skills or not. Considering those facts, this study was conducted to investigate the impact of mobile phones on students' English reading skills.

From the background above, this study is expected to answer the following questions: What are the students' perceptions about the effects of using mobile phone applications on the students' improvements in reading English? How do they use mobile phones that can improve their English reading skill meaningfully?

Mobile learning has some effects on learners' capability of learning English. A study by Gheytsi (2015) entitled "The Effect of Smartphone on Reading Comprehension Proficiency of Iranian EFL Learners" showed a significant difference between the experimental and the control group after a month of using the application. In the study, Gheytsi used an experimental approach to investigate the effect of

smartphones on EFL students from the Ilam Motjama Fani Tehran English Language Institute with 40 high school students as the sample. The similarity between Gheytsi's study and this present study is the reading focus mainly on the usage of mobile phone. However, in terms of the methodology, the data in Gheytsi's study were collected through an experimental method, in which there were experimental and control groups. The reading materials were given to the experimental group for a month. The reading materials were also tested to ensure suitability. She also conducted pre and post-test to see if there is any improvement in the students' reading performance. This study is considered a mix of qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative data were organized by using SPSS. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were obtained from the interview by using spreadsheets and word documents. Based on the previous study, it is relevant to include an interview as the data collection technique. The demography is also different, as this present study research was done in Indonesia. It involved ten interviewees based on the Intensive Course on reading in which will be described further in the next chapter. Thus, this study aimed at finding out the perceptions of sophomore students (4th Semester of English Department students, the year 2019/2020) on mobile phones toward English reading skills. Without including statistical and numerical data, this study was done qualitatively, where the research paid attention carefully to the details.

The second study was done by Ekinci (2017) entitled "Perceptions of EFL Learners about Using Mobile Applications for English Language Learning: A Case Study" which focused mainly on the mobile applications for English Language Learning. The study showed that mobile applications like Duolingo, Memrise, Acobot, Voscreen, and English Central give some advantages and disadvantages to EFL learners. Ekinci (2017) let his respondents choose their five most popular applications freely. Then, he asked them to install and use those apps for two weeks during the study. After that, they filled out minute papers every two weeks on each application. Same as the previous study, this study also aimed at discovering the significance of mobile phones in English learning. However, Ekinci's study used more sophisticated data validation including SPSS and interviews. The application's authenticity is also tested to get the desired result. Although the technicality of the mobile application is not the concern in this study, both Ekinci's study and this study discussed the same thing that is related to mobile applications and mobile phones. Thus, it can be part of the discussion. Besides, it also investigated the students' perceptions of English in which became the main reason to have this research done. Unlike Ekinci's study that focused on the four English skills such as Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking, this study only concerned with the Reading skill. The underlying reasons for choosing reading skills were stated in the methodology section. The similarity between strikingly Ekinci's and this study is on the subjects that were female and male sophomore students between 18-22 years old. However, further investigation is needed to see to what extent this research involved Indonesian students.

Another study conducted by Nasr & Abbas (2016) entitled "The Effectiveness of Using Mobile Phone on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension in Najran University" showed that using WhatsApp application, online and offline dictionaries, online resources, and memos remarkably improved participants' code-breaking practices and text participation practices, text using and text analyzing practices were slightly improved. Similar to the previous study, Nasr & Abbas used an application to carry out the data. An application such as WhatsApp was frequently used in reading practices to see the effectiveness of Mobile phones on students' reading comprehension. Nasr & Abbas' study was similar to this present study since it also investigated the impact of mobile phones on students' reading comprehension. However, since Nasr & Abbas' study focused on investigating the effectiveness of a mobile phone, they did not include any perception. To fill the gap, this study looked for the perceptions from high and low achievers of sophomore students by using open-ended questions where interviewees are expected to answer with rich details.

This study is expected to give practical and theoretical contributions. For the teachers, the result of this study can be used as a breaking-through method to be introduced in Indonesia. It is supported by the fact that most students nowadays use mobile phones all the time. For the students, they can optimally utilize the use of mobile phones for their English skills, particularly reading. For the other researchers, the result of this study can be used as additional literature that helps others in doing similar research.

METHOD

This research was done by having descriptive-qualitative as the research design. In collecting the data, this study went through various processes such as documenting, interviewing, and note taking. Therefore, a qualitative approach was used since the data were in the form of responses. Those responses were then deciphered to see whether they lead to new theories or existing theories.

The data in this study were in the form of audio or written data that were taken during the interview with the two groups. These data belonged to qualitative data since they consist of a bunch of words and sentences from the primary respondents. These research data provided the participants' characteristics in detail as well as their reading proficiency scores. The data were collected from two main resources, Primary and Secondary Data.

The primary data were obtained from an authentic resource. This study involved ten interviewees from English Department students of Universitas Negeri Malang, the academic year 2019/2020 majoring in English Language Teaching. The primary data were collected by having an interview. They were directly obtained from the sophomore students' responses with no other techniques and they were in the form of audio recordings, notes, and documentation.

The secondary data were obtained from the secondary party in which they went through multiple processes without involving the researcher. To be precise, the secondary data were taken from the results of the Intensive Course Reading in the form of a score, name, and class. Since the researcher did not participate in collecting them, another party had a right to issue the data.

The participants were categorized based on their academic results on the Intensive Course (IC) on reading. The chosen respondents were also asked whether they used a mobile phone to access online reading sources or not. The following initial names were chosen in order with their attendance list. They were listed by the previous Intensive reading course instructor, Mrs. S class A, which was associated with a high result (above 80) with an average score of reading of class A was 83. The five participants were contacted by using WhatsApp and asked whether they used a mobile phone for accessing online reading sources or not. They were also showed the interview questions along with their availability to be interviewed. It was found that they frequently used a mobile phone for accessing the online reading source and agreed to be included in this study. For the low achievers, they came from class D, which was associated with lower achievement on reading based on their Intensive course reading results by Mrs. S (English Language Teaching instructor from Universitas Negeri Malang). The students who scored below 80 were chosen based on their attendance list. The same approach was applied to low achievers. These are the respondents' initial names, along with their ages, scores, and groups.

Table 1. Respondents' Characteristics

No	Initial names	Age	Reading score	Group
1.	AD	20	88.4	High achiever
2.	AN	20	88.6	High achiever
3.	MA	19	83.3	High achiever
4.	MD	20	89	High achiever
5.	NU	20	71.7	Low achiever
6.	AD	21	74	Low achiever
7.	FD	20	70.8	Low achiever
8.	AS	20	70.8	Low achiever
9.	DR	20	71.6	Low achiever
10.	RW	20	81.8	High achiever

This study was conducted in Universitas Negeri Malang involving students from English Language Teaching major in the academic year of 2018/2019. To look for the targeted interviewees, the

students' Intensive Reading scores were used as the indicators. Since there were two different groups, the perceptions of using a mobile phone on English reading were also different.

The instrument used in this research was open questions. It was a proper instrument to be used since the respondents' answers could be explored as clear and in detail as possible. The respondents were not controlled by the interview protocol meaning that they could add anything regarding the interview questions.

The interview blueprint covered the whole research questions. It was designed to raise proper questions that can answer the research questions accurately.

In this research, open questions were administered to see how well participants expressed their opinions and perceptions of using mobile phones in achieving those skills. They were also asked to what extent mobile phones give a significant improvement in their reading skills in general. To see their consistency and find deeper answers, some follow-up questions were also given to them. During the interview, all of them said their perceptions clearly and in detail.

However, the mobile phone is too general. To be more specified, the researcher asked them what aspects of mobile phones help them in improving their reading skills along with their perceptions. The first thing that came to mind was the use of electronic dictionaries (E-dictionaries). It was considered an important application since vocabulary mastery is one of the integral subjects in reading skills. Therefore, it was worth to be included in the open questions by asking the students how well the E-dictionaries improve their vocabularies.

Along with E-dictionaries, their opinions and perceptions about electronic journals were also included. The researcher decided it since the students needed to provide a lot of necessary information and require techniques taught by their lecturers in the previous semester. The question was then followed by any follow-up questions to find out their perceptions in using electronic journals in mobile phones on their improvements in reading.

Third, their opinions about electronic newspapers were asked related to the first research questions. Online newspapers can be accessed through mobile phones. Similar to electronic journals, reading online newspapers require techniques. It was followed by follow-up questions to collect more about their perceptions in using online newspapers on mobile phones in improving their reading.

Lastly, other online reading materials such as online articles, short stories, and novels were also asked during the interview. It was worth noting that the researcher could not involve the whole aspects of mobile phones to be asked to the respondents. Therefore, other online reading materials that could be accessed on mobile phones are relevant to be asked to answer the first research question.

To obtain proper responses for answering the second research question, the researcher asked them to act as the teachers and chose the appropriate materials for the students by using mobile phones in improving their reading skills. By acting as the teachers, they could provide authentic answers on how they used mobile phones for their improvement in English reading as well as for their students in the future. According to them, first, using mobile phones in improving reading skills could be done in a regular classroom setting. By giving the students online social media, materials, and assignments, they could maintain good communication with the teacher and among others. In other words, they could use mobile phones and authentic materials such as books to improve their reading skills.

Second, to improve their reading skills meaningfully, the teachers should know the students' levels. It is important to have appropriate materials that match the students' levels. Thus, none of them would feel the materials were too easy or too difficult. By choosing the right materials for their level, the information needed to answer the research questions could be obtained accurately.

Third, they were asked how they managed the class while using mobile phones. The answer was by giving proper instructions so that the students are significantly improved in their reading skills.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

First, this study found important findings related to the students' improvements in English reading by using a mobile phone. It dealt with the mobile phones' applications that they mostly used and unconsciously improved their reading skills. The second finding showed their perceptions on the mobile

phone's application like E-dictionaries that received a positive perception from both groups. The third finding dealt with the positive perceptions of using E-journals from the high achievers' group. The fourth finding showed the positive perceptions of online newspapers from both groups. The last finding also showed both groups' positive perceptions of other reading sources that are available online.

The students believed that the practicality of smartphones helped them in improving their reading skills. Practicality deals with the easiness of accessing the smartphones, particularly in accessing online short stories and novels. One of the low achievers' members stated;

"Yeah, I think smartphones are very handy. It really helps me in learning English, particularly reading. You know, I can find thousands of novels and short stories in a very short time. I can also access everything I need every time. With such easiness, it's easy to say I can read anytime I like." (Excerpt 1)

While accessing mobile phones, both groups stated that they accessed online dictionaries or E-dictionaries mainly to unfamiliar words. The sophomore students of Universitas Negeri Malang tend to switch from one to another application while accessing their mobile phones. The most accessed application is E-dictionary in which both groups stated that it affected their reading skills meaningfully. All of the respondents agreed that E-dictionaries helped discover new vocabularies. These E-dictionaries also contain authentic audio recordings on how to pronounce the words. It was supported by one of the high achievers' group members, MA, who said:

"I feel like that E-dictionaries are very useful. In terms of the way they pronouncing words, they provide the recorded sound from native speakers. In addition, E-dictionaries are relatively small in size. I think it helps me a lot in searching for the meaning words. Because whenever I read something, I always open my Oxford (Online dictionary) in my smart phone. I think it is quite easy, I just switch the tab from another tab without closing the app. I think Oxford is very small on size too. They have only like hundreds of Kb in order to be installed on my mobile phone." (Excerpt 3)

Students from both groups (mostly from the high achievers' group) have used electronic journals during their study in Universitas Negeri Malang. Based on the interview, E-journal is a favorable method in improving their reading skills by using a mobile phone. However, while the high achiever group used E-journal intentionally, the low achievers group only accessed it when they were asked by the instructor of the course. It was also found that the respondents have learned how to read fast and found the topic by reading electronic journals on a mobile phone. One student from high achievers' group, AD, said:

"E-journal is very helpful in increasing the reading speed because I want to deal with the homework as soon as possible (laugh). By finding a particular subject using features on pdf, I can find important information that is relevant to mine. I rarely read entire journals though, because I think I just need sentences or paragraphs only. Yeah, by looking for "ide pokok" (Main topic) in each paragraph is not hard after all. I learned new vocabularies too, and whenever I don't know the meaning, I switch to electronic dictionaries to find the meaning."(Excerpt 4)

As one of the reading materials, online newspapers could be used to improve reading skills. By an reading online newspaper, students could learn how to interpret the words, find new vocabularies, and others are beneficial. One of the high achievers' group members, RW, mentioned:

"I think online newspapers significantly improve my reading skill. Since I started accessing newspapers on mobile phone I can read and interpret things faster. I don't know maybe the language... I can't tell how but I certainly believe that it broadens my horizon. You see, since I start reading newspaper on my smart phone, I can understand what the short stories are about. Apart from that I have learned unique and new vocabularies. Well, some newspapers or articles that I have read have a lot of unfamiliar vocabularies." (Excerpt 6)

It was also found that online newspapers could help to improve students' reading skills. It contains a comprehensive list of reading materials that were accessible online. This statement was supported by one of the high achievers' group members, MA, who stated:

"I think it has good contents (Articles). I rely on online articles because my lecturer asked me to do so during the class. Within articles, I gained a lot of knowledge, entertainment, etc in a very quick way. The language is very simple too. It is very straightforward as well. They (The online articles) really helped me to write especially random comments such as; writing opinions on someone's articles, write a short travel journey, and so on." (Excerpt 8)

Overall, both groups of the sophomore students of Universitas Negeri Malang had positive perceptions of the use of mobile phones in general and using mobile phones' applications in improving their reading skills. However, some low achiever students thought that using e-journals did not improve reading skills. Therefore, they sent negative perceptions of using e-journals on mobile phones in improving reading skills.

Based on the overall responses, both of the groups gave various answers but mostly they were related to the use of mobile phones in a proper way to improve their reading skills. In this section, three important findings were collected from the respondents. The first one was utilizing social media and other online resources in language teaching during reading class. The second one was knowing the students' level before incorporating mobile phones in the reading class. The last one dealt with how they give the proper instructions during the reading class using mobile phones.

It was found that to improve their reading skills meaningfully, the students from both group should apply online teaching techniques such as; online learning and act as the teachers who helped the students in utilizing mobile phones for improving reading skills. They were asked some questions related to mixing online class (using smartphone applications like; Edmodo or Google Classroom) that might be useful for both the students and the teacher. This indicated that combining the online and conventional classroom was favorable due to its practicality in sharing materials and communicating with the students when the teacher did not present. It also maintained a good relationship between the teacher and the students by allowing them to communicate by using the chat box in Edmodo. One of the low achiever's group members, AS, said:

"If all of them do have mobile phones perhaps I will provide them with online short stories or novels for them to read. In the class I will give some assignments to test their knowledge afterwards. I will also incorporate social media such as Edmodo and WhatsApp to interact with them every time. If the students or the teacher cannot attend the class they can use online class. Online class can be accessed every time and a lot of materials are also available online." (Excerpt 9)

The teachers should consider whether their students had mobile phones and allowed them to use their mobile phones during the teaching-learning process. It means that as the teachers, they should know the students' levels. This statement was supported by one of the high achievers' group members, AN, who said:

"It depends on what level of the students actually. If the students are still on elementary level, I will not incorporate any mobile phone on my class, because I believe that the students still do not have self-consciousness, meaning that they will eventually lose focus on what is being taught. As for advanced level of students such as college students, I might allow my students to access online source using mobile phone during class, as they are already matured." (Excerpt 10)

Combining online classrooms could be beneficial if the teacher gave proper instructions to the students. The teacher, in this case, should observe the students and regularly ask about their progress. Some respondents even believed that strictness is one of the keys in teaching by using online-based

applications on a mobile phone. This statement is supported by one of the high achievers' group, MD, who said:

"I would ask students to access reading online source guided by me. If it is a reading class I will ask them to search for narrative stories, etc on the internet I will give instructions to them, like when they are allowed to use it and the provide time limit. They are not allowed to access other than I have instructed. I think the teachers' role in observing the students is still needed." (Excerpt 11)

To use mobile phones to improve reading skills meaningfully, they had to act as the teachers who allowed their students to use mobile phones during class. With this kind of setting, they would act as if they were responsible for improving their reading skills as well as their students. It could be concluded to improve the reading skills by using a mobile phone, they should incorporate social media to communicate with the students and give online accessible materials. Next, they had to know their levels and the students' level before using mobile phones in English reading learning. Last, they should give proper instructions to their students as well as for themselves while accessing the mobile phone in an English reading class setting.

Both groups agreed that mobile phones affected their process of learning English in general. Muhammed (2014) supported this statement by saying a great number of applications in mobile phones such as PDF books and articles helped students in improving their English skills, either inside or outside the classroom due to their accessibility. Thus, it was easier for students to improve their English skills at any time.

Based on the findings, both groups stated that Electronic dictionaries helped them in finding new vocabularies and glossaries easily. This finding was in line with Barham (2017) who stated that students had a great and exciting experience in using the mobile or electronic dictionary in learning new vocabularies. The electronic dictionaries contain some information such as pronunciation, spelling, and syntax that make them learn not only the vocabularies but also other necessary English skills. Concerning the findings (see Excerpt 3), its size and convenience become other positive aspects which beneficial for the students (Stirling, 2003). The respondents tend to install a dictionary that had a smaller size since it did not waste a big amount of the mobile phone's memory.

Based on the findings, the high achievers' group liked online journals. Most of them need online journals to deepen their understanding of their future thesis. The statement above was supported by Lang (2009) who stated that learning journals helped students engaged in deeper literary theory and enhanced their critical reading skills. By learning electronic journals, they could increase their reading comprehension and get more information for their future academic writings.

Based on the finding (see Excerpt 7), it was stated that online newspapers improved their reading skills, discovered new vocabularies, and helped them to obtain new information. The finding was in line with Krajka (2000) who stated that the digital versions of printed newspapers helped learners to improve their reading skills, enrich vocabulary, and gain some cultural information knowledge and be up-to-date with the current situation across the world.

Both groups were always intrigued by new things online. Therefore, they liked to look for online newspapers that were accessible by mobile phones.

It was found that the teacher should carefully utilize the students' needs while incorporating online and conventional classrooms (see Excerpt 9). The teacher should act as an administrator who takes control of the online classroom. By doing that, they could monitor students' activities while having an online classroom. In this case, choosing proper online materials should be taken into account. This statement is in-line with Gilbert (2015) who stated that the instructors need to administer the students' needs before implementing an online classroom. They also needed to evaluate the challenges, benefits, and useful strategies for the students as well.

The findings from both groups suggested that learning using mobile phones could be implemented properly if the teachers knew their students' levels. They thought that if the mobile phone was implemented at the elementary level, it would not fit the students' learning outcomes in English,

particularly reading. It was also difficult for the teachers in using mobile phones during the teaching-learning process since they would not be focused on the students. Therefore, students' readiness is an integral part before incorporating the online classroom by using a mobile phone. This statement is supported by Appana (2008) who stated that before conducting an online classroom, the teacher needed to address the students' needs and readiness. During its implementation, students should be self-centered and provided with the necessary things to maintain their online presence and participation.

If the teacher gave proper and clear explanations of the materials, the rewards and punishments for the students, and the assessment, it was possible to reach positive outcomes that improved their reading skills. The statement is supported by Arkorful & Abaidoo (2014) who stated that during online classrooms, teachers or instructors should maintain good communication with the students and provide them with a wide range of necessary knowledge. In a reading class setting, the teacher could instruct them to join Edmodo and give instructions on how a particular website works, how to access or download reading sources and do the assignment later on.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From this study, it could be concluded that their perceptions were mainly positive especially from the high achievers' group who considered mobile phones' applications were useful in improving their reading skills. Those applications are; electronic reading sources, electronic dictionaries, electronic journals, and electronic newspapers that were accessible via their mobile phones. Meanwhile, the lower groups tend to dislike electronic journals due to the language and other aspects. Thus, it could be inferred that both groups had positive perceptions of the impact of using mobile phones on reading skills.

Secondly, based on the findings and discussions, it could be concluded that to use mobile phones in improving reading skills meaningfully, the sophomore students of Universitas Negeri Malang needed to address their needs. In this study, they acted as the teachers to give more answers related to the use of mobile phones as a media for improving students' reading skills. Based on that, there were three answers; incorporating online and conventional classrooms using electronic devices such as laptops and smartphones, knowing their students' level, and giving proper instructions.

There are some suggestions addressed for the English teachers and further researchers. For English teachers who teach reading, it is important to expose the students to various reading materials either in the classroom via authentic materials such as books, short stories, or online materials. The teacher also needs to create a friendlier class setting to keep the students engaged with such an ever-changing topic. For other researchers, further study needs to be conducted with different levels of the participants. The participants can be taken from elementary or junior students' level.

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