SMARTPHONE USE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Technological advances have changed every aspect of our lives and our learning ways. Support tools for learning are not only boards, chalks, index cards, posters, ... but also modern equipment such as projectors, interactive boards, iPads, laptops, and smartphones, etc. However, the use of mobile devices in the classroom receives both support and opposition, like a double-edged sword. This article aims at briefly describing smartphone roles in teaching and learning, as well as its usages in classrooms by learners to support English language learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

A smartphone is a mobile phone that can be used as a small computer and that connects to the internet (Cambridge Dictionary). Its popularity has positively changed the ways people communicate and gain information. In addition to helping in communication, a smartphone is also an efficient mobile learning device which provides people with chances to learn anywhere and anytime.

2. SMARTPHONE ROLES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

The study by Darko-Adjei (2019) examined the use and effects of smartphones as a tool in distance learning at the University of Ghana. It found positive and useful smartphone usages in the students' learning activities, like easy sharing and accessing of online lecture materials, easy communication with peers and course masters. Besides, the students mentioned smartphones' portability as compared to other mobile devices. However, the findings also showed mobile phones' negative effects on learners' academic activities. Surfing the web, intruding calls, etc… distracted their attention when learning.

Aamri and Suleiman (2011) investigated the use of cell phones in English language learning by Sultan Qaboos University freshmen. The result showed that mobile phone use in the classroom was still limited because teachers were afraid of distraction caused by the devices. It suggested reconsidering the importance of mobile phones in learning and teachers should allow those smart devices to be used at school.

Herrington (2008) conducted a study with adult educators who used smartphones to create digital stories or lessons as part of a graduate course that taught them how to use technology in adult education. The researcher interviewed the students to find out how the technology helped them in this context and what teaching methods were suitable for this approach. The participants were 14 students from different professional backgrounds who wanted to become or advance as teachers and trainers in various education sectors. The results showed that the students appreciated the multimedia features of the smartphone as powerful tools for the task. Most of them said they would use similar tasks for their own students in the future. One of the main benefits of the technology that the students mentioned was its ability to be used spontaneously, for example, to record 'street interviews'.

Research shows that smartphone usages in language learning have both advantages and disadvantages. Teachers should give students opportunities to use the devices to meaningfully learn and collaborate.

3. SMARTPHONE USE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Language teachers and learners can benefit from the use of smartphones in the classroom, as they can provide flexible tasks and support different activities. However, they can also be a source of distraction, but this is not a new problem caused by smartphones. I have seen students looking out of the window or doing other homework instead of focusing on the task I assigned. I think smartphones are often unfairly blamed for reducing students' attention, but this may not have always been the case. In my opinion, smartphones are a valuable resource for language learning, and I believe more and more language teachers will appreciate them for the possibilities they offer for language learning, both inside and outside the classroom.

The purpose of this section is to summarize some ways to utilize smartphones for English language learning in classrooms.

3.1. Doing information-gap tasks

Teachers can divide students into groups and ask those groups to watch different video clips at the same time. Learners are required to do follow-up tasks such as briefly summarizing the contents of the clips. Then the whole class watch those videos again and match the other groups' descriptions to the videos. (Pinner, 2016)

3.2. Collaborating and sharing with Padlet, Kahoot! and Quizlet

Padlet is the convenient tool that helps to increase learner participation and lets teachers collect real-time feedback from students. With an account of Quizlet or Kahoot!, teachers can create vocabulary flash-cards and multiple choice questions for their students. They can be

used in warming-up, brainstorming and reviewing sessions. Especially, they may make shy learners feel safe when replying in-class questions.

3.3. Accessing online dictionaries

In the past, it took much time to look for meanings of words using printed dictionaries. Nowadays, it is much faster for students to visit online dictionaries, such as

https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/

https://dictionary.cambridge.org/

https://www.macmillandictionary.com/

If learners want to find synonyms and antonyms of words, they can visit:

https://www.thesaurus.com/

(Ehnle, 2020)

3.4. Translating texts

When learning English, students sometimes need to fully understand the meaning of a sentence, a paragraph, or even a text. Nowadays, they can do that without asking their teacher's help. Google Translate, Microsoft Translator, Reverso Translation Dictionary, Naver Papago Translator, SayHi Translate are useful mobile translator apps which can help language learners both inside and outside class. The two most well-known ones are mentioned as follow.

Google Translate is one of the famous translators thanks to its simplicity and versatility. Google Translate's mobile app has various features as well as offline mode. It is now supporting 38 languages for camera translation and over 100 languages for translations of typed or handwritten text.

Although Microsoft Translator supports fewer languages than Google Translate, it is still another big name in translation apps because of its simpler interface than Google Translate's. Its functions include: voice, conversation, photo, and text translations.

(Roth, 2019).

3.5. Remembering notes

If learners cannot take notes fast enough in class, they are allowed to take pictures of the board and Powerpoint slides. However, learners should be encouraged to write their own notes in the notebooks. It is believed that when students take notes during classtime, they can avoid falling asleep and better understand the lessons.

3.6. Searching and confirming information

Pinner (2016) agreed that one of the ways he found very effective was to let his students use smartphones in the class to quickly search the web when he wanted to introduce something or activate their background knowledge about a topic. Students who have some knowledge of the topic can also learn from this by verifying some details, and then they can have the usual group discussion after putting their smartphones back in their bags.

4. CONCLUSION

Using smartphones in the classroom does provide advantages if it is appropriately controlled by both teachers and learners. As for university students, who are adults and highly responsible for their deeds, they should be allowed make use of mobile devices to comfortably support their study. There are also some requirements to consider if smartphones are utilized in class such as stable Internet access and learners' smartphone ownership. When everything is under good control, we can fully enjoy the benefits of the advanced learning environment.

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