



A Study on The Use of Smartphone Applications in English Language Learning with Special Reference to Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Technology and education are essential concepts in the current world. The societies of the world are heading towards technology and education very rapidly. Both the concepts indicate the hasty development taking place everywhere. The progress in the field of technology and education can be taken as a sign of growth in a particular society. The present study aims at explaining the use of smartphone applications to improve English language skills and translation and vocabulary improvement. This paper also seeks to demonstrate the significant role played by smartphone applications amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the present study, it has been demonstrated that smartphone applications aid in improving language skills, translation, and enriching vocabulary. Moreover, smartphone applications have been used virally amid the COVID-19 pandemic. They have a significant role in online teaching and learning. They act as a personal teacher who works 24/7.

Introduction

The world is witnessing a technological revolution. Technology is being applied to most of the human aspects of life. Thus, the present era is called the 'technology era'. The majority has become familiar with using technical tools such as computers, laptops, smartphones, etc. Smartphones are technological devices that play a vital role in our daily life. Although they are used for various purposes, the most concerning one are their use in education (Kalolo, 2019). Since education is the backbone of any nation because it defines its worth, the use of technology has been emphasised in the teaching and learning process (Palvia et al., 2018). Apart from this, the pandemic has also forced people to get familiar with technology in order to connect with others (Kalimullina et al., 2021). Smartphone applications ease teaching and learning. Various applications are available on the applications store, play store, and other online application stores. A variety of applications are available in these stores, and a lot of them are related to educational purposes. The learners of the English language can easily download any application they want. They help enhance the quality of education for the teachers and the students alike. A positive impact has been observed in teaching and learning when the applications related to education are used.

In the last two decades, the use of smartphone applications has rapidly increased. Most people, particularly the learners, have realised the real value during the COVID-19 crisis. The smartphone applications played a vital role during the COVID -19 pandemic. Teachers started using them virally due to the facilitation of online teaching and learning. Summing, educational applications have a vital role in improving the quantity and quality of teaching and learning in both traditional

and distance education. The cooperation between smartphone applications and learning and teaching makes it an exciting topic for different researchers in different subjects.

Objectives

The present study aims to explore the role of smartphone applications in improving English language skills, translation and vocabulary. It further tries to show the significance and role of smartphone applications amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, it determines the impact of smartphone applications on English language learning and education before and amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

Hypothesis

The traditional methods of learning the English language are challenging and not motivating. Hence, this study explores the impact of educational applications and mobile technology in motivating learners. Keeping in mind these aspects, the following are hypotheses have been proposed. The first hypothesis is that mobile educational applications can improve English language skills, translation and vocabulary in particular. The second hypothesis is that Mobile applications play a significant role in English language learning and education amidst the covid-19 pandemic.

Application of the study

This study can help English language learners who have difficulties in English language learning. Likewise, it can benefit the material and curriculum writers in applying updates such as computers, laptops, and smartphones, in teaching contexts. Moreover, English language learners can attain both pedagogical and professional developments in English language skills. A few studies have explored the pedagogical applications of smartphone vocabulary learning.

Smartphone Applications

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) comprises different types of tools, and smartphone applications are one of them. Apparently, smartphones have become an integral part of our daily life. Rapid technological advancements have resulted in them being described as mini-computers. They are used not only for calling or sending text messages but also in the field of education. Language learners can download different applications to help them with different aims, such as translation, writing and spoken language, grammar etc. Applications can be downloaded from the google store and play store. These applications provide students with tests, podcasts, dictionaries, games, quizzes, etc. The aforementioned types of applications can be used by a personal English language trainer who works 24/7. As discussed above, there is a variety of these types of applications. Language learners can download any application they require, for instance, dictionary apps, vocabulary apps, writing apps, etc. The learners can use dictionaries and vocabulary applications to enrich their vocabulary.

Technological development has a noteworthy role in using applications on smartphones and iPad. Several companies, programmers and engineers have constantly been developing educational applications due to their impact on learning. Moreover, it is apparent that such applications can improve English language skills drastically because of the personalised nature of the content available to learners. They learn what they want to learn. Hence, learning is not forced upon them; instead, it is an activity they prefer. Learners who struggle in any skill can download an application

easily, which aids them in enhancing the skill present in a weaker state. Thus, these applications can serve all learners, whether college or school level students.

Smartphone Applications and Covid-19 Pandemic

Most of the countries have been fighting the invisible enemy, which is COVID-19. COVID-19 has been spreading in different countries; it started in China (Wuhan) and is still spreading over the world. It is considered a dangerous disease that threatens human lives. Due to its highly contagious nature, most of the countries declared lockdown. The governments of these countries shut down malls, markets, and educational institutions. From this point onwards, the world began using technology extensively, not only in the teaching and learning of the English language but in all spheres.

Smartphone applications have been used widely during the COVID-19 pandemic. These applications enabled teachers to upload the teaching material and send them via these applications. Apart from these, there are applications that allow the teachers to go online for vis-à-vis teaching by using different applications such as zoom, google meet, we meet, and others. These applications enable teachers and learners to communicate in online classes. The teacher can deliver instructions to his/her class from home by using one of the video conference applications. Additionally, these applications enable the teachers to organise webinars, seminars, and conferences with the least effort. This enables students to join them by one of the mentioned applications.

Few teachers record their videos and upload them either on YouTube or on other websites to let their students watch a video related to their subjects at their leisure. Here it is important to mention that YouTube and educational sites have been widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students can easily find videos on YouTube that talk about any topic they wish to learn. They can also access any educational website and find essays, articles, pdfs, etc.

We can say that the COVID-19 crisis has revealed the real importance of using Information and Communication Technology tools, particularly smartphone applications in education. It has further disclosed the vital role online teaching can play during a pandemic or a similar disaster. Moreover, applications such as zoom, google meet etc., are of utmost significance in online examination during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most schools and universities have been using them in the facilitation of online examinations.

Methods

To serve the purposes, a mixed-method research design is applied here. Quantitative questionnaire survey data were collected from 60 English language learners. The findings of the study revealed that the students hold a positive attitude toward using smartphones in learning the English language. Though they feel engrossed in being active to use a smartphone in classroom settings, there prevail infrastructural and socio-economic constraints that ultimately hamper the holistic development of the English language learners. Though they feel engrossed in being active to use a smartphone in classroom settings, there prevail infrastructural and socio-economic constraints that ultimately hamper the holistic development of the English Language Learners.

Participants

The total number of participants in this study were **60**. Out of these **60** participants, **30** students belonged to M.A first year in the department of English, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). Amongst these **30** students, **15** students are doing M.A in English Literature and the rest of the **15**

students are doing M.A in ELT. The remaining **30** participants out of the **60** respondents were research scholars in the mentioned department. Out of these **30** participants, **15** participants were research scholars in English literature, and the other **15** participants were research scholars in ELT.

They were native speakers of the Hindi language, and their age was between 22 and 28 years. All the participants were skilful in using mobile devices with proficiency in the English language.

Instrument

The present study is a quantitative one and a close-ended questionnaire was designed to collect the data. The questionnaire consists of seven questions. Each question had different options and the participants could select any one of them. The questionnaire was distributed online to the participants. Sufficient time was given to the students to answer the questionnaire. The following part is going to show and discuss the results of the collected data. The data were then analysed using SPSS software and MS excel to export them in a graphical representation.

Results and Discussion

Due to the wide use of smartphones in our daily lives, the data collected results show that **100%** of the participants are using smartphones. When it comes to M.A. students, the results revealed that **10%** of the participants used their smartphones every day for one hour, while **20%** of the participants were using the smartphone for two hours a day. On the other hand, **50%** of the participants were using their smartphones for three hours, and **20%** of the participants were using their smartphones for four hours. Only **10%** of participants were using the smartphone for more than four hours. See chart 1.

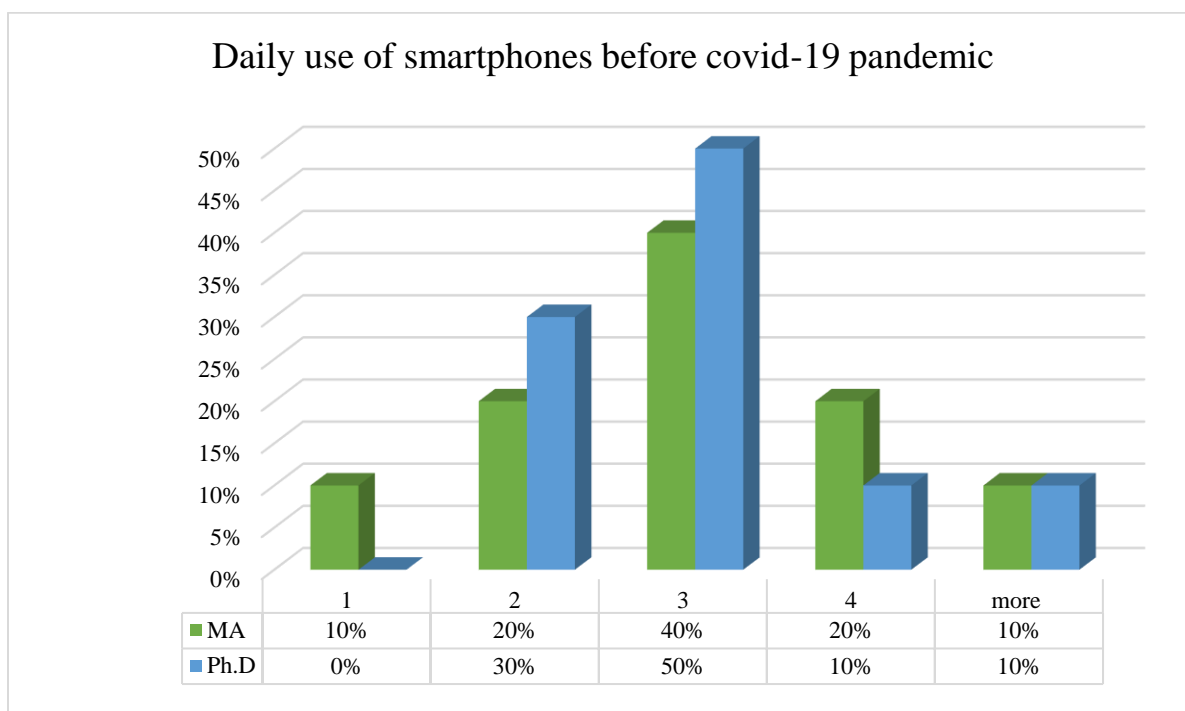


Figure 1. Daily use of smartphones before the covid-19 pandemic

The results related to research scholars show a modest disproportion when compared with the data of M.A. students. The results indicate that **50%** of the participants were using their smartphone

for three hours a day, **30%** were using the smartphone daily for two hours, and **10%** were using the smartphone for four hours. In addition to this, **10%** were using their smartphone for more than four hours a day. See chart 1.

The results further indicate that **90%** of the participants (M.A students and PhD research scholars) downloaded an application pertaining to education and learning in their smartphone, as illustrated in chart 2 given below:

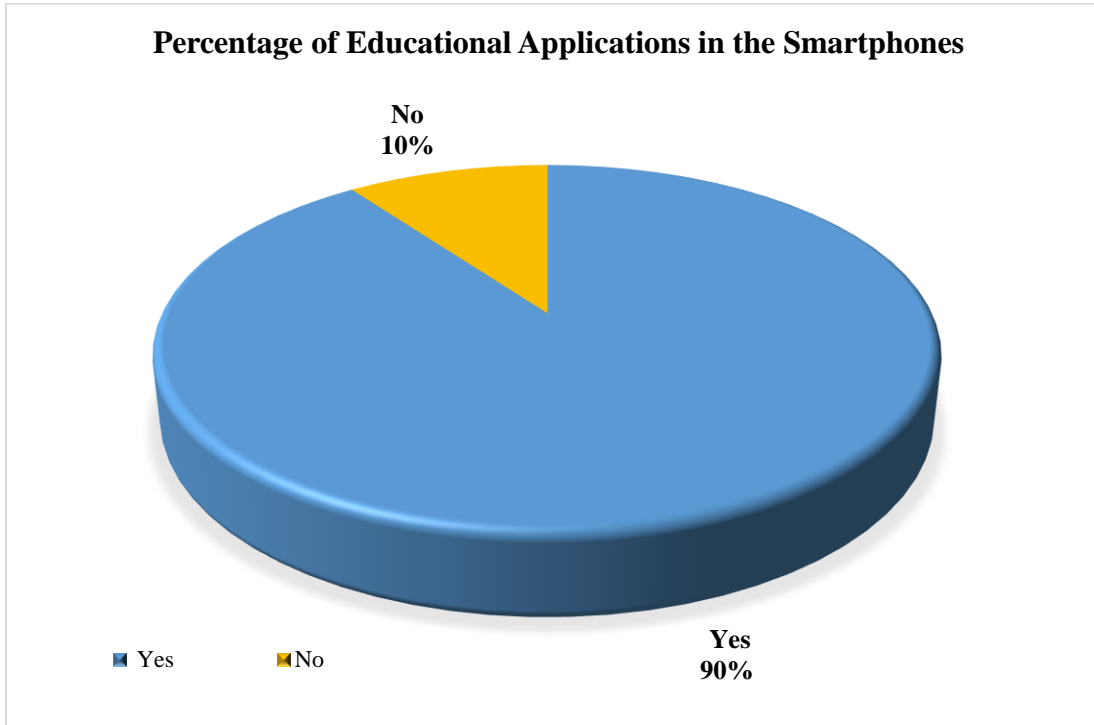


Figure 2. Percentage of educational applications in the smartphones

English language skills are categorised into two types: productive and receptive skills. Apparently, productive skills include speaking and writing, whereas listening and speaking are categorised as receptive skills. According to the data, **10%** of the participants were using applications to improve their listening skills and **10%** were using applications to improve their reading skills. It means that a total of **20%** of the participants were using smartphone applications to improve their receptive skills. On the other hand, **10%** of the participants were using applications to improve their writing skills and **10%** were using applications to improve their speaking skills. It means that a total of **20%** of participants were using smartphone applications to improve their productive skills, as shown in chart 3 below.

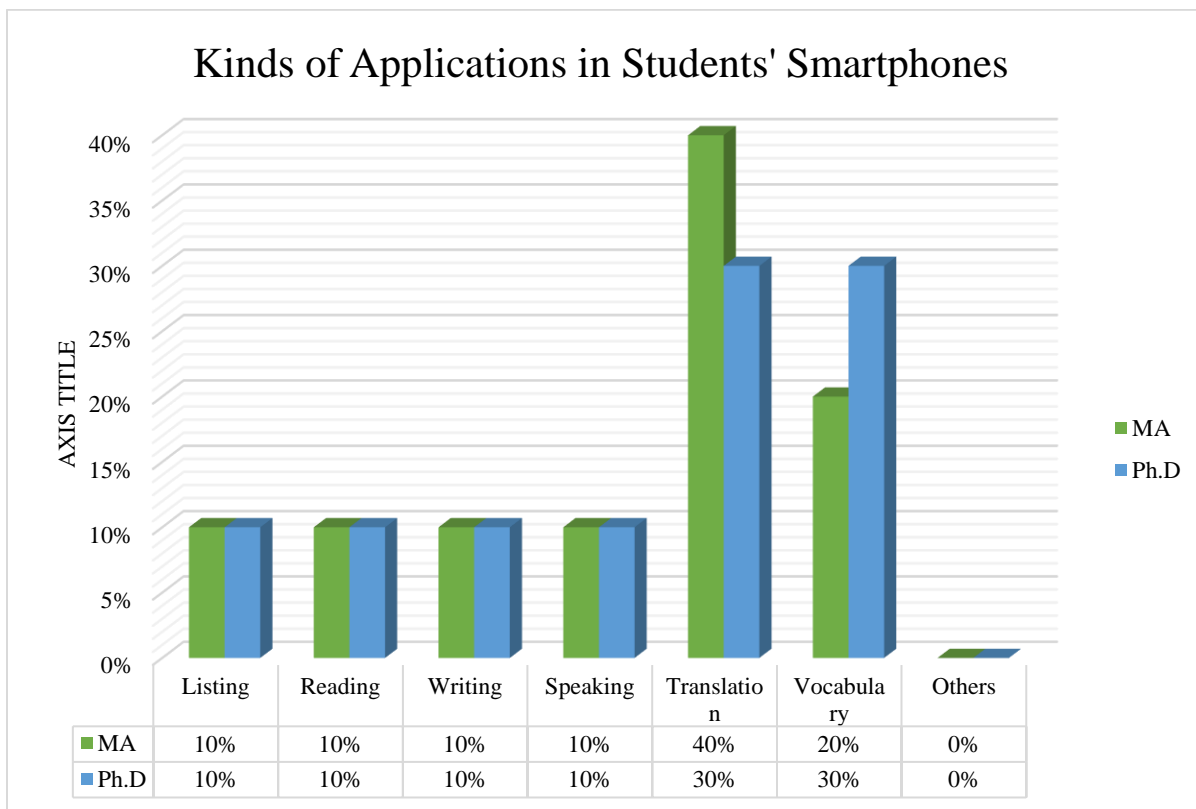


Figure 3. Kinds of applications in students' smartphones.

When it comes to M.A. (English Literature and M.A. ELT) students, the results further indicate that **40%** of the participants were using dictionary apps in their smartphones to assist them in finding the meaning of English words while **20%** of the participants were using such applications to enhance and acquire new vocabulary. On the other hand, the data results of research scholars who participated in the study indicate differences only in the use of dictionaries and vocabulary apps. **30 %** of these participants were using dictionary apps and the other **30 %** were using vocabulary apps. See chart 3.

Based on the results, **70 %** of M.A students agreed that smartphone applications had had a positive impact on their receptive and productive skills. **20 %** of the participants were neutral in their responses, while only **10 %** disagreed with this aspect. In contrast, the opinions of research scholars were not entirely different. **80%** of them agreed that smartphone applications had had a positive impact on their receptive and productive skills, while **20 %** were neutral in their responses. See chart 4.

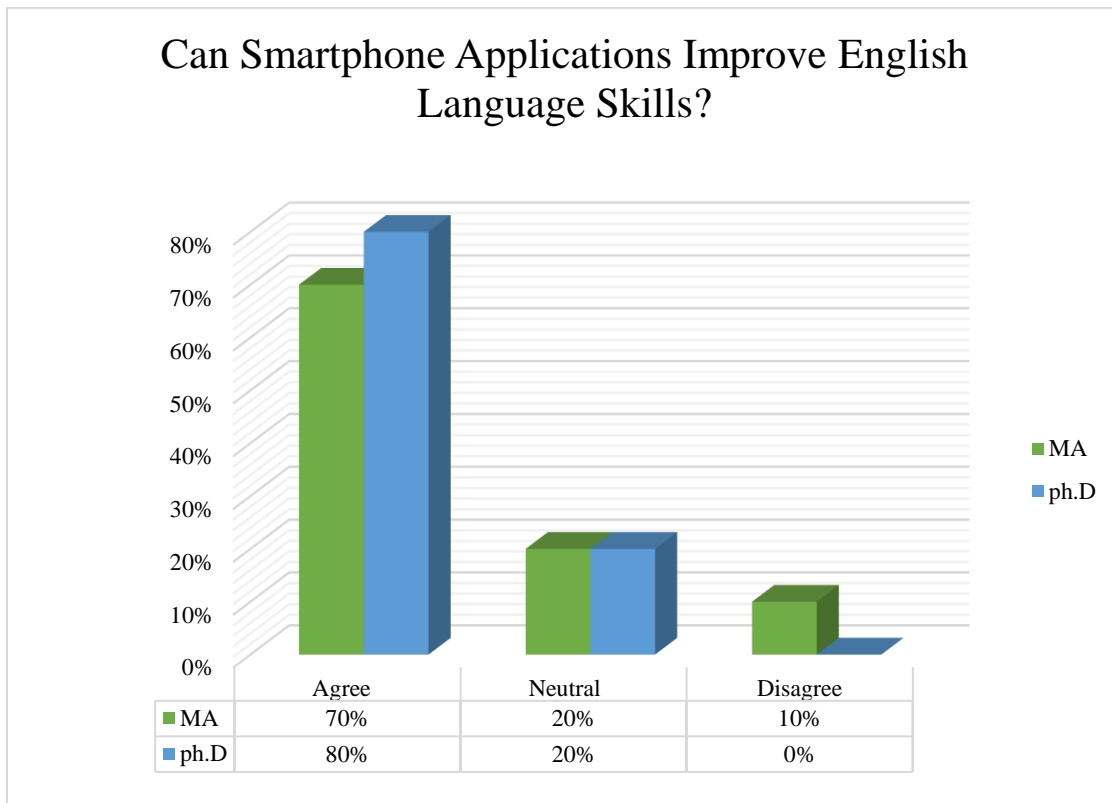


Figure 4. Opinions about the role of applications in improving English language skills

The researcher in the present study particularly references the role of smartphone applications during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher further aims to find the difference between the use of smartphone applications after and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the researcher requests the participants to answer the following questions to make particular references and comparisons; (1) How many hours did you use your smartphone during the COVID-19 pandemic? 1, 2, 3, 4 & More; (2) For what purpose are you using the applications amid COVID -19 pandemic? Language learning, Online classes, Webinar, Others.

The results indicate that **10 %** of M.A students were using their smartphones for one hour per day during the COVID-19 pandemic, while **20 %** were using them for two hours a day. On the other hand, **20 %** were using their smartphones for three hours a day, while **40%** were using their smartphones for four hours a day. Moreover, **20 %** of the participants were using their smartphones for more than four hours a day, as shown in chart 5 below.

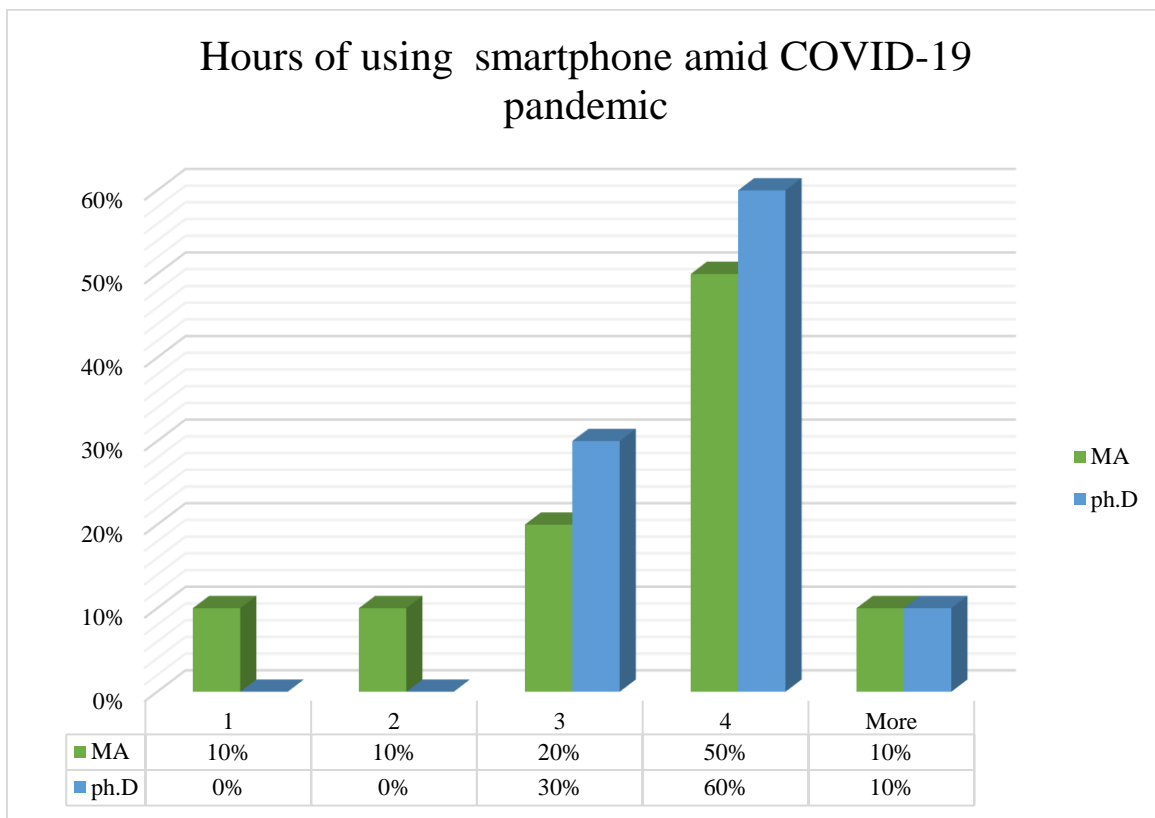


Figure 5. The use of smartphones per day amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

In contrast, there was a slight difference in the use of smartphones by research scholars. **60%** were using the smartphone for four hours a day while **30%** were using the smartphone for three hours and only **10%** were using the smartphone for more than four hours, See chart 5.

The most crucial aspect that the results have revealed is that all the selected participants of M.A students (English Literature/ELT) were using smartphone applications to attend online classes, indicating the vital role of smartphone applications during the covid-19 pandemic. Whereas the data results of research scholars indicated that **60%** were using smartphone applications for webinar proposes amid the covid-19 pandemic, **30 %** were using smartphone applications for language learning, while only 10% were using these applications for other purposes. See chart 6.

It is important to mention that the results of both M.A in English Literature and ELT students have shown that most of the students are following the modern trend of technology and prefer using smartphone applications to improve and enhance different skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. The results have also revealed that both M.A students and research scholars are using dictionary apps on their smartphones for translation purposes. In addition to this, they are also using apps to assist them in acquiring and improving their vocabulary knowledge.

The results also indicate the significant use of smartphone applications amidst the covid-19 pandemic in online teaching. The study has further revealed that all the selected participants of M.A (both English Literature and ELT) have been using these apps for attending online classes. However, there was a disproportion in the results of M.A students and research scholars. There is an obvious indication that smartphone applications play a vital role in language learning,

translation, and enhancing vocabulary. The results have also indicated the indispensable role of smartphone applications in online teaching and webinar organisation amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

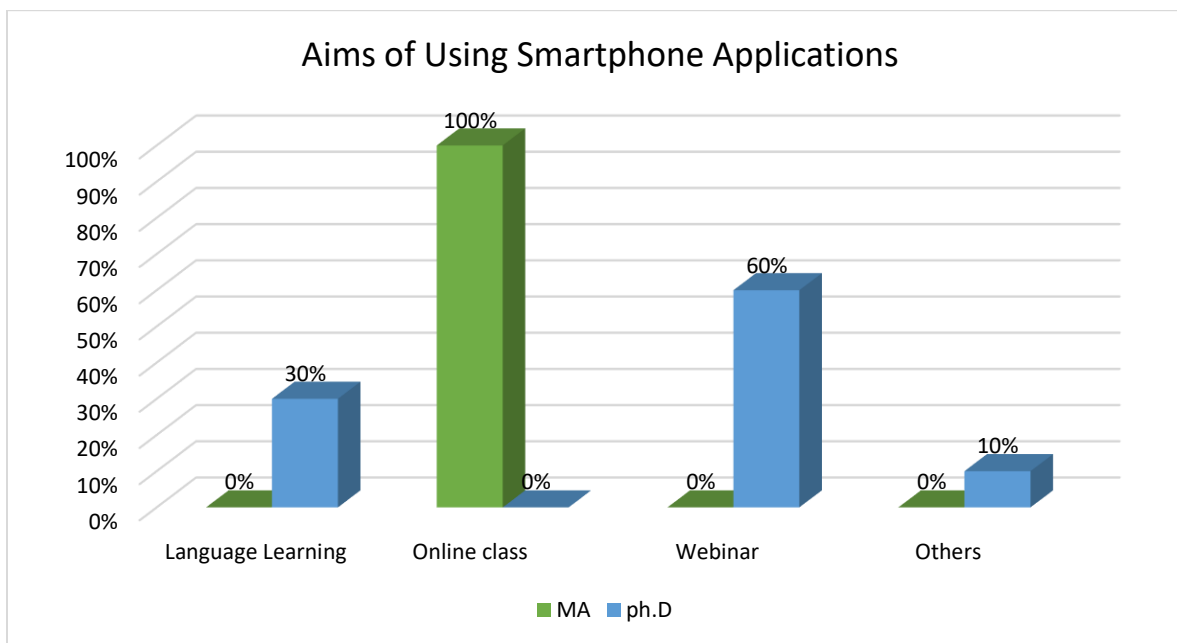


Figure 6. The aims of using smartphone applications amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

Integrating technology in education is an excellent step toward better learning. Smartphones are virtual devices and can be found in the pocket of everybody. The last two decades have witnessed a noticeable change in using technology in different spheres of human life. The present study has shown that smartphone applications assist English language learners in improving their productive and receptive skills. Applications such as dictionaries, particularly those related to vocabulary, have a significant role in the translation process and in acquiring and enhancing the vocabulary. Amidst the COVID-19, smartphone applications have been virally used for different aims, and online teaching is one of them. The study results have shown a disparity in utilising the smartphone applications between M.A and Ph.D candidates before and amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The results have proved that all the M.A participants were using these applications to attend the online class. In contrast, the Ph.D research scholars were using smartphone apps for webinars, language learning and other aims. This study has also proved that most of the students prefer using smartphone applications for learning and coping with scientific advances.

Suggestions

There is a further need to highlight the significance of smartphone applications in language learning. The learners should be aware that using smartphone applications related to language learning will improve their language skills. Moreover, these applications have a role in helping the learners in translation and enhancing the vocabulary. The teachers should take the initiative of motivating their students to utilise technology in language learning. They should also suggest at least one application to encourage them to use technology during an academic year to familiarise them with how these applications could be used to improve their language skills.

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