The Role of Smartphone towards English Speaking and Listening Skills Enhancement: A Case of the University of Rwanda

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Abstract: This study sought to explore the role of smartphone applications to enhance English speaking and listening skills at the University of Rwanda. The study is a case study that used voluntary response sampling techniques with 20 students and 6 lecturers. Findings revealed that students used various smartphone applications such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Tiktok and Instagram for English skills enhancement. Smartphone applications helped students to acquire speaking and listening skills in a variety of ways. Furthermore, it was found that various strategies such as recorded videos, playing games, audio songs and WhatsApp conversations were used to enhance their language skills mastery. The researchers recommend that the university authorities should ensure availability of internet so that students may use their smartphone applications effectively to enhance English skills. Lecturers should make use of smartphone applications too because the method is a powerful tool for effective learning.

Keywords: ICT; Smartphone; English Language Skills; You Tube; WhatsApp; UR-CE.

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Introduction

The fast growing advancement of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) has made potential contributions to English language education. According to Nhung (2014), the use of technology gives students opportunities to practice speaking and listening. The implementation of ICT in teaching and learning has activity attracted great interest from practitioners in higher education institutions. Due to its interactive and dynamic nature, ICT has the stamina to meet the needs of individual students. Ammanni and Aparanjani (2016) reported that the use of ICT can help students to master English speaking and listening skills. They added that ICT has become an essential tool in every day teaching and learning because it addresses needs of students and it provides opportunities by effectively guiding their learning.

According to Raja and Nagasubramani (2018), technology is part of academic curriculum as it helps students in the process of learning. Technology has changed the educative process from passive to active and from reactive to interactive. Furthermore, using ICT for learning provides useful feedback through various interactive features. Soviphea et al. (2018) argued that using technology in learning English skills such as speaking and listening can be beneficial as technology exposes

learners to authentic tasks and materials. It also provides opportunities for collaboration across distances. Petty (1993) as cited by Soviphea et al. (2018) claimed that through technology, students could effectively improve their speaking and listening skills.

Chenda (2018) conducted a study at a higher educational institution in Cambodia with an objective of examining the differences in students' performance in speaking before and after the implementation of ICT in an English as Foreign Language classroom. The results of the study revealed that students spoke better English after implementing the ICT in the learning process. According to Al Aamri (2011), smartphones positively contribute to effective learning of English in various ways. First, they help learners to improve their literacy skills. They enhance both independent and collaborative learning experiences. Furthermore, smartphones help learners to identify areas where they need assistance and support. Finally, they help to bridge the digital divide gap in the learning context. Nizeyimana (2014) argued that smartphones help students to exchange emails, to effectively receive new vocabularies and to explain English idioms.

In Rwanda, the Ministry of Education drafted an ICT for Education Policy in 2008, which states clearly the mission of the education sector such as creating a shared mandate for integrating ICT in all educational institutions. The purpose was to support the development of better teaching and learning to equip learners with 21st essential skills. Thus, public and private higher learning institutions in Rwanda had to develop their local ICT policies with the inspiration from the national policy (Byungura et al. 2016). In 2018, the University of Rwanda launched smart classrooms that sought to provide students with ICT advanced skills through digital learning and teaching. The smart classrooms were launched with the objective of integrating the ICT pedagogy in education system to facilitate effective learning (University of Rwanda, 2021). This study therefore sought to explore the role of smartphone towards English speaking and listening skills enhancement at the University of Rwanda. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What kinds of smartphone applications are used for English Learning at the University of Rwanda?

2. What role do smart phone applications play toward English Speaking and Listening Skills?
3. What strategies do students use through Smart Phone applications to enhance reading and listening skills?

Literature Review
The Use of Smartphone in High Education
Smartphones are widespread everywhere in the world and they have become popular among students for communication purposes (Al Aamri, 2011). They offer a motivating alternative for second language learning as using real world resources for teaching and learning in the classroom makes education more meaningful and relevant. In the United Arab Emirates, Alfawareh and Jusoh (2014) as cited by Soviphea (2018) studied the use of smartphone for learning and found that 91 percent of students used the smartphone technology for learning purpose while the minority used it for other activities such as downloading videos, mp3 songs and so on. Therefore, they concluded that smartphones could help students in improving learning purposes.

The use of computer tablets, mobile phones and other electronic devices has become a necessity in every human activity including academic and professional (Uwizeyimana, 2018). According to Liliia and Gulnara (2016) recent year have demonstrated great deal in using mobile technology in the high educational system. Students can study through mobile devices like mp3 prayer, video prayer etc. Using smart phone helps students to access information easily. A study conducted by Özgür Şahan (2016) in Bursa Technical University revealed that utilization of mobile technology is useful and beneficial to learners due to ease of access to information as smartphones help learners to immediately receive the information they want. Habiba and Mohamed (2021) carried out a study at one Arabian university on the role of smartphones in gaining English language skills. Their study findings revealed that smartphones are important and useful in simplifying the process of learning. The findings further reported that using smartphones could make the learning process easy through downloading educational resources.

Learning English Skills through WhatsApp
A study of Jamal Kaid (2019) found that WhatsApp has a positive impact on learning English skills like speaking and listening. He explained that through

WhatsApp group, students could change ideas effectively. WhatsApp is useful for students who are learning the English as Foreign Languages. Other results reveal that WhatsApp motivated students to use the language more efficiently and reduced their anxiety. In additional, the researcher explained that using WhatsApp application motivated the students to learn English as foreign Languages.

Ahmed (2019) found that WhatsApp application strengthens and gives learners a broader understanding of topics discussed in classrooms, clarifying more what they studied through WhatsApp groups. The author conducted a study at Aden University on how WhatsApp can develop English skills and found that there is a remarkable progress, which students achieved in their speaking and listening when they used the WhatsApp groups. This occurred when the students met in WhatsApp groups and discussed their lessons in English whereby when one of them make mistakes in speaking, they correct him/her immediately and that mistake would not come again. Jafari and Chalak (2016) cited by Ahmed (2019) examined the role of WhatsApp in learning vocabulary at an Iranian university. The study revealed that using WhatsApp in learning vocabulary had a significant role compared to other approaches used. This means that WhatsApp as smartphone application has a significant contribution toward learning English skills.

YouTube and English Speaking and Listening
In recent years, You Tube has become increasingly popular in the world. The study of Putri (2019) on You Tube for self-regulated language learning at the Islamic University in Jakarta showed that there are various video contents that students can watch in a day to learn English. Those videos help students in the process of learning English where they find new words and new styles of speaking. The author concluded that the more one makes effort in learning English through You Tube videos, the better one becomes skilled. Therefore, YouTube video is a motivating media which gives students a better exposure toward effective speaking and listening.

In the study of Nawal & Tabarek, (2020) a significant number of students agreed that learning through YouTube videos is interesting. Adriadi et al. (2020) conducted a study at the University of Indonesia about student's experiences in online language learning by using You Tube. Participants positively expressed that learning English skill through YouTube was practical and innovative in improving students' English skills. One of the students revealed, "I learned about how to study English better as I practiced the clues... I got improved in my listening, vocabulary, grammar, and I like watching common grammatical errors recommended by my teacher." Therefore, using You Tube in English learning is very crucial because through it, students improve their listening skills, get new vocabulary and increase their grammar mastery.

Methodology
Research Design
This study used the case study design whereby interview with students and lecturers provided qualitative data that addressed the problem under investigation. A case study can be a person, a group of people, or a unit for which research information is being sought (Thankappan, 2020). Therefore, students and lecturers from the University of Rwanda in the college of Education is a case of this study.

Population and Sampling
As the University of Rwanda has several campuses across the country, this study took place at Nyagatare and Rukara campuses, which offer educational courses. Students who take Education must know how to speak and listen in English language because they need English for their learning and for their future teaching jobs. The study used voluntary response sampling technique to reach 20 students from the two campuses. The study also involved 6 lecturers for interviews.

Validity and Reliability
The study established the validity through critical scrutiny of the instruments against research questions by experts in English language. The study established reliability through data triangulation in that both students and teachers were interviewed to give information related to the problem under investigation.

Treatment of Data
The researchers analyzed the data from the interview through content analysis approach whereby similar themes were assembled together in an attempt to answer the research questions.

Ethical Considerations
The study employed certain ethical procedures. First, all participants were asked to confirm if they were willing to participate in the study. The researchers assured participants that the

information they were going to provide would be used for research purposes only. The researchers kept names of informants confidentially.

Findings and Discussion

Research question 1: What kinds of smartphone applications are used for English learning at the University of Rwanda?

Results from the interview schedule show that students used five applications in their smartphones to facilitate the learning of English skills. Such applications are YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Tiktok and Instagram. Some interviewed students gave different examples of applications that helped them to learn. One student, for example, reported that Facebook, WhatsApp, You Tube, Instagram and Tiktok have been useful in learning English language skills.

Another student reported to have been using Tiktok, You Tube and Facebook in English learning. Literature supports the reported platforms as potential opportunities for effective language learning. Facebook, for example, is a popular social networking site that gives learners the power to build community and connect with friends online. It helps students to improve their English proficiency and enables them to communicate, stay up-to-date and keep in touch with other learners thereby sharing experiences in their learning process (Zhang 2018). On the other hand, Instagram is a popular photo and video sharing platform. It is a students' favorite app for learning languages through uploaded videos and photos. On Instagram, student can write about their daily activities and provide feedback to their classmates (Bazimaziki, 2022). Tiktok, WhatsApp and YouTube are most popular video sharing and social media platforms, which enable students to learn languages through uploaded videos, which helps learners to watch them and follow the content carefully (Putri 2019; Ahmed, 2019).

Research question 2: What role do smartphone applications play toward English Speaking and Listening Skills?

As this research question sought to establish the role played by smartphone applications toward English Speaking and Listening Skills, students revealed that their smartphone applications help them in learning speaking and listening skills in English language in a very special way. Students reported that "our teachers send us audio and video

to our class WhatsApp groups. This allows us to communicate with other students about the assignments and mostly all of them are in the English language." One of the students reported that

> I usually visit some video cites such as You Tube, Instagram, Tiktok and WhatsApp groups to watch contents in English language. This helps me to communicate with my friends who live all over the world, some of them living in English-speaking countries. Therefore, we can talk in English and in that way I gain listening skills.

Another student reported, "I use YouTube application in my smartphone to find songs in English. When I listen to these songs, it helps me to understand the content. I gain vocabularies which next time I use to explain myself." Another student revealed, "WhatsApp is good and I like it. It makes me feel free to speak English when I am with other friends in WhatsApp groups."

One more student reported that

> On WhatsApp, I like to chat with people outside the country, for example in the United States of America, England, South Africa and other English-speaking countries in the Great Lakes region such as Tanzania and Uganda. This helps me to speak English better, especially since we use audio because writing is so difficult.

Through interview, lecturers revealed that they used technology to teach students. One lecturer, for instance, said, "we use video presentations and audio recordings through smart phones for teaching languages especially English. Using video and audio record is the best way to teach our students about listening and speaking English well." According to Altam (2020), social media platform like WhatsApp, Instagram, Tiktok, You Tube and Facebook allow students to practice English-speaking skills without being surrounded by their peers and without being afraid to commit errors and mistakes. According to Nawal &Tabarek (2020), YouTube creates knowledge as it offers multimedia forms of education. Comprehension level of learners is higher than 75% when learners see and hear.

Research Question 3: What strategies do students use through Smart Phone applications to enhance reading and listening skills?

This research question sought to establish strategies used through smart phone applications to enhance reading and listening skills.

Recorded Video

One of the strategies used was downloading materials and playing them later for learning. This was revealed by a student who held the view that "In my smartphone, I have an application called Vidmate. This application helps me to download videos from different YouTube channels. I use these videos to learn English skills." Another respondent said: "I like English videos since they make me gain a lot and improving my knowledge including English skills, because I try to imitate the way in which the English people speak."

One teacher added, "through downloaded video from YouTube, it is very likely that a student with a smartphone and good skilled in technology would use downloaded videos to teach themselves how to speak and understand English." Therefore, downloading recorded videos was a powerful strategy used to enhance English skills. Adriadi et al. (2020) explained that recorded video helps one to understand the context. This is different from the reading texts and listening activities as video provides strong graphic signals. These support the students to understand what is happening even when the language is hard to listen or to follow.

Playing Games

Playing games was another strategy used by students in the process of mastering English skills. One lecturer held the view that it is good for students to use all possible methods to master English. He reported that there are many different ways of learning, playing games included. He was also captured saying, "Most of the smartphone games I know are in the English language, so students should choose a game that interests them and play it for effective mastery." About playing games, one student reported that

> There are many different games in my smartphone. For example, football games, driving…and these games are often in English. When I open to play a game of football, I must care about introductions of football which is going to take place and the introduction is always in English. This makes me to understand what they want to say.

Alrajhi (2020) supported the use of games for language learning when he suggested that Learning English language skills by using gaming should be encouraged. The use of games for learning has the root from the Interest Stimulation theory and Arousal theories, which explain how engagement in gaming practices can foster cognitive processing abilities. Similarly, Latifah (2020) reported that video games are useful in learning English materials as they develop students' interaction and thinking capacity.

Audio Songs

Audio songs were reported as a powerful strategy for language skills mastery. One student revealed, "Songs help me to understand English because I try to listen carefully to understand what the artist is saying. This make me to get vocabularies of the song and try to use it myself." Another student enjoyed the rhythms of songs sung in English as she said, "I like English songs because of their good rhythm and lyrics. This makes me understand the content. This further allows me to learn more about the language, both speaking and listening due to the vocabularies I get from the songs." Ali (2020) asserted that songs reinforce language acquisition in a very special way as students listen to them in the learning process.

WhatsApp Conversations

Students reported that chatting through WhatsApp is useful in learning English through the smartphone. Through interviews, one student revealed:

> In our class, we have a WhatsApp group called 'English Language.' This group was created so that we can learn English skills among ourselves. There are people who have a lot of knowledge and other who are feeble. Therefore, we do exchange ideas about English so that the strongest in English can help the weak.

One more student said, "I have a WhatsApp group with classmates. When we get a moment, we use English instead of Kinyarwanda. This is the plan we have as university students. It helps us to master English both speaking and listening." Ahmed (2019) explains that WhatsApp chart is very powerful in learning English skills. This researcher says that writing on WhatsApp in a group allows students to gain different English words that they can use in class when they are doing assignment presentations. Taken together, it was also found that charting on WhatsApp groups allowed students

to discuss the lessons they had been taught, how they do their homework and the way they would use to revise lessons they have learned in class.

Conclusion and Recommendations
Conclusions
The study concludes that students at University of Rwanda used various smartphone applications for English skills enhancement. Such applications include YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Tiktok and Instagram which were useful for effective acquisition of language skills.

Smartphone applications helped learners to acquire speaking and listening skills in a variety of ways. For example, as teachers sent audio and video clips to students, the clips allowed students to communicate with their fellows about assignments given. Furthermore, students gained vocabularies, which they later used in their speech. The clips enabled students to feel free to speak English with friends through WhatsApp groups.

Students used various strategies such as recorded videos, playing games, audio songs and WhatsApp conversations to enhance their language skills mastery. Recorded video, for instance, enabled them to playback the content for further reference in the process of learning just as games stimulated their thinking capacity and vocabulary building.

Recommendations
Based on conclusions of the study, the researchers recommend that the university authorities should ensure availability of internet so that students may use their smartphone applications effectively to enhance English skills. The researchers further recommend that lecturers use smartphone applications to enhance teaching and learning because of their effectiveness.

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