SMARTPHONE DISTRACTIONS IN VOCABULARY LEARNING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The pervasive use of smartphones in Indonesia has significantly impacted educational practices, offering substantial benefits for vocabulary learning, such as easy access to information and interactive applications. However, these devices also present a major challenge: digital distraction. This study investigates the types and contributing factors of distractions experienced by second-semester English students at a university in Indonesia during vocabulary learning via smartphones. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 33 students and follow-up interviews with three selected respondents. Quantitative findings revealed that notifications or pop-up messages (75.8%), texting (72.75%), social media and entertainment applications (68.2%), and multitasking (68.15%) were the most prevalent and disruptive types of distractions. Qualitative analysis further contextualized these distractions, highlighting habitual app-switching and the allure of entertainment content as key disruptors. The factors contributing to these distractions were identified as low self-regulation (74.7%), attentional impulsiveness (69.6%), and the ease of access to social media (71.7%). Interview data underscored the role of emotional regulation, such as using entertainment apps to combat boredom or tiredness, and habitual behavior in exacerbating these distractions. The study concludes that while smartphones are powerful tools for language learning, their potential for distraction is significant and multifaceted. It recommends that students adopt better self-regulation strategies and use focus-enhancing features, while educators and institutions should integrate digital literacy training to promote more mindful and effective smartphone use in academic contexts.

Keywords: Digital Distraction, Vocabulary Learning, Smartphone Use, Self-Regulation, Language Learning

ABSTRAK

Penggunaan telepon pintar yang meluas di Indonesia telah mempengaruhi praktik pendidikan, menawarkan manfaat yang besar untuk pembelajaran kosakata, seperti kemudahan akses informasi dan aplikasi interaktif. Namun, perangkat ini juga menghadirkan tantangan yang besar: gangguan digital. Studi ini menyelidiki jenis dan faktor penyebab gangguan yang dialami oleh mahasiswa semester dua program studi Bahasa Inggris di sebuah universitas di Indonesia selama pembelajaran kosakata melalui penggunaan telepon pintar. Data dikumpulkan

melalui kuesioner yang diberikan kepada 33 mahasiswa dan wawancara lanjutan dengan tiga responden terpilih. Temuan kuantitatif mengungkapkan bahwa notifikasi atau pesan *pop-up* (75,8%), berkirim pesan teks (72,75%), aplikasi media sosial dan hiburan (68,2%), dan multitasking (68,15%) adalah jenis gangguan yang paling lazim dan paling mengganggu. Analisis kualitatif lebih lanjut mengkontekstualisasikan gangguan-gangguan tersebut, menyoroti kebiasaan beralih antar aplikasi dan daya tarik konten hiburan sebagai pengganggu utama. Faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap gangguan ini diidentifikasi sebagai regulasi diri yang rendah (74,7%), impulsivitas atensional (69,6%), dan kemudahan akses ke media sosial (71,7%). Data wawancara menekankan peran regulasi emosional, seperti penggunaan aplikasi hiburan untuk mengatasi kebosanan atau kelelahan, dan perilaku kebiasaan yang dapat memperburuk gangguan ini. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun *smartphone* adalah alat yang bermanfaat untuk pembelajaran bahasa, potensinya untuk mengganggu cukup signifikan dan multifaset. Studi ini merekomendasikan agar mahasiswa mengadopsi strategi regulasi diri yang lebih baik dan menggunakan fitur-fitur peningkat fokus, sementara pendidik dan institusi harus mengintegrasikan pelatihan literasi digital untuk mempromosikan penggunaan smartphone yang lebih bijaksana dan efektif dalam konteks akademik.

Kata Kunci: Gangguan Digital, Pembelajaran Kosakata, Penggunaan Telepon Pintar, Regulasi Diri, Pembelajaran Bahasa

A. Introduction

Smartphones have evolved into a fundamental component of the modern educational landscape, a trend particularly evident in Indonesia, where recent data indicates that approximately three-quarters of the population are active users. This pervasive adoption has transformed pedagogical approaches, especially in language learning. For vocabulary acquisition specifically, smartphones offer significant benefits by providing students with flexible and immediate access to information, interactive applications such as Quizlet and Duolingo, and platforms that facilitate collaboration. Studies, such as those by Shehadeh (2024), confirm that these tools enhance learning strategies, boost motivation, and ultimately contribute to greater vocabulary mastery by allowing students to effortlessly search for definitions, pronunciation, and usage.

However, this integration of technology is a double-edged sword. The very connectivity that enables these learning benefits also makes the device a potent source of distraction. Research by Metruk (2022) identifies distraction as a primary challenge when students use smartphones to develop language skills. Notifications from social media, instant messages, and the allure of entertainment

applications constantly threaten to divert attention away from learning tasks, significantly reducing their effectiveness. This creates a critical paradox in contemporary education: the smartphone is simultaneously an essential learning tool and a major disruptive influence.

The problem of digital distraction is well-established in academic literature. Defined by Mayildurai et al. (2019) as the process of diverting a person's focus from a primary task, it manifests in various forms. Scholars like McCoy (2020) and Abidin (2023) categorize common distractions as texting, email, social media browsing, web surfing, and gaming. Furthermore, the factors contributing to this phenomenon are complex and multifaceted. Theoretical frameworks from Wang et al. (2022) and Throuvala et al. (2021) highlight key contributors such as attentional impulsiveness, the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), poor emotion regulation, low self-regulation, and the mistaken belief in the efficacy of multitasking.

A preliminary investigation suggests that second-semester English students at a university in Indonesia, who regularly employ smartphones for vocabulary learning, are highly susceptible to these challenges. Therefore, this study is designed to explore this issue within this specific academic context. The research has two central objectives: first, to identify the most prevalent and disruptive types of distractions encountered during smartphone-based vocabulary learning, and second, to investigate the underlying factors that contribute to these distractions.

In this study, Quantitative data will be gathered through a structured questionnaire to measure the frequency of distractions and the prevalence of contributing factors among the student sample. This will be supplemented by qualitative interviews to gain deeper, contextual insights into the students' personal experiences and behaviors. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for students, educators, and institutions to develop more effective strategies for mitigating digital distractions, thereby harnessing the full positive potential of smartphones in education.

B. Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining

quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively investigate the types and contributing factors of digital distractions during vocabulary learning via smartphones (Hadju & Aulia, 2022). The sample for this research consists of 33 respondents, second-semester students from the English study program at a university in Indonesia.

The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire, developed based on a review of relevant literature to ensure validity. It was designed to measure two main constructs: (1) the types of distractions, using a frequency-based Likert scale (1=Never to 5=Always), and (2) the factors contributing to these distractions, using an agreement-based Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms.

Quantitative data from 33 respondents were analyzed using univariate tabulation (Gupta, 2022; Kumar, 2008). This involved grouping responses into categories, calculating frequencies, and presenting the results in statistical tables to show the percentage distribution for each indicator. To gain deeper contextual insights, qualitative data were supplemented through follow-up interviews with three selected respondents.

C. Research Finding and Discussion

The quantitative findings of this study clearly delineate the most prevalent and disruptive types of digital distractions encountered by students. The data reveals that notifications or pop-up messages are the most significant distraction, with 75.8% of respondents. This is closely followed by texting (72.75%), social media and entertainment applications (68.2%), watching videos (68.2%), and the habit of multitasking with other applications (68.15%). These results indicate that interactive and alert-based interruptions pose the greatest threat to focus. In contrast, distractions such as email and listening to music were perceived as less severe, demonstrating a varied spectrum of disruptiveness among different smartphone activities.

Furthermore, the analysis identified the key factors contributing to these distractions. The most influential factors were Low Self-

Regulation and Emotion Regulation & Mental Health, each with 74.7% of respondents agreeing to their impact. The Ease of Access to Social Media (71.7%) and Attentional Impulsiveness (69.6%) were also identified as major contributors. These factors, supported by additional influences like the belief in multitasking efficacy and the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), create a complex web of reasons why students struggle to maintain focus. The consistently high scores in categories 3 and 4 across these factors confirm they play a substantial role in the distraction phenomenon.

The qualitative insights provide crucial depth and context to these numerical findings, crystallizing into two central themes. Regarding the types of distractions, interviews confirmed they manifest as specific behaviour: the powerful pull of social media notifications, habitual app-switching described as a "reflex," the allure of entertainment content like TikTok videos, and the temptation of mobile games. Concerning the contributing factors, the interviews illuminated the underlying reasons, which included the easy access and constant temptation offered by the device, low device control (though some students used strategies like "Do Not Disturb"), using apps to regulate emotions like boredom or fatigue, and ingrained habits of compulsive phone checking.

Table 1. Self-Regulation Category of the Students

Score	Q1 (%): Have difficulty controlling myself to stay focused on the goal of learning	Q2 (%): Rarely make a special strategy so as not to be distracted	Q3 (%): Often cannot stay focused for long when learning	Mean (%)
1	3%	6.1%	0%	3.1%
2	12.1%	18.2%	12.1%	14.1 %
3	45.5%	39.4%	57.6%	47.5 %
4	30.3%	27.3%	24.2%	27.2 %
5	9.1%	9.1%	6.1%	8.1%

The strong convergence between the quantitative and qualitative data underscores a powerful triangulation of results. The high quantitative scores for social media distractions and low self-regulation were vividly exemplified by interview participants who described reflexively checking apps and their inability to control impulsive phone use. This integration confirms that smartphone distraction is not a simple matter of willpower but a complex interplay between the device's design

(e.g., notifications, easy access), individual psychological factors (e.g., impulsiveness, emotional state), and learned behaviours (e.g., habitual multitasking). These findings align with established theories from scholars like Wang et al. (2022) and Throuvala et al. (2021), validating their models in the specific context of Indonesian English language learners.

D. Conclusion

This study confirms that smartphones present a dual role in language education, serving as both powerful facilitators and significant disruptors of learning. The findings demonstrate that the respondents experience considerable digital distractions during vocabulary learning, primarily from notifications or pop-up messages (75.8%), texting (72.75%), social media and entertainment applications (68.2%), and multitasking with other applications (68.15%). These distractions are driven by underlying factors including low self-regulation (74.7%), attentional impulsiveness (69.6%), ease of access to social media (71.7%), and emotional regulation needs.

The implications of these findings underscore the critical importance of developing self-regulation skills among students. As the primary users of digital learning tools, students must learn to manage their device usage consciously to harness the benefits of smartphones while minimizing their disruptive potential. Self-regulation empowers students to control their learning environment, resist digital temptations, and maintain focus on academic tasks—skills that are essential not only for vocabulary acquisition but for academic success in the digital age overall.

For educators and institutions, these results highlight the necessity of integrating digital literacy and self-regulation training into the curriculum. Rather than prohibiting smartphone use, educational policies should promote mindful engagement with technology through structured interventions, workshops, and the promotion of focus-enhancing tools.

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