

Smartphone Use of Freshman Students at a Private University in Iraq

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Abstract: A wealth of research has been carried out on smartphone use in line with the revolutionary advancements in ICT technologies. However, employing an example of figurative language to describe smartphone use is not common in previous studies. This study was conducted to contribute to the literature in this regard. Therefore, 40 Foundation English students at a private university in Erbil, Iraq were chosen by systematic sampling method. The students took a survey, a questionnaire and an interview within 10 weeks. Quizizz software program was used to conduct the questionnaire and the survey. Subsequently, MAXQDA software program was used to transcribe and analyze the interview. Content analysis method was preferred to classify the themes and interpret accordingly. During the data collection process, students' favorite activities, daily or weekly usage and importance of smartphones were explored in detail. Students' simile examples were classified under 4 subheadings which were food and drink, electronic devices, stationery items and people. The findings revealed that social media platforms were the most popular pastimes; the amount of time on smartphone increased during the weekend; smartphone addiction level was noticeable. The findings of this study may have some implications on the problematic use of smartphones and its adverse effects on users' personal, social and professional lives.

Keywords: Smartphone Use, Simile, Addiction Level

1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICT) have received much attention to create, share, store and exchange information. These technological tools include laptops, PCs, USB flash drives, tablets and smartphones. Smartphones are the most popular ones at all ages for their various functions. For instance, smartphones have been widely used to text, send or receive emails, watch videos, read e-books, follow the latest news, do online shopping, take online lessons, play games and surf other websites. In other words, smartphone revolution has occurred since the advent of first smartphones in the 1970s by Martin Cooper. Considering the diverse functions of smartphones, smartphone sales and subscription rates have risen exponentially. Mobile subscriptions were surpassed 8.5 billion level in 2022, and over 1.4 billion smartphones were sold only in 2022 (Statista, 2022). The smartphone can link people at any time, in any place, with anyone thanks to its mobility and portability (Park, 2005; Kara & Yildiz, 2022). Smartphones have been readily used as means of communication to make connections among people globally.

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Smartphones have been extensively used by users to develop academically and professionally. For instance, smartphones are common to receive or deliver lessons remotely.

Students and teachers can exchange information through live lessons, chat boxes or e-mails (Bilgin et al., 2022). Nearly all learning management systems (LMS) and video communication companies allow students to connect and get benefit by their smartphones. It is convenient to get education and earn a degree remotely thanks to advancements in smartphone technology (Wajcman et al., 2007). Subsequently, the guardians of the students can be informed by teachers frequently for the betterment of the education. Once parents have been informed timely by their smartphones, parent-teacher communication can increase the levels of students considerably. Moreover, the number of conflicts between parents and the teachers can decrease if they contact with each other regularly. Likewise, smartphones have been used widely in people`s professional lives. To illustrate, drivers can take advantage of their smartphones to find the directions with the help of GPS navigation apps. Furthermore, people can seek jobs online through worldwide employment websites by being online with their smartphones. In addition, businesspeople can monitor their sales rates online with their smartphones. They can increase the efficiency once they reach the required data with one click. Similarly, smartphones can be used to complete projects with their advanced features (David et al., 2015). Nowadays, smartphones are capable of drawing, editing, merging professionally. These features can be used in cooperation as well with other contributors. It can be argued that smartphones have diverse effects in people`s academic and professional lives.

Apart from many positive aspects of smartphones, it is obvious that smartphones can have some drawbacks in people`s lives. These drawbacks have arisen if the balance between using the smartphone and taking a break cannot be established well (Khan, 2008). For instance, office workers can be dismissed from their positions on grounds that they are using the mobile excessively during their shifts. Additionally, some deadly accidents may occur if drivers are busy using their smartphones. Moreover, family members can have some conflicts at home if they spend time surfing the websites rather than having a conversation. In addition, students who are addicted to smartphones can fail courses by attendance if they stay at home rather than joining lessons at schools. On the other hand, using the mobile excessively can lead to some serious health issues (Huss et al., 2007). Users can have various issues related to sleeping, concentration, anxiety, stress, headache. In addition, smartphones emit radiation which can cause some fatal diseases. These concerns show that using smartphone excessively can affect people`s lives negatively.

Similes can be used in literature to make associations between two entities as a figure of speech. In other words, they have been used to make a comparison and illustrate an image in readers` minds, so readers can be more engaged (Senel, 2016). Similes are literary terms to compare different items by using “like”, “as as” or “as”. Figurative language has been preferred to express the ideas more effectively rather than verbalizing directly. Similes have been used in different platforms such as poems, novels, newspapers, cartoons, movies and commercials. For instance, “My best friend Zaid worked a lot last week. He was as busy as a bee last week.” In this example, hard work was associated with the bee. Similarly, “My cousin is like a volcano today.” can be mentioned as an example to describe an aggressive person. It can be stated that similes can perform different functions in different contexts.

2. Literature Review

The popularity of smartphones has increased substantially since the 1970s. Accordingly, the number of publications related to the effects of smartphone use in people's lives has increased. However, there are few studies to describe smartphone users' habits with similes. This study was conducted to fill this gap and contribute to the literature in this regard.

A number of studies have been conducted to figure out the functions of smartphones for users. To name a few, according to the report published by Paw Research Center (2022), 98 % of the teenagers in the US aged 15 to 17 have their smartphones. In the same report, it was noted that YouTube, TikTok and Instagram are the most popular social media platforms. Additionally, M-learning is receiving much attention nowadays as it allows users to keep learning by their smartphones. Sullivan et al. (2019) postulate that flexibility and convenience are the most important advantages of learning through smartphones. It shows that smartphone use has some aspects according to the preferences and priorities of the users. In addition, Al-Hamdani et al. (2018) carried out a study in Iraq on farmers' smartphone use. The study concluded that apart from surfing other websites, farmers were eager to use their smartphones for knowledge sharing groups. They asserted that they joined different groups to increase their knowledge on growing healthy food. When a university meets or surpasses a student's expectations, the student is satisfied (Khan & Yildiz, 2020). Likewise, Kara (2020) carried out another study on university students' smartphone use. The study uncovered that students who used their smartphones to learn English, spend time on social media platforms, play games and watch movies were content with the lifestyle they were in. Subsequently, Turgut and Kursun (2020) conducted a study in Turkey on children aged 9 to 16. The study revealed that 64 % of Turkish children had internet-enabled devices which was 46 % in Europe. Also, social media platforms, watching movies and listening to music were the most popular reasons to go online for Turkish children in this study.

Teachers' opinion on smartphone use in class has also received much attention in many studies recently. To name a few, Khan et al. (2018) conducted a study on EFL instructors in Saudi Arabia which revealed that the instructors were cautious to integrate smartphones into classes. They argued that smartphones can be mostly to distract attention rather than using it for educational purposes. They hinted that well-planned lesson plans can be a pre-requisite to benefit from smartphones for educational purposes. Marques and Pombo (2020) conducted a study in Portugal on teachers to integrate game-based learning into classes. The study revealed that game based mobile learning can raise the standards in education if planned and implemented successfully in educational institutions. Additionally, Gloria and Oluwadara (2016) conducted a study on pre-service teachers. The study revealed that teacher candidates increased their self-efficacy after undergoing a training about using smartphones in classes effectively. Another notable point was that teacher candidates' smartphone self-efficacy and technology self-efficacy increased considerably in this study. Subsequently, Alakurt and Yilmaz (2021) carried out a study on ICT teachers in Turkey to get their opinions on smartphone use in classes. The teachers asserted that smartphones are indispensable to communicate and access to the bulk of information in seconds, so integrating smartphones into classes can be of greatest importance to promote students' learning in classes.

On the other hand, some negative points of smartphone use have been emphasized in increasing number of studies. For example, Tindell and Bohlander (2011) assert that distractions, cyber bullying and radiation

are the most notable adverse effects of smartphone use on students. Additionally, they contend that cognitive alertness reduces if users cannot take a break regularly. Wexler (2019) conducted a study in the USA on integration of smartphone into class activities which culminated with negative consequences. Most of the students earned worse marks in their upcoming exams once they started using their smartphones in class. They also stated that students did not want to switch to traditional course books which was another challenge for the teachers. They concluded that disadvantages of smartphone use in a college setting outweigh the advantages. Mac Callum (2014) et al. conducted a study on mobile learning with teachers in New Zealand. The study revealed that digital literacy and anxiety are two demotivating factors to integrate smartphones into classes. They asserted that a successful implementation of learning by smartphones can only be achieved through intensive training and guidance. In addition, Amiri et al. (2020) examined 47 articles in Iran on smartphone use. The study uncovered that addiction, dependence and overuse were common adverse effects of smartphone use. Tosun and Yildiz (2015) remark that many students are unmotivated and aimless because of the addiction and Yildiz (2019) claims one cause of that is students' addiction to social media and technology. Their electronics have enslaved them. The study also revealed that these adverse effects can affect users' motivation, life quality and success negatively. Motivated learners are engaged in interesting tasks. Learning should be aided by simplifying tasks. Teachers must establish a less stressful learning atmosphere so students can complete assignments without fear (Yildiz & Celik, 2020). Furthermore, Park (2005) carried out a study on Korean students to figure out their smartphone usage habits which concluded that students felt regretful after using them excessively. It can be concluded that there are conflicting views on smartphone use. It seems that this controversy will prevail for a while until a consensus has been established.

A few studies have been conducted to describe smartphone use with similes. For instance, Senel (2016) conducted a study on ELT department students in Turkey. The students classified their smartphone use under 5 headings as a part of life, an addiction, an entertainment, a useful device and a dangerous factor. In other words, they used many words such as water, friend, internet, chocolate, library, virus or fire to make associations. The students reiterated that similes were helpful to visualize their smartphone usage habits. Likewise, Venta et al. (2008) conducted a study with smartphone users in India and some European countries. The users described their smartphones as a part of their soul, a gift, a loyal friend, oxygen and water. Their associations showed that smartphones had an irreplaceable place in their lives. Using simile to describe smartphone use can be a predictor to figure out the importance of smartphones for users.

2.1 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study aimed to examine the smartphone usage habits of college students. To this end, questionnaires, surveys, and interviews were used to assess students' daily smartphone usage, various reasons for using the device, frequency of grabbing the device, and overall importance of smartphones in their lives. In order to clarify the topic, students were asked to use similes to describe their smartphone usage; thus, the researcher attempted to determine whether the students considered them as useful gadgets or viewed them as time-consuming devices. Based on this framework, the following research questions were formulated as follows:

- Can students maintain the balance between studying and spending time on their smartphones?
- What are the most popular websites for students?

- Can students` daily usage increase at the weekend when they have more free time?

3. Methodology

This research was conducted using a mixed-method approach to examine verbally and quantitatively (Morse, 2016). Additionally, content analysis was employed to gather, classify and analyze qualitative data. (Drisko, 2016). To collect data, a survey, a questionnaire, and an interview were included. Five questions were included in the survey to collect additional information on students' smartphone usage. The questionnaire contained 8 questions regarding respondents' cell phone usage and practical techniques for reducing smartphone usage. Once participants responded, the data were analyzed in SPSS 26. using descriptive statistics, so the mean score, percentage, and number of respondents for each item ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree were gathered in one point. In addition, the interview contained a question that used similes to determine the students' smartphone usage patterns. A one-on-one interview was done to obtain students' genuine perspectives in a stress-free atmosphere, as it was observed in a pilot study that students were hesitant to express their views on this topic openly in common meetings. The pattern to use examples of simile in the interview was formulated as follows:

- My mobile is like a(n) for me because

The responses of the interviewees were transcribed through MAXQDA software program to classify and analyze accordingly.

3.1 Participants, Setting and Sampling Procedure

The population of study was all students who took Foundation English course as a pre-requisite for two semesters at a prestigious university in Erbil, Iraq in 2021-2022 Academic Year. Foundation English students were placed after taking the thorough proficiency exam of the university in which they had to answer pre- intermediate level questions in 3 skills. Additionally, they were interviewed in lecturers` offices to measure their speaking skills. According to the result of proficiency exam, it was observed that these students had some information in English, but they needed to improve their English through intensive lessons for a year. The rationale to offer Foundation English course is that students have to take all lessons in English at this university, so they need to command English as precise as possible. Otherwise, their satisfaction and motivation rate can decrease gradually which may lead to see many dropouts at the end. In this regard, the university administration takes the initiative to promote their learning in English through Foundation English courses with proven techniques. Watching movies, reading graded readers, playing games via KAHOOT, writing via Padlet are some supplementary materials to have more engaging classes. Additionally, the university has a diverse community to welcome students from 15 different countries, so they mostly prefer English to communicate with each other which can help them improve their fluency. Thanks to these advantages and qualified academics, the university was ranked first among all private universities in Iraq.

Systematic sampling method was chosen in this study as it allows the researcher to choose sample by pre-defined intervals fairly. 300 Foundation English students were listed, and each 5th student was separated from the list to be a participant in the study. Later, they joined two workshops to be informed about the study in detail and to allow them to ask questions in their minds.

Table 1 illustrates the number of male and female students as well as their ages.

Table 1: Participants` Frequency in Terms of Gender and Age

Variable(s)	Option	F	%
Gender	Female	24	48
	Male	26	52
Age	18-21	32	64
	22+	18	36
Total		50	100

Once Table 1 was examined, it was seen that male students (52 %) were higher than female ones (48 %). In addition to the gender, the participants ages were illustrated in detail which displayed that 64 % of the students were between 18 and 21 years old, whereas 36 % of the students were 22 years old or older.

3.2 Instruments and Data Collection Procedure

The study lasted 10 weeks to collect the data through a questionnaire, a survey and an interview and analyze them according to gathered data. In week 1 and 2, the researcher invited the participants to the conference hall and all steps were introduced with visualized presentations. Additionally, the researcher displayed some previous articles, reports and videos related to smartphone use globally, so the participants were expected to be more familiar with the items in the data collection instruments. When it was week 3 and 4, the researcher allowed students to take the questionnaire prepared by Quizizz software program. The students were given 2 days to think about the responses and finalize it. In week 5 and 6, the researcher initiated and finalized the survey prepared by Google Form. The students were given 2 days again to consider the options and choose the closest ones for them. Week 7, 8 and 9 were reserved to record the interviews for each question. When it was the tenth week, the collected data were cross-checked by the committee and saved based on the common points. Quizizz, Google Form, MAXQDA and SPSS 26. were the primary instruments to analyze and interpret the data scientifically.

4. Findings

Findings of this study were classified under 3 headings which were the survey, the questionnaire and the interview, so each instrument was elaborated to get detailed analysis and make interpretations accordingly.

4.1 The Analysis of the Survey

Figure 1 illustrates the amount of time allocated for using the smartphone on weekdays.

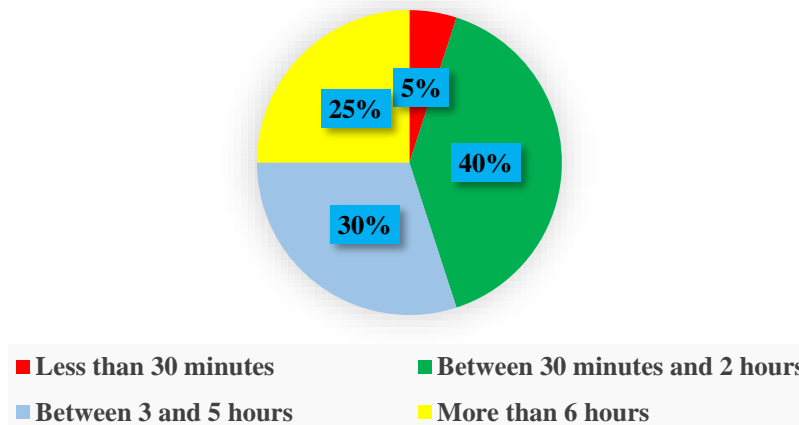


Figure 1: The amount of time spent with smartphone on weekdays

As can be seen in Figure 1, it was noticed that 40 % (20) of the students had a habit of using the smartphone more than 7 hours. Additionally, 30 % (15) of the students set aside between 4 and 6 hours for smartphone usage. Conversely, only 20 % (10) of the students spent between 1 and 3 hours using their smartphones. Likewise, only 10 % (5) of the students allocated less than 1 hour for using their smartphones. These figures demonstrate that the highest percentage was recorded with using the smartphone at least for 7 hours, whereas the lowest percentage was related to using the smartphone for less than 1 hour.

Figure 2 illustrates the amount of time allocated for using the smartphone at the weekend.

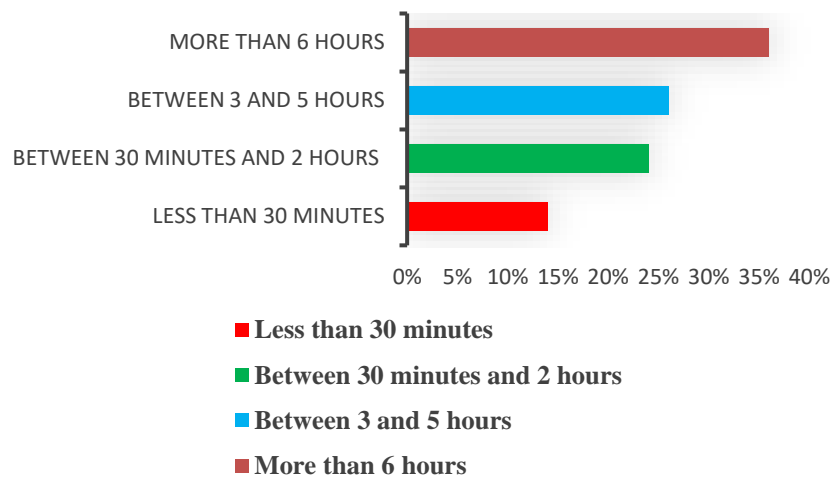


Figure 2: The amount of time spent with smartphone at the weekend

Once Figure 2 was examined, it was noticed that 36 % (18) of the students had a habit of using the smartphone more than 6 hours. Additionally, 26 % (13) of the students set aside between 3 and 5 hours for smartphone usage. Subsequently, 24 % (12) of the students spent between 30 minutes and 2 hours using their smartphones. Conversely, only 14 % (7) of the students allocated less than half an hour for

using their smartphones. These figures display that the number of hours spent online increases when students have more free time at the weekend.

When weekdays and weekend smartphone usages were compared, it was observed that the amount of time to use smartphone increased substantially.

Figure 3 displays the participants` favorite activity on their smartphones

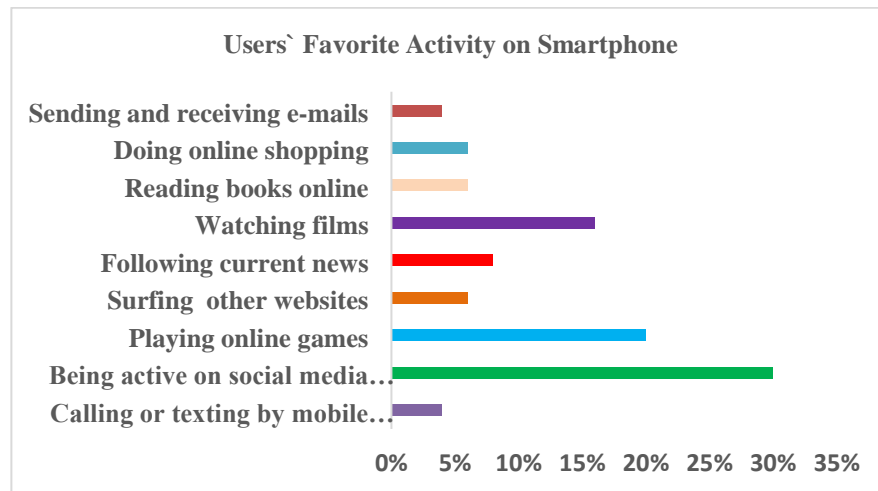


Figure 3: Users` favorite activity on smartphone

Once Figure 3 was observed in detail, it was observed that 15 (30 %) students opted in social media platforms as the first choice when they were online. Playing online games followed the social media platforms in terms of popularity with 10 (20 %) students. Third favorite activity was watching films with 8 (16 %) students. Subsequently, sending and receiving e-mails, reading books online, following current news, surfing other websites and calling or texting by mobile operators were not as popular as social media platforms, playing games or watching movies. It can be argued that 3 activities dominated their time over 9 activities given in the survey.

4.2. The Analysis of the Questionnaire

Table 2: Students` opinion on their habits related to smartphone use

ITEMS	Mean	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f
1. I use my smartphone more than any other ICT tools.	4,66	82 %	41	6 %	3	8%	4	4 %	2	0 %	0
2. I know when to use and when to stop using my smartphone.	2,18	14 %	7	0 %	0	0 %	0	62 %	31	24 %	12
3. I think I mostly use my smartphone to develop myself.	3,82	54 %	27	12 %	6	10 %	5	10 %	5	14 %	7
4. My smartphone is in my mind even when I am away from it.	4,46	58 %	29	30 %	15	12%	6	0 %	0	0 %	0
5. My smartphone affects my social life negatively.	4,64	64 %	32	36 %	18	0 %	0	0 %	0	0 %	0

The participants responded to five questions to demonstrate their genuine opinions on smartphone use.

Once item 1 was analyzed about prioritizing smartphone over other ICT tools, the mean score was recorded as 4,66 which was quite significant. 41 (82 %) students opted in strongly agree which meant that smartphone was more popular than any other ICT tools. Accordingly, only 9 (18 %) students chose other options. It can be argued that smartphones` popularity is more established among participants.

When the second item which was related to knowing when to use and stop using the smartphone was analyzed, the mean score was 2,18. Only 7 (14 %) students chose strongly agree, while no student opted in neither agree nor neutral. On the other hand, 31 (62 %) and 12 (24 %) students chose disagree or strongly

agree which indicated that students had difficulty in keeping the balance between using the smartphones and keeping the distance.

Item 3 was related to smartphones` effects on their self-development. The mean score was 3,82. 27 (54) students chose strongly agree, whereas only 6 (12 %) students chose agree. Additionally, 5 students (10 %) opted in neutral and disagree respectively. The number of students who opted in strongly disagree was 7 (14). These figures illustrated that many students had some hesitations on using their smartphones for their self-development.

Item 4 was designed to pinpoint whether students were addicted to using their smartphones or not. The mean score was 4,46 which was quite significant. 29 (58 %) students chose strongly agree, whereas 15 (30 %) students chose agree. Similarly, 6 (12 %) students opted in neutral. On the other hand, no student took side with neither disagree nor strongly disagree. These figures implied that students` degree of smartphone addiction was close to alarming levels.

The last item was related to the effects of smartphone use on students` social lives. The mean score was 4,64 which was quite significant as well. The students opted in either strongly agree or agree options. 32 (64 %) students chose strongly agree and 18 (36 %) students took side with agree option. On the other hand, no student chose neutral, disagree or strongly disagree. According to the gathered figures, it can be postulated that smartphone use had varied adverse effects on students` social lives.

Considering the findings in the questionnaire, it can be concluded that students cannot make a distinction between studying and spending time through their smartphones. However, they are optimistic about coming to a resolution soon. They reiterated that they know how to break this habit with some clear plans.

4.3 The Analysis of the Interview

The interview was given under 4 categories based on the transcripts recorded and analyzed by MAXQDA software program.

Table 3 shows the simile examples, frequency and percentages in the interview concisely.

Table 3: Classification of Simile Examples

	Categories	Frequency	%
1	Food & Drink: mineral water, fruit, vegetables, sugar, coke, potato, tea	12	24
2	Electronic Devices and Accessories: earphone, fridge, camera, USB, printer, laptop, TV, smart watch	4	8
3	Stationery Items: book, eraser, stapler, highlighter, whiteboard, sharpener, calculator, notebook, magnifying glass, compass,	16	32
4	People: grandfather, aunt, mum, brother, parents, friend	18	36

When the categories and frequency were analyzed in detail through Table 3, it was seen that students chose some people (36 %) who have a close relationship with them Later, stationery items (32), food, drink (24) and electronic devices, accessories followed it. It can be suggested that students` acquaintances are precious in their lives. Additionally, other categories had important places in their lives which can be explored further below:

4.3.1 Food and Drink

My smartphone is like drinking mineral water. I drink mineral water to help digestion. Likewise, I use my smartphone to refine the information I grasp. My smartphone helps me to distinguish accurate information from false ideas, so misinformation issues can be eliminated to a great extent. (Student 3)

My smartphone is like fruit and vegetables for me. I need fruit and vegetables to have a healthy diet. Likewise, I need to enrich my learning with my smartphone. I cannot lead a healthy lifestyle if I avoid eating fruit and vegetables. Likewise, I cannot satisfy my hunger for knowledge without my smartphone. (Student 5)

My smartphone is like sugar for me. I cannot eat cakes and pasta if they do not have sugar. Likewise, I am not satisfied with the information I learn in classes through books. I need to cross check the information I learn through books. Learning in the class and researching further online complement each other with the help of my smartphone. (Student 8)

My smartphone is like drinking coke excessively. Although I know that drinking coke excessively can affect my health negatively, I cannot help but drink it. Likewise, I know that I have to study for my quizzes, but I cannot help but go online with my smartphone. (Student 10)

My smartphone is like eating potato for me which is my favorite vegetable. Likewise, I prefer my smartphone over my laptop and tablet. I enjoy grabbing my smartphone. Conversely, I cannot get the same satisfaction with my tablet or laptop. (Student 13)

My smartphone is like drinking tea for me. I know that drinking tea a lot can affect my health negatively. However, I cannot help but to drink at least 20 cups of tea daily. Likewise, I know that using my

smartphone a lot can affect my personal and social live adversely. However, I cannot myself from using my smartphone excessively. There are many activities to do on my smartphone. (Student 17)

4.3.2 Electronic Devices or Accessories

My smartphone is like an earphone for me. I am sharing my room with two friends of mine in a dormitory, so I cannot listen to music loudly. I plug my earphone into my laptop to listen to music, so I can relax or study further. Likewise, I use my smartphone to relax and study further. If I want to relax, I can play fun games or read comics. If I want to study further, I log in to my e-library account provided by the university and study more via varied books. (Student 6)

My smartphone is like a refrigerator. I use the refrigerator to keep food and drink fresh as much as it can. Likewise, I use my smartphone to store information, so it will not be lost. I can restore my information whenever I need. Additionally, I use my smartphone to reach my Google Drive account, so I can access to valuable information whenever I want. (Student 7)

My smartphone is like a camera for me. I use the camera to zoom in and take memorable photos. Likewise, I use my smartphone to get in-depth knowledge on the internet, I can use this knowledge in my real life as long as I need. (Student 9)

My smartphone is like a USB flash drive for me. I use my flash player to keep my files. Likewise, I use my smartphone to upload files on my One Drive account provided by Microsoft Company. I save much time and money when I use e-cloud systems to store information. (Student 20)

My smartphone is like a TV for me. I like lying on the sofa and watching TV in the evening to relieve stress. Likewise, I like cleaning up my mental mess compiled during the day. (Student 21)

My smartphone is like a laptop for me. I can carry my laptop to any place as it is portable. Likewise, I can take my smartphone any place to use according to my needs. (Student 23)

My smartphone is like a printer for me. I use my printer to have a hard copy. Likewise, I use my smartphone to connect to the printer and get a hard copy. It is so convenient. (Student 25)

My smartphone is like a smart watch for me. My smart watch counts my steps, monitors my sleeping, heart rate and blood pressure closely. Likewise, my smartphone is smart enough to do all these activities and monitor timely with the help of certain applications. (Student 26)

4.3.3 Stationery Items

My smartphone is like a book for me. I expand my knowledge whenever I read a captivating book for me. Reading books help me a lot to improve my focus, concentration, analytical thinking skills, problem solving skills, creativity, so my life experience increases a lot. Likewise, I enrich my learning whenever I go to another website with my smartphone. My smartphone helps me be a more knowledgeable and respectable person in society. (Student 28)

My smartphone is like an eraser for me. I use eraser to make corrections. Likewise, I use my smartphone to cross check whether the information I have learned is accurate or not. If I need to make corrections to refine my knowledge, I cannot envision another means than my smartphone. (Student 30)

My smartphone is like a stapler for me. I use my stapler to join the pages, so they will be attached to use together. Likewise, I use my smartphone to connect my information, so my previous knowledge and current knowledge can be synthesized. When I update myself with my smartphone, my previous and current knowledge makes sense. (Student 32)

My smartphone is like a highlighter for me. I mark significant points with a highlighter. Likewise, I use my smartphone to highlight noteworthy points in my PDF files. These notes help me a lot to do revision before my exams. (Student 33)

My smartphone is like a whiteboard for me. I use the whiteboard to take notes and learn further. Likewise, I use my smartphone like an online whiteboard through certain applications. It is so convenient for me to save much time and energy. (Student 24)

My smartphone is like a sharpener. I use my sharpener to sharpen pencil's writing point. Likewise, I use my smartphone to sharpen my skills. When I use my smartphone, I can develop many skills to be used in my social life. (Student 27)

My smartphone is like a calculator. I use the calculator to perform math operations accurately, so I have no chance to make personal mistakes. Likewise, I use my smartphone to calculate while selling or purchasing products for my father's store. (Student 34)

My smartphone is like a notebook for me. I use my notebook to take notes and study later for my upcoming exams. Likewise, I use my smartphone to write down important points and use as a reference later. (Student 35)

My smartphone is like a magnifying glass for me. I use magnifying glass to monitor objects with a larger frame. Likewise, I use my smartphone to get closer to details, so I can interpret the events better. My smartphone helps me to expand my perspective. (Student 36)

My smartphone is like a compass for me. I use the compass to find the direction. Likewise, I use my smartphone to find the right path. I learn how to direct my career, seek job opportunities, fix some technical problems on my computer through my smartphone. (Student 38)

4.3.4 People

My smartphone is like my grandfather. My grandfather is so knowledgeable about many fields. Likewise, my smartphone opens all the doors on the internet to satisfy my hunger for new information. (Student 37)

My smartphone is like my aunt. She is an economist who has some information about the economy of different countries. Likewise, my smartphone is amazing to reach the accurate information about any country's economy in the world. (Student 39)

My smartphone is like my mom. She knows many recipes by heart. Likewise, my mobile helps me to access to many recipes on YouTube and other websites. (Student 40)

My smartphone is like my brother who works as a mechanic. My brother figures out many problems in my car if I call him. Likewise, my smartphone helps me to figure out the problem and offer sensible solutions through many websites about maintenance. (Student 1)

My mobile is like my parents. My mum and dad are the greatest advisors in my life. Likewise, my smartphone helps me to watch many videos and read many articles related to my future career and come to the wisest decision. (Student 2)

My smartphone is like the best friend of mine. My best friend supports and encourages me to be better regardless of failure or success. Likewise, my smartphone encourages me with motivational videos and inspiring stories when my mood is bad. (Student 4)

5. Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, it was realized that students were capable of distinguishing literal meaning from figurative language. According to Song (2020) figurative language can be used actively to illustrate the concepts more clearly. He also elucidates that figurative language encourages the learners to read more literary works and articulate their ideas creatively. Considering students' genuine opinions on smartphone use, some interpretations can be made. Students' simile examples were classified as food, drink, electronic devices, stationery items and people. Students used some of the basic staples like water, tea, fruit and vegetables to make a comparison between smartphone use and these staples. Sahu et al. (2019) argue that smartphones have irreplaceable places in users' lives which was consistent with the findings of the study. Additionally, students verbalized some electronic items such as earphones, USB flash drives, laptops and TVs to describe their relationship with smartphones. They implied that smartphones were as indispensable as other electronic devices. Kim et al. (2021) postulate that smartphones have numerous features to take the place of some other means of communication such as laptops and TVs.

Subsequently, students made a comparison between stationery items and smartphones. They chose books, highlighters and erasers to illustrate their smartphone use. It is unobvious that stationery items were as essential as smartphones for them. O Dimpka and David (2021) attest that smartphones have a myriad of functions, so they can replace a notebook, a book, a highlighter or an eraser with a smartphone without feeling any hesitation. Furthermore, students integrated some family members, relatives or friends into the interview to describe their smartphone habits. They verbalized grandfather, parents, mum and friend to illustrate their smartphone use habits. These chosen people demonstrated that they had unbreakable bonds with their smartphones. Katevas et al. (2018) contend that smartphones play important roles in users' lives as some people are invaluable in users' lives.

Apart from interview, the questionnaire and the survey shed light on some essential points. The findings in the questionnaire demonstrated that smartphones were more popular than other ICT tools which was consistent with Mishra's (2020) previous study. Also, students expressed that they felt restless if they were away from their smartphones which could be regarded as a sign of addiction. Hong et al. (2012) state

that mobile addiction is common among college students. In addition, students asserted that smartphone addiction can affect their social lives negatively which was in line with previous studies. Billieux et al. (2015) postulate that using smartphones excessively can have negative effects in users' social lives. The findings deserve special attention as well. It was observed that the amount of time spent on smartphones increases at the weekend which was consistent with Hwang and Park's (2017) study. They attest that online activities via smartphones increase considerably when students have more free time at the weekend. Furthermore, social media platforms, online games and watching films were the most popular activities among participants in this study. On the other hand, reading books online, surfing other websites and following the latest news were not as popular as other activities. This finding was in line with Hossain's (2019) opinion. Hossain stated that spending time on e- games, social media platforms and movie-streaming platforms have been increasing among teenagers. More initiatives can be taken to increase reading books online, surfing other websites and following the latest news, so they can take advantage of their smartphones and be more knowledgeable.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, Foundation English students illustrated their smartphone use by employing similes. The questionnaire, the survey and the interview were used as the primary data collection instruments. Based on the collected data, some interpretations can be made.

It was noticed that similes can be a great predictor to pinpoint students' relationship with their smartphones. The degree of dependence could be understood easily based on the chosen simile examples. The students used food, drink, electronic devices, stationery items and people around them to make a comparison. These chosen items and people confirm that smartphones were as indispensable as others. They also expressed that they cannot envision a moment without grabbing their smartphones which was another sign of smartphone addiction. Additionally, smartphone dependence multiplies during the weekend. Moreover, social media platforms, e-games and movies were primary sources to spend time on their smartphones. Subsequently, students admitted that their social lives were affected adversely once they were using their smartphones in an excessive way.

Some recommendations can be made for further studies. Although there are many forms of figurative language, only similes were included in this study. Other forms of figurative language could be added to enrich the scope of the study. In addition, only smartphones were integrated into this study. Other forms of ICT tools such as laptops, TVs or tablets can be studied in future studies. Moreover, only 4 headings were chosen in the study as examples of studies which can be extended with other headings.

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