

Smartphone Effects on Literacy and Language

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People growing up today are surrounded by technology. Remarkably, some people don't know what life is like without it. Those who have grown up alongside all the technological advancements throughout the past decades have seen it evolve but have also had to adapt to all the changes being made. One of the most evolved pieces of technology is the phone. A phone is a technological device that enables people to communicate in conversation when in different places. When phones were first created, this was their one and only function. A phone now has taken on the name of a smartphone because it has the ability to not only conduct calls, but send and receive messages, access various tools, take photos and videos, and countless other specialties. Simple tools like a calculator or an alarm have been replaced by phones. With the additional features that have been added over time, there are more and more uses for phones, leading to a drastic impact on people's everyday lives. My personal smartphone has many more uses than just communicating with friends and family, unlike my old flip phone that I used years ago. Because smartphones have become significantly more convenient, people currently have become dependent on all the various tools provided by smartphones. Collectively, the ways in which smartphones have evolved have

influenced people's language and literacy practices today because they offer numerous ways of communication, have become globalized, and are efficient.

In the beginning, the purpose of phones was intentionally designed for communication. In the 1900s, this was all a phone had the capacity to do. Phones were stationary and unable to be simply transported and additionally required some effort to operate. As they evolved, the size, appearance, and overall function have drastically advanced. Now, most people own a smartphone that has considerably more advanced abilities such as games, social media, a camera, internet sources, news, music, and several tools that are essential for daily life.

Once phones became mobile, it drastically affected how people use their language and literacy practices to communicate. There are countless platforms for communication to take place on just this singular device; this is what makes the smartphone so popular today. From Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, email, texting, gaming, and the internet, there has been a substantial amount of growth in the places people are able to interact. With these numerous ways for communication to occur, it enables people to enhance their literacy. People update others by posting about their lives on social media, connect with teachers or bosses through email, text friends and family, or talk face-to-face through facetime. All of these practices have increasingly become enjoyable and easily accessible throughout society. These platforms for communication are creating a greater interest in individuals within the communities that surround people. According to Deborah Brandt in the book *Literacy and Learning*, she writes, "If anything, people's testimonies attest to the deep personal valuing of literacy

for dignity, connection, continuity, development, faith, pleasure, action, and legacy. They also attest to the ingenious ways that people appropriate and redirect literacy learning for their own purposes” (Brandt 10). People are becoming much more fascinated with each other and their personal lives due to the broadcasting of everyone’s lives. This has influenced literacy today because it has increased literacy.

People today, including myself, spend hours a day looking at their smartphones reading, learning, connecting, and socializing. When exercising literacy in any form, people are likely to become more proficient in applying it. Having additional associations with people allows individuals to connect, read, write, and learn directly from their peers. Their understanding of their peers, society, culture and how they interact and communicate has completely expanded due to the plenitude of styles to socialize on smartphones. Generations in the past could never communicate in the distinct forms that we perform today, meaning that the increase in communication among people has significantly improved knowledge of how society communicates and understands each other, including the way literacies are applied.

As communication advancements by using smartphones have taken place throughout time, they have reached a larger, global scale as well. People all around the world possess phones now, and because of this, they are able to communicate from country to country. In the past, it would take days, weeks, and even months to be able to spread and broadcast information around the world, leading to delayed responses as well as miscommunications. Smartphones now have the ability to produce fast and efficient ways to connect with others. This has positively impacted literacy around the

world by bringing several diverse countries together. News is broadcasted, potential threats are informed, methods in helping the planet are publicized, and historical events are all able to be communicated through the use of smartphones. People around the world can easily learn a substantial amount of information about other countries and cultures because of the easy access we have to programs such as the internet, apps, and other particular sources on smartphones. Through the use of these tools, people can create a well-connected and global community.

Smartphones have also been helping people around the world to learn how to become literate. Because of the numerous features that smartphones have access to, they are able to assist people in learning different languages, as well as translate any language. According to a blog by Sandy Phan, “To be able to read, write and count contributes to an individual’s self-development, and allows each individual to have their own sense of personal freedom and better understand how to adapt to the constantly changing world” (Phan 2014). With the help of several unique apps on smartphones, people across the world are able to learn, read, write, and speak in different languages that they couldn’t before. This is improving literacy in populations everywhere and assisting people in migrating out of poverty. Phones have provided people in countries that have numerous amounts of poverty access to opportunities to become literate, leading to more knowledgeable and healthier lives. Phan states, “Before the widespread use of cell phone technology, the adult literacy rate in all of Africa stood at 52 percent; by 2008, the literacy rate had increased to 63 percent” (Phan 2014). It is proven that as smartphones are becoming more available around the globe, their tools are being

utilized to make literacy more common within places where it is uncommon. This is extremely beneficial in the literacy practices that people use today because it is broadening the ways in which countries are able to connect to the world and helping people live more educated lives.

Additionally, the efficiency of smartphones has influenced the way we are able to carry out our literacy and language due to the way they have developed over time. The features added to a smartphone have allowed people today to create new ways of communication, enabling them to save time. The ability to send and receive text messages on smartphones is one of the main forms of communication that has sped up the language that is being used today. One example of this is the use of acronyms such as “lol,” “gtg,” or “ttyl.” Typing out these shortened phrases on the go has given the generation today an easier, faster, and more efficient way to use language.

An even shorter method of communication is through a digital icon, or symbol, expressing human emotion called an emoji. Emojis are now considered a type of literacy because they are able to convey specific messages, emotions, and tone within writing. The popularity, effectiveness, and performance of these icons have completely shifted with time and become increasingly widespread due to the suitability of them on smartphones. According to the Oxford Dictionary, one of the most frequently used emojis, commonly known as the ‘Face with Tears of Joy’, was declared the word of the year in 2015 (Oxford University Press). Essentially, emojis “have come to embody a core aspect of living in a digital world that is visually driven, emotionally expressive, and obsessively immediate” (Oxford University Press). This type of literacy has advanced the

manner in which people express themselves through writing on smartphones and has become a tool for immediate and effective forms of communication.

On the other hand, the continuous use of smartphones has not been advancing the ways in which people are learning and communicating. Everywhere among developed countries, people are constantly pulling out their smartphones to avoid direct interaction with their surrounding peers. The constant lack of social interaction and communication lessens the quality of social skills within an individual. Smartphones have also been distracting students in classrooms, as well as causing conflict. For example, an experiment measuring participants' cognitive capabilities within the presence of their phones concluded with results declaring, "the mere presence of one's smartphone reduces available cognitive capacity and impairs cognitive functioning, even though people feel they're giving their full attention and focus to the task at hand" ("The Mere Presence"). From this study, it displays how smartphones are contributing to distraction from people's learning. It takes more focus for an individual to not pick up their phone, causing the attention of the mind to be disturbed. By having this lack of focus, learning is hindered which can cause misinterpretations of the encountered material and a lack of productivity. Therefore, learning has become much slower and inefficient. Even more, the content people are reading on their cellular devices is not always as educational as reading a book would be. Tweets, blogs, texts, and listening to YouTube videos are mostly used for entertainment purposes and don't provide sufficient informative material to increase advanced literacy. The decrease in high-level literacy practices has diminished not only the use of advanced language but the value of it as well. The

popularity of smartphone usage has overtaken the appeal of learning and being socially interactive with people. In all, smartphones have distracted from people's ability to learn and communicate effectively leading to a decrease in literacy.

From my experiences and knowledge of the evolution of phones, their impact on language and literacy has been ultimately substantial. As connections are rising throughout the world, people are continuing to write, read, speak, and connect by taking part in the various forms of communication that have been created. In the past, the few ways in which people communicated with the use of phones seemed to hold most cultures back from what their potential in literacy had to offer. Throughout time and as technology has progressed, smartphones have given the world numerous significant opportunities to advance their literacy skills and develop new forms of language.

In all, smartphones have influenced the way in which people use their literacy skills and language. Their numerous platforms for communication, apps, and tools are great sources for applications of literacy to take place. I have personally developed many literacy skills as well as taken advantage of the numerous tools provided smartphones every day. This has impacted the entire world and provided multiple opportunities for growth within nations. As phones have evolved, their convenience, efficiency, and mobility have increasingly benefitted the connections people are able to make on a daily basis as well. With the continuous development of mobile phones, the future holds much more advancements within technology and also literacy.

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Author Bio

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