Utilizing Mobile Applications for English Language Learning by EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT:

The study provides an examination of the use of mobile applications in English language learning among EFL learners. It explores the advantages, challenges, and limitations of mobile learning applications and their effectiveness in improving language skills. The research method used to conduct the study is a review of related literature for various studies conducted on the research topic. The study is also planned to examine the effectiveness of using mobile applications for English language learning by EFL learners. Also, the best practices for integrating mobile applications into EFL classrooms and provide insights into future possibilities for mobile language learning. It is hoped that the current attempt helps enrich the previous literature in the field of Mobile Assisted Language Learning with theoretical information related to the use of Mobile learning applications in learning the English language in an EFL context.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, mobile applications have revolutionized the way we learn and interact with the world (Low, Kamaruddin & Hmzah, 2019). Among the various domains influenced by this technological change, education has seen significant changes, with language learning being one of the most influenced areas.

In the technology-directed and interrelated world today, the acquisition of English as a second/foreign language has been more significant. English is considered the lingua franca of the globalized world, playing a crucial role in international communication, science, and trade (Rao, 2019). For non-native speakers of English, who are referred to as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, the capacity to communicate effectively in English is an entryway to opportunities for personal and professional success. However, the process of English language learning, especially for adults, has always been characterized by its challenges and complexities (Bacha, 2011).

For EFL learners, the acquisition and improvement of the English language is often a complex and time-consuming aim. They must navigate the details of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation while building effective communication skills. Furthermore, the process of language learning can be challenging particularly for adult learners who already have established native language models and they must balance their language learning with other life commitments (Hall, 2012).

Luckily, the emergence of mobile technologies has led to a new era in language learning, providing EFL learners with innovative and obtainable tools and resources to enhance their English language proficiency. Mobile applications particularly, have emerged as a dynamic and flexible means to facilitate English language learning and enhancement, revolutionizing how individuals approach the acquisition of this essential skill (Almadhady, 2020).

The traditional methods of English language learning, such as classroom instruction, have been the basis for many decades. However, they failed to address the specific needs and learning preferences of EFL students (Chun, 2014). The inflexible structure of these habitual approaches may not always cater to the unique learning styles and paces of individual students (Rao, 2002).

Currently, the field of education has witnessed a radical transformation. Mobile technology, including smartphones and tablets, has penetrated every life aspect. Within the digital revolution, the use of mobile apps for English learning has gained significant traction (Tan, 2017). The ubiquity of language learning applications currently serves language learners of all levels, starting from the basics to the advanced speakers. The apps provide a broad range of facilities, from vocabulary and pronunciation practice to interactive lessons. These applications made language learning more practical, flexible, and personalized (Konovalenko, 2021).

The current study investigates the use of smart mobile apps as a significant learning resource for EFL learners in the learning of the English language, covering their impact on language acquisition, their advantages, challenges, and the best practices for the integration of the applications with language learning inside the classroom.

2. The Research Aim

The purpose of this study is to investigate how EFL learners use mobile applications as a revolutionary tool for English language learning and development as they progress toward communicative proficiency in the language. The study explores the aspects of mobile apps, explaining their uses, benefits and challenges of using the apps, as well as how they work to improve English language skills for EFL learners. Furthermore, the study delves into the most efficient methods for incorporating the application in EFL classrooms and envisions uture developments that could work to improve ERL learning experiences by utilizing mobile technologies.

3. Literature Review

Various studies have been carried out and established the efficiency of mobile apps in English language learning and acquisition within the EFL context to facilitate and enhance the performance of EFL students' language. These applications provide interactive exercises, multimedia content, and gamified learning experiences that engage and motivate students (Carrion, 2022).

In a research article Cavus and Ibrahim (2009) investigated the use of mobile applications in the universities to enhance the language skills of English. The researchers examined the use of a mobile application called Mobile Learning Tool (MOLT) which is designed to gather short messages between students. The results showed that 89% of all students enhanced their skills in learning new English concepts using MOLT.

In (2010), Kabilan et al. in a study entitled *Facebook: An online environment for learning of English in institutions of higher education* examined the effectiveness of using Facebook application in English learning. Facebook is a social network application that can used as a mobile application to connect individuals or groups through messages, audio, or video calls. Significantly, the result showed that the respondents agreed that mobile applications such as Facebook are effective in enhancing their learning activities in English. The students can communicate effectively with their teachers or other students via Facebook. Thus, they can develop their English skills based on the feedbacks from teachers and the gained knowledge from social communications.

Moreover, Hutchison et al. (2012) investigated the role of using mobile applications in learning activities such as English literacy. Based on many experiences of using mobile applications by students, the researchers concluded that mobile applications are effective environment to develop the students' skills of listening and reading. The students accomplish their learning events using various styles like visual, audio, and text content. According to (Geneva, 2016), the learning style verity is helpful to pass the learning materials for students based on integrative presentation.

Shih et al. (2015) study aims to examine the impact of using LINE application on the performance of English sentences and word spelling. LINE is a mobile application that is

used to gather text messages between individuals. 29 students from Chinese universities were involved in the study. The researchers allow the students to send text messages that are given by teachers as writing tasks. The teachers are responsible for correcting the spelling and give feedback to students via LINE. The results showed that there is a significant enhancement in students' spelling skills after using LINE.

In this context, Liu and He (2014) investigated the useful mobile application of English learning for Chinese students according to the proposed skills of English. For this purpose, five college students were interviewed to classify the mobile application based on the skills development, and 15 students were involved in the application tests to analyze the reliability of these applications. The study found that there are different useful applications can be used for English skills enhancement of Chinese students.

Chuan et al. (2016) designed a mobile app called MyEVA to enhance the English vocabularies. The mobile app was tested by 55 students from College of management, Chien Hsin University in Taiwan. The results showed that by using MyEVA, the vocabulary learning of most students was enhanced. Mostly, the writing and reading skills of students are enhanced through imagery and flash card activities.

Jing (2017) study the effects of using mobile applications on the enhancements of phonetics learning of foreign students in universities. A Mobile application called "English Liulishuo" is used to accomplish phonetics learning. The teachers provide many records to the students through this application before allowing them to upload their records. The significant results confirmed that most of the respondents skills of phonetics are enhanced using the mobile application.

Mukhlif and Challob (2021) in their study entitled *Enhancing Vocabulary Knowledge Among Secondary School EFL Students By Using Facebook* attempted to examine the effectiveness of using Facebook application for enhancing vocabulary knowledge by making a comparison between traditional instruction and employing Facebook. The results showed that the use of Facebook is more effective than traditional instruction in improving EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge.

Almadhady (2022) proved that MALL applications have many characteristics to support language learning activities. The study respondents provide positive attitudes toward the actual use of mobile apps to improve their English language learning.

Based on the above studies, it can be concluded that mobile applications are effective in enhancing the students English skills. Most of the previous studies recommended the mobile applications for English learning for many reasons; mobile applications provide several learning styles, and students can accomplish their learning activities in anytime and anywhere.

4. Research Method

The research method adopted in the study is based on a review of related literature for the available sources of various studies conducted on the research topic.   The literature review is

a critical and comprehensive summary of available researches and literature on a specific topic (Fink, 2019). The use of a literature review helps to understand the existing knowledge and assists researchers in gaining a complete understanding of the existing body of knowledge associated with their research topic (Balaid, 2016)

It is commonly used as a research method in various fields (Snyder, 2019). The use of a literature review helps to understand the existing knowledge and assists researchers in gaining a complete understanding of the existing body of knowledge associated with their research topic (Balaid, 2016). According to Snyder (2019), literature review technique aids in identifying the research gaps that can direct the investigators toward productive study directions. Additionally, they give the background information and context for the research, elucidating how the study fits into the larger academic context (Kraus, 2022).

5. Results and Discussion

This section explains the analysis of the research based on the objectives of the study. The analysis is for the data collected data using a literature review. The main objective of the study is to investigate how EFL learners use mobile applications in English language learning and development.

5.1 Advantages of Mobile Applications in EFL Learning

Over time, the environment for learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has greatly improved. Integrating mobile applications with learning processes has been one of the most notable changes (Metruk, 2021). According to Alzatma (2020), mobile applications have had a significant impact on the evolution of EFL education. They offer numerous benefits that facilitate the fulfillment of the varied requirements and inclinations of EFL students.

Mobile applications are accessible to EFL learners anytime, and anywhere. This is making them a convenient tool for language learning. Students can be engaged in the learning activities during commutes, breaks, or while they are waiting for appointments (Hulme, 2017). This flexibility accommodates different learning experiences and various lifestyles. Furthermore, the mobile apps offer personalized English learning experiences. They can adapt to individual learning styles, progress, and interests according to their individual preferences and needs. This adaptability allows the learners to concentrate on particular areas where they require improvement and move past topics they have already mastered (Metruk, 2021).

Most mobile applications incorporate different forms of media, such as texts, audios, videos, and interactive exercises. various learning styles will lead to motivating the students' learning using likable learning styles such as video, audio, images, and texts (Mei Lin & Chin Lee, 2014. P127). This multimodal approach appropriates different learning preferences, making it simpler for students to comprehend and retain information (Elaish, 2021). Mobile applications often feature gamified elements and interactive exercises that engage language learners. These interactive features according to (Shortt, Tilak, and Kuznetcova, 2023), can lead to make the learning process more enjoyable and motivate students to spend more time on language learning activities.

Another advantage of using mobile apps is discussed by Finardi, Leao (2016) that EFL mobile apps often involve exercises in vocabulary and grammar building. These tools present

the language learners with structured and inclusive ways to develop their language skills. Mobile apps also can provide immediate feedback on the exercises and assessments, allowing the students to get their mistakes corrected and learn from them in real-time (Avci, 2017). This is considered a valuable feature for EFL students, as it promotes their self-correction.

Mobile applications also include progress tracking options that allow students to monitor their progress over time (Thornton, 2021). These metrics can help to motivate students to continue learning and give them a sense of convenient achievement. In addition, the digital nature of mobile applications ensure that the content is regularly updated to reflect the new developments in English language learning, such as new vocabularies, expressions, and current cultural trends (Hiel, 2016). Also, many mobile apps offer EFL learners offline modes, enabling learners to study without an internet connection. This feature is advantageous particularly for the language learners in regions with limited or weak internet connectivity.

In conclusion, mobile applications have revolutionized EFL learning by offering learners with accessibility, personalized learning experiences, convenience, engagement of content, and many other of advantages. As technology continues to progress, mobile apps are likely expected to play a more significant role in language education. EFL learners, beginners or advanced speakers, could benefit the potential of mobile applications to improve their language skills and to reach their learning goals in more efficiently and effective manner (Zhang, 2022).

5. 2 Challenges and Limitations

Although mobile applications have brought significant advancement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, they are also accompanied by some challenges and limitations. It is necessary to be conscious of these drawbacks to make the mobile learning environment effective and suitable.

Firstly, there are the technological barriers to the use of mobile applications by EFL learners. These are important obstacles that educators and students must overcome. These include the digital divide, differences in device capabilities, and differences in how people access technology (Rezaie, 2014). to use EFL mobile applications efficiently, many students might not have access to the necessary hardware, such as smartphones or tablets. Furthermore, the age and quality of the devices can affect how well apps work, leading to uneven learning chances. Furthermore, access to online EFL resources may be impeded by issues with internet connectivity (Amerri, 2020).

Secondly, the absence of direct personal interaction is another drawback. Despite the convenience and accessibility of mobile apps for learning, they often fail to facilitate real-time verbal communication and interpersonal engagement, which are essential for language acquisition (Bravo and Vasquez, 2011). Face-to-face interaction offers language learners the chance to practice speaking and listening skills, enhance pronunciation, and engage in meaningful cultural exchanges. Consequently, the lack of face-to-face interaction, as highlighted by Oylere et. al (2018), can impede progress in fluency and cultural competence during the language learning process. To overcome these limitations, educators and learners may need to supplement mobile app-based learning with opportunities for authentic

conversations in real-life settings, ensuring a comprehensive and effective language learning experience (Keshav, 2005).

The privacy and security concerns of mobile application users pose the third challenge in language learning. With the growing adoption of mobile applications for educational purposes by EFL learners, there is a risk of personal data and information being compromised. As highlighted by Chun (2016), these concerns encompass potential data breaches, unauthorized access, and the misuse of private information. When EFL learners use mobile apps, they often provide their details, login credentials, and sometimes payment information (Zhao, 2016). It is crucial for both, the apps developers and the users to prioritize security measures, such as encryption and strong authentication protocols, to protect the confidentiality of users' data (Bosch, 2009).

The above-discussed challenges and limitations are mostly encountered by mobile application users in the EFL context. However, there are also more challenges and limitations attached to the use of mobile applications such as motivation and self-discipline, limited interaction and speaking practice, the limited screen size of phones and tablets, the inability to address the individual learning need, and the lack of motivation and discipline (Pilar et.al, 2013).

In conclusion, the utilization of mobile applications has revolutionized the patterns of EFL learning. However, it is important to acknowledge that these applications also present various challenges and constraints. For EFL learners to fully reap the benefits of mobile applications, they must be cognizant of these limitations and incorporate them into their language learning strategy. According to the research conducted by Ekinci and Ekinci (2017), by integrating mobile applications with traditional classroom instruction and cultural immersion experiences, these limitations can be addressed and a more comprehensive approach can be adopted to professionally and successfully overcome them.

5.3 Effectiveness of Mobile Applications in English Language Learning

English learners at various levels of proficiency, whether they are beginner learners or advanced, have the chance to utilize mobile apps that outfit to their specific needs. This advantageous feature ensures that individuals learning English as a foreign language receive content and exercises that are neither excessively challenging nor excessively basic, thus facilitating a comfortable and stimulating learning experience (Ekinci, 2020). The efficacy of incorporating mobile apps into English language learning processes is increasingly evident within the current educational landscape (Sung, 2016). Mobile applications offer a flexible and engaging platform for English as foreign language learners to enhance their language skills. As stated by Hulme (2016), one of the primary benefits of mobile applications in this context is their ability to address diverse educational and learning requirements.

In addition, mobile applications provide interactive learning experiences, which contribute to enhancing the enjoyment and effectiveness of language acquisition activities. The incorporation of game-based elements, such as quizzes and rewards, facilitates competition and motivation among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Lampropolus, 2022). Furthermore, the provision of prompt feedback through these applications is also a significant advantage. Users of these apps are capable of assessing their development and identify aspects that need improvement, thus promoting a self-directed approach to learning (Majid and Salam, 2021).

The efficacy of mobile applications heavily relies on the accessibility and convenience they offer. Language learners can easily and conveniently access language learning resources and materials through their smartphones at any given time and location. This merit of flexibility accommodates the full activity schedules of EFL learners allowing them to include various language learning practices into their daily routine (Ventola, 2014). As a result, mobile applications are not only making the learning process more accessible but they assist in ensuring consistency in the learning practice, which is an essential factor in successful language acquisition.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of using mobile applications in English language learning by EFL learners is understood by their flexibility, game-based elements, instant feedbacks, and convenience, presenting the language learners with an influential instrument to enhance their language proficiency.

5.4 Best Practices for Integrating Mobile Applications in EFL Classrooms

The integration of mobile applications effectively in EFL classroom settings requires an attentive approach that increases the benefit of technology while addressing the possible challenges. According to Egbue, and Maddin (2017), one of the best practices to ensure a successful mobile apps integration is including a clear definition of the learning objectives. The implementation of mobile applications, users should set up clear learning objectives. These objectives should be aligned with the syllabus and the specific language skills to be improved.

Regardless of the aim behind using mobile applications whether to improve vocabulary acquisition or to enhance listening comprehension. It is significant to have a clear objective ensures that the applications are used effectively and support the learning experiences (Marie, 2021).

Another practice among the best to ensure the successful integration of mobile apps is the selection and evaluation of the applications. According to Dawson (2020), the quality and suitability of the mobile application is a vital issue. The users should carefully choose and assess applications to ensure that they are suitable for EFL learners' objectives. Important factors like the content, user-friendly, and interactivity, should be given high priority. The Regular review and update of the recommended applications are very essential, as the technology scene is continually developing (Huckvale, 2015).

While mobile applications provide self-directed learning, it is necessary to supply effective guidance and support to students. Educators must clarify how to use the applications effectively to monitor the users' progress, and to provide the required assistance (Churchill, 2016). By adhering to the best practices, the learners can ensure that the integration of mobile applications in EFL classrooms is purposeful and effective, providing an educational milieu that enhances language learning while taking the advantage of the technology benefits (Redecker, 2017).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, mobile applications are currently considered one of the most important learning resources. They are providing an effective alternative learning environment to EFL students and learners by presenting convenient and flexible learning in which the learners are

free from the limits of time and place. As the students are struggling to master their own study inside the classroom, mobile learning applications now allow learners to have effective and integrated learning outside of the classroom contexts. Mobile applications have made a radical change in EFL learning by offering learners with accessibility, personalized learning experiences, convenience, engagement of content, and a many other advantages. As the technology continues to progress, mobile apps are likely expected to play more significant role in language education. However, the use of mobile applications in EFL settings come up with some challenges and limitations such as the technological barriers related to poor or no internet connection, the lack of face-to-face interaction which is resulting in the lack of fostering the real-time communication interaction, the privacy and security concerns of the apps users as learners are increasingly engaged in using mobile applications, their personal information is exposed to possible risks. It was also concluded that the effectiveness of using mobile applications in English language learning by EFL learners is represented by flexibility, and convenience of these applications. Additionally, by the learners' adherence to the best practice of mobile learning activities, they could ensure the effective integration of the mobile applications in EFL classrooms.

استخدام تطبيقات الهاتف المحمول في تعلم اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية

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ملخص البحث:

تقدم الدراسة تحليلاً لاستخدام تطبيقات الهاتف المحمول في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وتستكشف المزايا والتحديات والقيود في استخدام تلك التطبيقات من حيث فعاليتها في تحسين المهارات اللغوية. الطريقة التي تم إتباعها لإنجاز البحث هي مراجعة الأدبيات العلمية ذات الصلة لمختلف الدراسات التي أجريت حول موضوعة البحث. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تمت مناقشة أفضل الممارسات المتبعة من أجل الوصول الى التكامل بين تطبيقات الهاتف المحمول والطرق الاعتيادية المتبعة في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وتقديم نظرة شاملة للإمكانيات المستقبلية لتعلم اللغة عبر الهاتف المحمول. من المتوقع أن تساهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء الأدبيات السابقة في مجال تعلم اللغة بمساعدة الهاتف المحمول بالمعلومات النظرية المتعلقة باستخدام تطبيقات التعلم المحمول في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في سياق اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.