

Using English Language Learning Mobile Applications among Iraqi EFL University Learners

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Abstract

This study is conducted for the purpose of collecting data, opinions, needs and learning and teaching facts of EFL university students about English Language Learning mobile apps. The study aims to identify the benefits, difficulties, and resolutions of using mobile phone applications. The study was conducted in the English Department at Al-Kitab University at the second semester of the academic years 2019/2020. The study is based on the descriptive study, since it describes the use of mobile apps in learning and teaching English Language. For this purpose, it employs the observation and structured questionnaire as methods of collecting data. A questionnaire of 13 main items has been launched to be responded by 133 EFL university students from both genders; 45 (33.8 %) males and 88 (68.2%) females, their ages vary between 19 to 25 years. The results showed that most students responded positively to using mobile applications in teaching and learning processes. In addition, all students had smart phones, and they used varied brands applications in the learning process. Moreover, the results indicated that students understand and learn better through using the applications.

Keywords

Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Teaching Styles, Efficacies, Primary School Mathematics Teachers

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Introduction

Using mobile applications and technological resources within university with its worldwide settings are still in its infancy, and the development of the new models, methods, systems and applications is needed to be put in place for successful integration. Teachers need to re-combine the current learning environment at universities to ensure an efficient and effective learning environment. Universities, teachers and administrators need to understand and acknowledge the changes in the attitudes of the today learners' attitudes towards learning. They should design a learning content that meets learners' needs and fits their daily life style (Farrah & Abu-Dawood, 2018).

Mobile applications enable learners to have a comprehensive scope for the learning process in the classroom language, as they expedite a multidisciplinary perception on learning and open new opportunities for learners. Using mobile applications in teaching and learning provides positive ideas and benefits that motivate learners to learn and understand better (Prensky, 2005). The learners of the new generation enjoy using technology, and they accept it happily. They usually develop a conspicuous willingness to use mobile applications in learning (Wang, 2017).

Tohara (2021) argue that Learners stay connected with their peers via SMS, mobile phones, Facebook, Skype, online forms, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, Blogs etc. They belong to the new digital mobile world. While on the other hand teachers and educators are still reluctant to use these technologies and in particular mobile phones for teaching and learning, and some of them even view these technologies as a distraction for learners. They still argue on the use of mobile devices especially mobile phones in class environment.

For this reasons universities should give training course of this type of mobile learning environments and technologies for teachers, and encourage the learners to use it and integrate it into the curriculum. If they do so, then the learning environment will be appropriate for the learner's life style and improves their access to learning content, and makes the learning process, creative, collaborative and challenging (Farrah & Abu-Dawood, 2018). It is time for universities and teachers to re-design the forms of education according to the dynamics changing of learners' lifestyle, thus providing strategic solutions to some existing problems such as the large number of first year dropouts at universities. The application of mobile learning technologies will potentially place universities at the forefront of pedagogical practice and addresses learners' needs to be flexible and portable (Ibid).

Mobile/ Smart Devices Application Learning

College learners constantly overcome their linguistic restriction, and happily express their ideas and thoughts during the progress of talking with others in English through certain mobile Apps. (Gilski & Stefanski, 2015) states that mobile apps, as a computer program, are designed to run on mobile phones, tablet computers (like iPad) and other mobile devices. They are easily available through application distribution platform called App Market, and these apps are typically operated by the owner of the mobile operating system, such as the Apple App Store, Google Play, Windows Phone Store, and BlackBerry App World. There are two main app stores: Google Play for Android and Apple App Store for iOS.

A mobile application, most commonly referred to as an app, is a type of application software designed to run on a mobile device, such as a smart phone or tablet computer. Mobile Apps frequently serve to provide users with similar services to those accessed on PCs. A mobile application also may be known as an app, web app, online app, iPhone app or smart phone app. Apps are generally small, individual software units with limited function. The development of App technologies made these English learning apps have capability to integrate different media, for example, text, picture, animation, audio and video can be integrated in order to create a multimedia instruction material, as well as prompt learners' interest in studying. By using communication apps such as QQ, WeChat and Skype to talk with others in English, college learners are encouraged to willingly speak up and engage in discussions (Shih, 2011)

There are various applications that can be used in teaching and learning. Rana (2014) clarifies that mobile applications can be used for educational practices such as SMS, GPS, camera, browsing, downloading, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, voice calls, and gaming. Also Ferry (2008) has indicated that mobile apps help learners to access and adjust web based contents, and they make learners cooperate with others.

Khaddage, Lattemann, and Bray (2011) concluded that using mobile applications help learners to concentrate on their weaknesses, reduce their misconceptions, and reinforce learning. As well, they help instructors to determine learners' difficulties and misunderstanding. In addition, instructors can adapt activities, practice teaching, and reinforce assessment and feedback. Huang, Hwang, and Chang (2010) point out that mobile applications help learners to study the learning materials in a convenient way. Also, they help them to interact with each other at any time and place.

To sum up, learning English means to control the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. To do that there are many apps that create a multimedia instruction material, which is very helpful to create English atmosphere for learners who are not only learn English from text but also from audio and video (Başal & Education, 2013). In addition, using mobile apps have a positive effect on English learning. It can promote learners' self-regulated learning (Conroy, 2010).

Edutainment

Edutainment is a derived word that states a mixture of entertainment and education or marriage of education with entertainment (Colace, De Santo, Pietrosanto, & Troiano, 2006). The common goal of this application is to support education with entertainment. It is used as a classical formula in producing educational computer games which are based on learning theories since 1970s. The first person who suggests the idea of edutainment is Robert Heyman from American National Geography Academic Union. Robert Heyman named the film of game type education as 'Education by Entertaining'. David Buckingham who is an expert of mass education in England indicated that the concept of edutainment which needs visual material is a style of teaching type mixed with game (Aksakal, 2015).

Druin and Solomon (1996) & Feezell (2001) explain that Edutainment is used to encourage learning entertainment with the way of interaction and communication, exploring by creating learning awareness, trial and error. Edutainment is stated as a place contain with mixture of many items (such as sound, animations, video, writing and picture) and a place where learners both have fun and learn. It is a form of entertainment designed to educate as well as to interest. Typically, it seeks to instruct its audience by embedding lessons in some familiar form of entertainment: television programs, computer and video games, multimedia software, and so forth (Cuccu, 2009).

Colace et al. (2006) described Edutainment as a type of entertaining which is designed with the aim of educate by including entertaining variety such as multimedia software, internet sites, music, films, video and computer games and TV programs in order to exhilarate in addition to educate. It is named as a hybrid type which is based on visualizing and animation made with the formats like game, diegetic things and visual materials (Buckingham & Scanlon, 2001).

Edutainment presents a blend of two streams: education and entertainment merging into one. The main purpose of intertwining them is to improve educational process by incorporating elements of entertainment into it. Zorica (2014) states that major education pedagogy involved with Entertainment-Education includes:

- Relevance: Learning is more likely when people can see the usefulness of the knowledge they are given.
- Incremental Learning: Learning is most effective when people can learn at their own place.
- Distributed Learning: Different people learn in different ways over different periods of time. It is important to present information differently so that people can absorb it.

Nowadays edutainment is penetrating the formal ways of learning originally, it was more cantered on informal ways of learning and incorporating educational elements into the entertainment field. Conversely, edutainment is an evolving alternative to traditional education method (Zin & Zain, 2010).

The Advantages of Using Mobile Applications

Mobile technology offers a new generation of learning to learners of all ages without being bound by place and time (Alzaza & Yaakub, 2011). Mobile applications are becoming more popular within formal education as its benefits offer cost-efficiency, portability; instant connectivity; and context sensitivity. They assist learners to create social interaction; they promote collaborative

learning, interactivity and instant feedback as well as collaboration between peers; they improve their knowledge structure; their learning achievements and motivation [Domingo and Garganté \(2016\)](#); [\(Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015\)](#) point out that learners are more willing to engage when learning with mobile technology; their desire to accomplish educational tasks also increases with the use of mobile technology, and it helps learners to become more self-directed in their learning. Mobile communication in education is a solution with a selection of prospects and challenges [\(Kommers & Hooreman, 2009\)](#).

There are various educational benefits in using mobile applications:

1. They can be used as study aids;
2. Can be accessed from almost anywhere; and
3. With the aid of location capabilities, learners can use location-based information.

[\(Cheon, Lee, Crooks, & Song, 2012\)](#).

Mobile applications supplement higher education by extending traditional educational platforms and encouraging distance learning or using settings outside of the classroom [\(Al-Emran, Elsherif, & Shaalan, 2016\)](#). Content applications that make use of personalized instruction can facilitate academic growth and self-efficacy among learners [\(Mouza & Barrett-Greenly, 2015\)](#). [Ingle and Duckworth \(2012\)](#) state that mobile applications can be used for a wide range of educational purposes:

- 1) Organization and administration,
- 2) Researching and information seeking,
- 3) Collaborating and sharing,
- 4) Enquiry and knowledge gathering, and
- 5) Application and interaction.

A great number of mobile applications are downloadable from app stores free of charge (either entirely, or in their basic versions) and they allow users to engage with and explore and use the functionality of the software individually or as a whole group/class (ibid).

As our learners have already seamlessly migrated into the mobile world, they may meet their educators waiting for them with an interesting menu of mobile learning options. On the other side, educators should not be confused from this move as it may bring back positive results sooner than expected. As every coin has two sides, only pro-active approach of both teachers and learners can guarantee success.

Methods

Purpose of the Study

This study is conducted for the purpose of collecting data, opinions, needs and learning, and teaching facts of EFL university learners about English Language Learning mobile apps.

Nature of the Study

The study is based on the descriptive study [\(Dewey, 1986\)](#) since it describes the use of mobile apps in learning and teaching English Language. For this purpose, it employs the observation and structured questionnaire as methods of collecting data.

Subjects of the Study

A questionnaire of 13 main items has been lunched to be responded by 133 EFL university learners in English language Department/ Al-Kitab University; from both genders; 45 (33.8 %) males and 88 (68.2%) females, their ages vary between 18 to 25 years.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire with 12 main items has been built for this study. The questionnaire is prepared in the light of 3 parts; the first (questions 1, 2, and 3) covers the learners' use of ELLMA,

the second part (questions 4, and 5) is set to get information about matching these apps in teaching process and whether the English Language teacher guide this matching or not, while the third part (questions 6-12) put to get free feedback from the learners about their opinions about characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of the ELLMA.

A note should be mentioned that all the questionnaire elements are set to be responded eligibly; on other words, the choice of obligation response in google form was activated by the researchers.

Data Collection Procedure

In order to collect data, the researchers lunched google forms link of the questionnaire to EFL learners in English Language Department/ Al-Kitab University from the period of 10th of April 2020 to 10th of May 2020.

Data Analysis Procedures

According to the structure of the questionnaire which is used in this study, the descriptive statistics was mainly conducted by analysing the data quantitatively. Calculating the percentage and is used for the part of learners' information. Also, the same calculating of the percentage is used to interpret the result of the 12 questions.

Findings and Discussions

In this section, the findings are discussed in related to the sequence of the questionnaire parts. The analysis process of the volunteers' response to the questionnaire has provide the researchers with helpful feedback that has supported their personal observation of using English language learning mobile applications among Iraqi EFL university learners.

In the response of 1st questions, the volunteers have provided 56 (42.1%) respondents that they may face difficulties in learning English language, 43 (32.3%) respondents do not face difficulties in learning English language, while the 34 (25.6%) respondents face difficulties in learning English language.

As for the 2nd question, 49 (36.8%) have selected option (d) which is most overall way that the Iraqi EFL Learners take when they face difficulties in learning English language. The options as shown in the bellow:

- a) asking your teacher for explanation
- b) using mobile apps learning
- c) searching about these difficulties in google
- d) all of the above options

The analysis also shows that 37 (27.8%) respondents have selected option (a), 28 (27.8%) respondents have selected option (b), and 19 (14.3%) respond has selected option (c).

It is noted that the result match what [Farrah and Abu-Dawood \(2018\)](#) mentioned about the need of teachers to understand and acknowledge the changes in nowadays Universities learning environments towards the needs of their learners.

As regard to the 3rd question, which tends to reveal the percentage of Iraqi EFL university learners who use mobile apps to learn English language; the volunteers' responds are as bellow:

- 101 (75.9%) use mobile apps to learn English language,
- 23 (17.3%) may use mobile apps to learn English language, and
- 9 (6.8%) do not use mobile apps to learn English language.

In the respond of using these apps, 59 responds; (44.4%) of these apps were looked by the learners themselves, while 22 (16.5%) of these apps were suggested by their teachers, and 52 (39.1%) responds show that both obvious resources of mobile apps were used.

The questionnaire also tries to discover the opinion of learners 'about the way of being teaching English in classroom is an old way and it should be matched with Language learning mobile apps' in the 5th question, and the responds are as bellow:

- 50 (37.6%) learners do not think that teaching English in classroom needs matching mobile apps,
- 44 (33.1%) learners think that teaching English in classroom needs matching mobile apps, and
- 39 (29.3%) learners think that may be teaching English in classroom needs matching mobile apps.

The questionnaire goes furthermore to show the time learners spend in using mobile apps to learning English language and the data of this question, the 6th one, are as the following:

- 19 (14.3%) learners spend 1-15 minutes,
- 31 (23.3%) learners spend 15-30 minutes,
- 49 (36.8%) learners spend 30-45 minutes, and
- 34 (25.6%) learners spend more than one hour.

While the 7th question, which tries to find out whether the availability of these apps help the learners and their teacher to improve teaching and learning process, and the results are as following:

- 72 (54.1%) learners answer as Yes; that the availability of these apps help the learners and their teacher,
- 27 (20.3%) learners answer as No; that the availability of these apps does not help the learners and their teacher, and
- 34 (25.6%) learners think that the availability of these apps may help the learners and their teacher.

The 7th question is specified for those who think that the availability of these apps helps the learners and their teacher, and the results are as following:

- 72 (54.1%) learners think that the availability of these apps help them and their teacher to improve teaching and learning process,
- 27 (20.3%) learners think that the availability of these apps do not help them and their teacher to improve teaching and learning process, and
- 34 (25%) learners think that the availability of these apps may help them and their teacher to improve teaching and learning process.

The 8th question is for the 72 learners of the 7th question, they have been asked to explain how that the availability of these apps help them and their teacher to improve teaching and learning process, and their answer were vary as following:

- *the apps give us good chance to review and study our lessons at any time and any place*
- *I think these apps help the student to learn the English language quickly because most of these apps use video clips and conversations by English people*
- *Yes of course, because I get be prepared before the teacher explains the subject, and through that apps can easily find what I want.*
- *First of all, it depends on the person and his potentials, if he wants to learn there is lots of things that he can do for learning, not only app's*
- *Yes, it helps when you listen to the pronunciation of telephone education and repeated pronunciation and write about the email is enjoyable and easier.*
- *Usually there are topics that a teacher does not mention in lectures. We must search for them in applications, in the opinion of learning, faster applications to learn.*
- *Learning on app is available most of times and reduced the time and cost of transport.*
- *Because these applications help the teacher and the student to understand the materials especially for the student to translate some meanings that sometimes do not know their meanings.*

The 9th question tries to find whether there is anything the apps can do for the learners while the teacher cannot, and the results are as following:

- 25 (18.8%) learners think that these apps can do things that the teacher cannot do,
- 56 (42.1%) learners think that these apps cannot do things that the teacher cannot do, and
- 52 (39.1%) learners think that these apps may do things that the teacher cannot do.

The 10th question tries to name these things that the 25 learners think that the teacher cannot do, and these things go around only three things which they are:

- The availability of multimedia,
- The facility of revision the lesson more and more, and
- The diversity of information.

The 11th question tries to name the most used apps, and among 133 responses there are 4 main apps, which they are:

- Translation apps (google translate in particular),
- You tube (there are no particular channel mentioned),
- Duo lingo, and Zamarican

And in the last of the questionnaire, the 12th question is to shed the light on the advantages and disadvantages of using English language learning apps in general and here are some of them as they were written by respondents:

- *the advantages are as following first making the learning English much easier and give us more time for review and study, the disadvantages are involved about unclear understanding in some subjects and here its mandatory to ask support by our teacher.*
- *Advantages: learning at home, reduce costs. Disadvantages: indirect content with teacher, less of team work and conversation.*
- *The advantages are we learn more and keep studying and know our lessons Disadvantages are sometimes we don't understand the teacher and we can't ask in the moment*
- *The advantages are, it will help me when I cannot reach the teacher or I didn't attend the lecture or finding Easier way to learn the subject, The disadvantages are, sometimes it will show me complicated way to learn the subject or not giving me the exact information that I need*
- *Advantages are that we could search or learn at any time we want by using these apps. And disadvantages are that the communication and discussions in the apps are less that they are in the class rooms*
- *The advantage is that it is more proficient in the language and the way the expressions are used the more likely it is that the program will be bad or the way they are expressed will be wrong*

Conclusion and Suggestions

In conclusion, using mobile applications and technological resources enables learners to have a comprehensive scope for the learning process in the language classroom, as they expedite a multidisciplinary perception on learning and open new opportunities for learners. In this study, the researchers investigated the learners' and instructors' perceptions and attitudes towards the use of mobile applications in the English Department at Al-Kitab University. This study investigated the benefits, difficulties, and the solutions of using mobile phone applications. As the study revealed, mobile applications are likely to present an additional valuable outcome on learning in this challenging, yet fascinating, and motivating learning environment. It's evident from the results of questionnaire that the majority of learners have favourable views towards using mobile applications for they involve energetically with such mobile learning applications. They take opportunities to assume their responsibilities to learn in a learner-centered classroom, in a collaborative and interactive manner with their peers and their instructors alike. The results showed that most of the learners used mobile phone applications because of easiness of accessibility and flexibility which helped them in the teaching and the learning process. Based on the results of the study, the researchers believe that using mobile applications in teaching and learning process might have a noteworthy effect on the learners' academic progress.

The researchers suggested that universities especially Al-Kitab University and its technology instructors should create certain educational applications for all of the courses according to the requests of the department's instructors which are appropriate and meaningful for the instructors and learners' specializations. In order to make the use of mobile phone applications useful in teaching and learning, tutors who reject using the applications should be encouraged and persuaded to use them.

Appendixes

Dear volunteers,

As part of our research in Al-Kitab University, we have conducted study to check "Using English Loanwords in Iraqi Arabic with reference to Medical Field Jargon". Your response to the following questionnaire will be highly appreciated. Note: your response will be confidential and will remain anonymous

Email address-----

Age

- 15-20
- 20-25

Gender

- Male
- Female

1. Do you face any difficulties in learning English language?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

2. You face English language learning difficulties by

- asking your teacher for explanation
- using mobile apps learning
- searching about these difficulties in google
- all of the above options

3. Do you use mobile apps to learn English language?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

4. Are these mobile apps you use?

- suggested by your teacher
- you looked for them
- both

5. Do you think that teaching English language in classroom is an old way and it should be matched with Language learning mobile apps?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

6. How much time do you spend in using mobile apps to learning language?

- 1-15 minutes
- 15-30 minutes
- 30-45 minutes
- more than 1 hour

7. Do you think that the availability of English language learning apps helps you and your teacher to improve teaching and learning process?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

8. If your answer was "yes" for question 7 explain how in breve, please

9. Do you think that English language learning apps can do things that the teacher cannot do?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

10. If your answer was "yes" for question 9 mention what are these things in breve, please

11. Mention the names of English language learning apps you usually use

12. Mention the advantages and disadvantages of English language learning apps

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