Evaluating current Mobile Applications for English Vocabulary learning: based on Hubbard's framework

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ABSTRACT

The Rapid development of computer technology in recent years has presented broad opportunities for its use in various fields, including the field of language teaching. At present, a number of tools, including a vast variety of language teaching applications, is readily available on the market. The aim of this study is to investigate the relevant learning theories underpinning the current mobile apps for English vocabulary learning, the pedagogic features of these apps, and the evaluations of the apps mainly from the learners' perspective. To examine the current mobile apps for English vocabulary learning, 10 apps were first searched and selected on Google Play. These apps were then analyzed according to the Hubbard's framework of evaluation. Open-ended questionnaires were sent to five participants and group interview was conducted to collect the learners' feedback on the chosen apps and their perceptions of mobile apps-assisted language learning experiences. Given the disjuncture between the promising future potential and the disappointing current reality of m-learning and MALL, it is important that educators have an evaluative framework which can guide them in assessing the benefits of the mobile resources they are considering using with their students. The results have shown that as with m-leaning in general, the vast majority of available mobile apps are underpinned by a behaviorist, teacher-centered transmission model of instruction despite the potential for more innovative constructivist, collaborative, learner-centered instruction. Regarding the learners' feedback, both the users' online reviews and the research participants' comments have shown their positive attitudes toward using current mobile apps for English language learning, although a couple of technological limitations still exist. The novel and enjoyable ways of learning would have a great potential to increase learning motivation and encourage lifelong learning habits. More research will be needed in the field of mobile apps in order to suggest the right direction to effective language learning.
 Keywords: mobile apps, evaluating, English vocabulary learning.

Introduction

From the beginning of its existence, computer technology has been used for various instructional purposes, including language teaching. Today's generation of students is growing up in a digital world. Using digital social devices is a huge part of their everyday experience outside the educational settings. A large part of our social communications is taking place online and since the internet language has a significant effect on the language of the users, it would be essential to do research on such issues and their role in language learning. One crucial question is "Would this new technology actually improve education?" The impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) on learning outcomes has been inconclusive; billions of budget have been spent, but it is generally difficult to evaluate its effectiveness in terms of improved results in language learning. Technology can help "facilitate the attainment of learning goals for individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, move, read, write, understand English, sustain attention, organize, engage and remember" (Brand, Favazza, & Dalton, 2012, p. 134). Numerous mobile applications (apps) have been developed to support different aspects of second/foreign language learning, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. As Stockwell (2007) maintains, vocabulary has been one of the most commonly taught language areas through technology in recent years. Gorjian, Alipour, and Saffarian (2012) believe that language teaching has not remained inflexible towards the profound changes taking place in other areas of knowledge and advances in network technologies, which has resulted in the emergence of virtual worlds to facilitate online versus offline communication among users. We can use technology to help EFL learners and teachers learn and teach better and more effectively. Mobile apps seem to be the ideal support for vocabulary learning. It could provide private, stress-free environments which allow unlimited tries until learners feel confident.

Research questions

Specifically, the following questions were addressed," what are the pedagogical features of the current mobile apps for learning English vocabulary? What are the strengths and weaknesses in utilizing these mobile apps for learning English Vocabulary?

Literature review