

## Use of Mobile Apps to Improve English Language Skills Outside the Bangladeshi University Classrooms

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**Abstract:** There are many tools and strategies devised for language classroom where the teachers are the facilitators. Over the past few years, it has been observed that a substantial amount of Bangladeshi people use smartphones and mobile applications, for educational and entertainment purposes. Learners who are motivated to develop their language proficiency outside the classroom context, mobile apps can be a useful tool in this in a gadget-centered era. Considering this, this paper is going to explore the relationship between the knowledge and use of Mobile applications among the Bangladeshi undergraduates to improve their English language skills, particularly outside the classroom. To explore this in detail, a focused group of undergraduate students were chosen randomly. Through the responses to some specific open-ended questions by the participants, the researchers discovered that mobile apps are certainly functional for self-motivated students to fulfill their language needs.

**Keywords:** Smartphones, English Language Learning, Mobile Applications, Motivation.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Language learning applications through mobile phones have the likelihood to alter the procedure languages are taught and learned. With the advancement of technologies, mobile phones, smartphones, in particular, are progressively becoming more popular among adult learners. The emergence of language learning apps on smartphones has created a revolution in the educational sector all around the world. With this, comes the idea of MALL, which is a subgroup of both Mobile Learning (m-learning) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). According to Chinnery (2006), Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is language learning that is assisted or strengthened through the use of a handheld mobile device such as, mobile phones (cellphones/smartphones), MP3 and MP4 players, Personal Digital Assistant (PDA).

If we consider the present scenario of the university learners within the university surrounding, we will find that every student has a mobile phone, basically a smartphone. Smartphones comprise plenty of applications through which the students can easily absorb a language and hone their language skills effectively. It is to be noted that most of the undergraduate students of the private universities in Bangladesh hail from a comparatively prosperous family and almost every one of them possesses a smartphone, but sadly, not all of them utilize their phones for language learning. Thus, it is essential to look over whether they are aware of these apps. Additionally, it is also important to know how many of them use these apps outside the classroom setting and what their attitudes towards these apps are. Indeed, not all students of the tertiary level in Bangladesh are not aware of the language learning applications on smartphones. Nowadays, many languages are learning mobile apps and websites available on smartphones where several types of interactive activities are given for practice. On smartphones, learners can go through these websites or apps, practice and take tests by choosing their English language proficiency level.

However, not all the teachers allow the students to use smartphones or these applications inside the class in Bangladesh, although this technology can make teaching and learning enjoyable. Authentic materials can be used in the classroom using these apps and the learners can make use of them outside the classroom too. This should also be remembered that big classroom with a large number of students is one of the biggest hindrances to effective teaching and in such a situation, it becomes very difficult for a teacher to give full and equal attention to all the students in each class within a limited time. Hence, in this condition, learners can put their smartphones to use and take advantages of educational applications to improve their learning skills in their free times.

Now, the only problem is that today's generation knows how to operate a smartphone, use the internet and look for things using but many of them do not know which and how many language apps they can use extensively to develop their English language skills. Students who especially come from rural areas and Bangla-

medium background to study in private universities, Dhaka mainly find it quite difficult to cope with the learning materials as they are all available in English only. Many of them cannot understand their course books which are written in English and sometimes they also get in trouble to understand the lectures which are fully delivered in English. In this regard, various mobile applications can be beneficial to these learners to a great extent.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Several contemporary researches have disclosed that learning with mobile apps has potential feasibilities for many learners of foreign language to practice and improve different language skills on their smartphones and tablet PCs (e.g. Chang & Hsu, 2011; Egbert, Akasha, Huff, & Lee, 2011; Hoven & Palalas, 2011; Stockwell, 2010). Moreover, Kukulska-Hulme (2009, cited in Kim, 2013) depicted mobile devices as spontaneous, informal, contextual, portable, ubiquitous, and personal. Mobile technologies can support learning that is more experiential and contextualized within a certain environment. Nash's study (2007, as cited in Kim, 2013), Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) allowed learners to connect the various input content so that they are compelled to integrate the real world and the materials found on the device to obtain better learning outcomes.

Kang and Kim (2007) presented a model focusing on improving the mobile contents of teaching and learning vocabulary and English listening skills in blended learning process, which refers to mix eLearning with traditional instructor-led training in the classroom, using a mobile device. The model contained 5 steps to practice English listening and vocabulary using TV dramas to contribute to learning. The first step was related to a classroom activity with instruction on Monday and the consecutive five steps were done on the mobile device from Tuesday to Saturday based on learners' own time and place. The study concluded that TV drama as a learning resource was useful to improve English listening skills and vocabulary since it was authentic learning materials. It also showed positive effects on students' attitudes towards mobile use (Kim, 2011).

Dang (2013, cited in Ababneh, 2017) conducted research to look into the Vietnamese students' experience and attitudes towards mobile phones use in case of learning the English language. He proclaims that the use of mobile phones has drawn many researchers and educators' attention for its prospective contributions to educational sectors predominantly and language learning to be specific. Findings of this research reveal that a substantial amount of students resort to their mobile phones to learn and study English skills. Moreover, these learners have expressed very affirmative and pleasing viewpoints towards using this technology to study English in the future. Additionally, the study is intended to alter the teachers' negative perspective towards the use of the mobile phone in learning a language within the classroom context.

Muhammed (2014) has inquired into m-learning among the EFL students of Sulaimani University, Iraq. The goal of his study was to determine the extent to which cellphones are worthwhile in terms of language learning as all the participants used mobile phones to develop their language learning skills. Several types of mobile phone applications affiliated with language skills, structures, and international tests are utilized by the participants to be involved in activities linked to the English language. The study shows that 99% of the participants considered mobile phones as an effective resource to learn the English language and that mobile phones affected the process of English language learning among them. Numerous applications can be found nowadays in mobile phones regarding English language learning. For instance, applications like free PDF books and articles, listening to websites. Vocabulary game, advanced grammar, International English Language Testing System (IELTS), The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), spell checking and proofreading is used by the selected university students. These are some major features of the English language, particularly for EFL students in a CLT classroom. They are fruitful, not only outside the classroom but also within the classroom as an experiment.

Ababneh's (2017) investigation on Jordanian EFL students' attitudes towards the use of their mobile phones in learning English as a foreign language shows that the learners have very positive attitudes towards using their mobile phones in learning English. According to the study, Jordanian EFL students exhibit a high use of their mobile phones in learning English outside the classroom since their overall mean score of using their mobile phones in learning English was (3.85) out of (5) on Likert-based questionnaire. This result shows a plea from the students to the teachers and curriculum designers to move away from the long-established curricula to the technology-based teaching process. According to Salameh (2017, p.5, cited in Ababneh, 2017) "mobile phones "might be considered a good supplementary material to the curriculum", since the teachers can use the interesting applications to motivate the students to learn English thoroughly in and out of the classrooms.

In Bangladeshi context, Hossain (2018) conducted a study on the students belonged to 3rd semester of Dhaka International University, who were from five different departments having a common course named 'Functional English' which required them to go through a four-month-long nurturing in English and a grading test at the end of the semester. The findings showed that the number of mobile phone users among the students

at the tertiary level is quite high as 90% of the participants admitted possessing a mobile phone and among them, 50% participants used smartphones whereas more than 37% used both normal and smartphones, and only around 11% had only normal mobile phone. 76.47% of students admitted that they used apps on smartphones to learn English language and many of them found it quite easier to utilize. They were very affirmative about using apps and smartphones to get motivated to learn English. The study concludes that most of them are on the side of the proposition that EFL teachers in Bangladesh be able to facilitate the learning process one step ahead if they entertain the learners' use of smartphones and apps in the classroom.

**Research question:** Under above the circumstances, the researchers developed the following questions to explore the mentioned matter in-depth,

- a) Are the students aware of the educational mobile apps and websites?
- b) To what extent, do the learners get motivated to use the mobile apps to develop their language skills?
- c) What are the major benefits of using these apps to learn English outside the classroom?

### III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, qualitative research has been done using some open-ended questions. According to Creswell, (2007, p. 37, as cited in Rahman, 2019) the final written report includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem which extends the literature or signals a call for action.

**Instrument and Data Collection:** Survey questionnaire was the instrument for this research. The researchers followed the five interrelated steps in the process of qualitative data collection suggested by John W. Creswell in his book *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2012, p. 205). A qualitative questionnaire was developed to elicit in-depth responses from a focused group of students studying in different departments of a private university. The questionnaire is attached to the "Appendix" section.

**Participants:** 25 students from 3 different departments of a private university were chosen for the research. Sample size was remained limited to twenty five students only considering the time and relevance to the research topic. A document containing 10 questions was given out to the students who answered them. This was a voluntary participation from the learners and no rewards were given for their involvement in this study.

### IV. DISCUSSION

As for the first two questions, the majority of the students have said that they have been using language learning applications for almost two years. Most of them (18 out of 25) talked about ELSA Speak for speaking and listening practice and YouTube videos for enhancing their reading, writing and listening skills in English. As for the third question, a substantial amount of participants have responded that the teachers should incorporate innovative tasks connected to the learning apps outside the classrooms.

The fourth question was about the benefit they gained from using the apps and all of them answered very positively. This affirmative response shows that language learning apps do help learners to improve their speaking abilities with time.

The fifth question was if there was any negative side of using these apps too which some of them said, at the beginning level, the apps display unwanted advertisements which waste time and the dialogues of ELSA Speak app are sometimes uttered too fast which may cause a little problem for the beginners. They also talked about if they face some problem while doing the module they hardly find someone to ask and resolve those. At times it is also difficult to be motivated and practice regularly.

The sixth question stated if these apps reduced anxiety during learning to which the majority said yes, only 2/3 students said the anxiety still exists.

The answers to the seventh question varied to some extent. While most of the students agreed on the fact that classroom learning is effective because real-life interaction occurs here, only some students disagreed and stated that these apps and YouTube videos are better than classroom learning because many instructors there who make learning quite easy and effective.

The eighth question asked to rate the students' language skills after using these particular apps. Most of them rated listening and speaking skills over their reading and writing abilities.

The ninth question was about the contextualization of these "native-speaking" apps to Bangladesh. Many students said that if some tutorials for Bangladeshi learners of beginner level could be added, that would be more effective and a lot easier to use. Some of them also pointed out that part of the app's rewarding point is the development towards attaining native-speaker like pronunciation which seems quite confusing because in this, accent becomes crucial while in global context, effective communication is the need of time. Moreover, RP pronunciation is really hard for many Bangladeshi learners to achieve. Some students stated that the apps could be more user-friendly and add free.

The final question of the questionnaire was about the recommendation of the learning apps to any other students to which all the participants saw eye to eye. Most of them said they would recommend ELSA Speak whereas some of them talked about Englishlistening.com. One student pointed out in the classroom context these apps can have a beneficial impact as these can engage the learners through different activities.

**Limitation of the study:** The study acknowledged only focused group of people in a private university context in Bangladesh which does not reflect the overall scenario of the country. Hence it cannot be generalized to each and every context. However, the study would have been more effective if the researchers could include a diverse group of participants from different universities. It would also be more enlightening if we could incorporate the teachers' perspectives and views of other universities as well.

## V. RECOMMENDATION

After considering the findings from the research and the drawbacks of using the language learning apps, we would like recommend the following points to create the awareness among the undergraduates regarding the use of mobile apps for the purpose of language learning outside the classrooms to achieve the highest benefits out of these applications:

- ✓ Students should be aware of the usage and benefits of the language learning applications out of their classrooms. In this regard, teachers can play a vital role as instructors.
- ✓ Teachers should assign particular tasks which involve using the mobile applications to make sure that the students are in the process of language learning even when they are at home.
- ✓ Urban-based universities should include activities which linked to the use of learning apps even inside the classrooms as well.
- ✓ Teachers should explore the new trends of teaching along with the technological tools to enhance the learners' propensity for using the learning apps outside the classrooms.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The utility of using these language learning applications inside and outside the classroom is that it can cut expenditure of writing materials and save time because the modules are already designed in the learningapps. From our research, it is evident that utilization of these apps can motivate the learners through lowering their affective filters. The researchers believe that these language learning apps on smartphones can be a reasonable addition to elevate their language competency since by using these apps they can review their own progress. In this way, it can foster a self-directed learning among the learners outside the classrooms which can make a long-term impact on their learning beyond the course requirements.

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## Appendix

Dear Participant,

The purpose of this survey is to explore how the use of language learning apps can improve English language skills outside the classroom among the students. All of your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. Thank you.

1. How long have you been using the language learning apps to improve your English language skills?

2. Which one of the following do you use the most?

- |                        |                        |              |
|------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| • Busuu                | • Randall's el-lab.com | • Tandem     |
| • Ello.org             | • LearnEnglish         | • ELSA speak |
| • EnglishListening.com | Podcasts               |              |
|                        | • Listen Pal           |              |

Others, please mention: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you think that the teachers should incorporate innovative tasks connected to the learning apps outside the classrooms?

4. What are the benefits that you have got from these apps?

5. What are the negative sides of using these apps?

6. Can these apps reduce your anxiety during learning? Elaborate how?

7. Is it better than classroom learning? If yes, then why, if no, then why not?

8. How would you rate your language skills from scale 1 to 10 after using these apps?

Reading:

Speaking:

Writing:

Listening:

9. According to you, what are the changes necessary in these apps in Bangladeshi context?

10. Would you recommend your friend or classmate any of these applications? Which one would you go for?

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