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Exploring the Effectiveness of Using Mobile Apps in Improving the Reading and Listening Skills of English Major Students at HUIT

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Abstract

With the development of mobile technology and the proliferation of mobile apps, language learners can capitalise on these applications to enhance their English. Although their portability, connectedness, and flexibility are widely acknowledged, it is questionable whether a method like this can help English major students at Ho Chi Minh University of Industry and Trade (HUIT) acquire English reading and listening abilities well. To figure them out, quantitative is the methodology chosen, including the questionnaire survey and the experimental test. The study will first find out the attitude of 97 English major students learning at HUIT towards online learning apps. Then, the next step was to examine the effect of online apps on their English reading comprehension and listening. The main finding is that almost all of them have a positive view and attitude towards mobile online apps, although there is also a small group that has an opposite opinion, and the studying method through MALL is productive and useful for these college students to hone their two input English skills. Besides, some online learning applications liked and suited for English major students are also shown. Plus, the researcher also offers some helpful ways for them to opt for a suitable approach for themselves and learn English on their own.

Keywords: reading, listening skills, mobile apps, MALL, HUIT.

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1. Introduction

Portable software for apps, often known as "mobile apps," has emerged as a business because of the proliferation of mobile devices. There are a significant number of software programmes designed specifically for Vietnamese pupils that have been aimed at improving their English language skills among the massive selection of available software. At this point, most English learners use internet-based apps to help them learn, and HUIT English major students are no exception. They find that these apps are helpful in assisting them with the process of learning a new language. Some think they are very useful in saving effort and time and helping to increase learning, teaching, and adaptation efficiency.

Every coin, however, has two faces. Despite the fact that there are many applications devoted to studying English and university pupils discover it simpler to access these materials and services, the app industry is actually like a dense forest. There are an excessive number of programmes available for college students to select from. Besides, everything always has two opposing opinions. Whether all HUIT English major students have a positive view about applying mobile apps to their language learning. Also, it is unsure whether HUIT English major students using smartphone apps to acquire reading and listening skills in English are productive and successful.

There are previous studies on the impact of mobile applications on the language learning of university students; however, there have been no studies on this for students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry (HCM). Thus, this academic study examines the attitudes of English majors at HUIT towards MALL in language learning and evaluates how mobile apps affect HUIT English-major students' language skills, specifically reading and listening skills in English. In addition, this research also gives some methods to learn reading and listening skills in English effectively and a few mobile apps for readers.

The scope of this study includes 97 English majors studying at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry and Trade (HUIT), Tan Phu district, Ho Chi Minh City. While reviewing and evaluating the impact of online learning applications on handheld devices, the researcher will focus mainly on two language skills: reading comprehension and English listening, instead of all four basic skills.

Research question:

This research will give answers to the two questions below:

- 1) *How do HUIT English-major students perceive the usage of MALL in gaining their English language?*
- 2) *Does the use of MALL lead to considerable advancement in reading and listening English language skills among HUIT English-major students?*

2. Literature review

2.1 Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

The term "Mobile-Assisted Language Learning" (MALL) refers to the process of studying a foreign tongue through the utilisation of portable technologies. When learning takes place in a MALL setting, there isn't any requirement for students to conduct research while seated in a conventional educational environment. According to Miangah and Nezarat (2012), the multimedia adaptive educational environment has the potential to be an appropriate way to address impediments to studying a language with regard to both location and time. In contrast to the tools that are typically used in classrooms, this one offers a unique mix of adaptability, portability, and interaction through mobile applications (Liu, Tan, & Chu, 2009). This combination may enhance language acquisition through the utilisation of real, defined materials. For example, it gives learners a chance to make connections to prior expertise, gain fresh information, and

ultimately expand their ability to problem-solve (Liu, Tan, & Chu, 2009; Liu, Navarrete, Maradiegue, & Wivagg, 2014).

Participants may utilize a variety of applications on their handheld gadgets to interact with online instructional materials; readers comprehend content, and pay attention to English files; learners are able to pause or move swiftly forward across contents whenever they see needed allowing them freedom to learn depending on the speed at which they get data; MALL gives learners an opportunity to determine what they want to study (Banister, 2010). MALL offers significant advantages to individuals. It has been suggested by Kukulska and Shield (2008) that MALL can foster collaborative efforts and the shared production of information. In order for pupils to get a comprehensive comprehension of a real-world issue, they were required to search for data and communicate it to their fellow class members. The benefits of this newly developed technology have been recognized by educational institutions on every continent. According to research done by Belanger (2005), universities in both Japan as well as the United States provide learners with Apple iPods in order to inspire them to participate in class activities.

There have been a great many studies done that appear to demonstrate that MALL is actually an efficient instrument for students. Following an analysis in a study by Liu et al. (2014). It is indicated that the resources, varied assets, and abilities required to maintain instruction in English have been provided publicly through cell phone gadgets. Additionally, Kukulska and Shield (2008) concentrated their attention on the effects of both hearing and speaking, and their research came to the conclusion that MALL is transitioning rapidly upward from a primarily teacher-learner, written learning space to a system that is going to incorporate multi-media content, cooperative communication operations, and one that will enable learners to collaboratively build data in order to address issues and add data vulnerabilities. This shift is taking place at a rate of one academic year to an average of two or three years. Indeed, handheld gadgets have a significant impact on the acquisition of linguistic knowledge.

2.2 English-studying apps

2.2.1 Apps offer a variety of resources to assist in learning English online

In the field of linguistic instruction, materials are vital. Resources are a key component of the instructional and learning procedures for learning languages. However, in conventional educational environments, resources are primarily based on text. Therefore, remote students should make use of internet-based resources and website documents as significant sources of information in order to engage in successful educational experiences. As stated by Stefanc (2012), resources are one of the most crucial and necessary elements of the instructional process, and the most significant component of any computerized language acquisition curriculum is the utilisation of internet-based materials.

HUIT English-major learners in Vietnam have the opportunity to study languages through a method that is assisted by a vast and plentiful selection of language-learning applications. The use of internet-based materials provides a straightforward access point to information that may be both applicable and significant. Moreover, the utilisation of internet-based materials is viewed as playing the role of enhancing the standard of studying, increasing the likelihood of gaining an opportunity for courses of study, lowering the amount of money spent on instruction, and facilitating the efficacy of school.

These elements of English education applications now have the potential to incorporate a variety of mediums thanks to the fast growth of software and technological advances. For instance, written content, images, graphics, sounds, and clips can all be incorporated to produce multidimensional media educational resources, which can also stimulate pupil enthusiasm for schoolwork. University learners are motivated to express their minds and actively participate in conversations by using social media platforms like Hello Talk, Facebook, etc. to interact with individuals abroad in English. University learners are frequently ready to push past their language limits and enthusiastically share their opinions and points of view when communicating with different people using the English language by using multiple communication platforms.

The development of mobile applications for educational purposes has resulted in a shift away from a conventional teacher-focused model in the classroom to the learner-centred, self-governed, knowledge-constructing model of positive education (Garrett, 2008). Besides, enhancing learning with technological advancements has the potential to increase both the learner's capacity for self-control and their level of enthusiasm. Furthermore, it also assists learners in improving their educational achievements and developing active mindsets about the process of studying. Numerous studies indicate that the use of smartphone applications can encourage learners to participate in self-controlled rounds of studying (Kitsantas & Dabbagh, 2010).

It is clear that the variety of applications readily available during linguistic instruction and study has increased dramatically, and their incorporation into training for languages is becoming increasingly important and essential. Students, particularly HUIT university pupils who stay inside the English-learning surroundings of Vietnam, are in a position to make use of a significant quantity of internet-based materials that are plentiful, varied, and easy to use for their studies to enhance their English tongue. This method of studying is known as self-directed education. Learners can be connected to a universe filled with an incredible quantity of knowledge, which enables them to acquire knowledge in an effective manner and attain exceptional levels of achievement. Learners are able to quickly look for knowledge and select the time and place at which they will gain insight when they engage in self-directed education with the use of internet-based materials (Hadwin & Winne, 2001; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2004).

Indeed, developing a certain skill through a self-directed method combined with MALL is really effective and convenient. According to research by Keezhatta and Omar (2019), improving reading comprehension skills through MALL is productive; it helps learners develop reading skills related to word identification and memory compared to other methods of common learning. Another study also said that MALL also helps students practice listening more easily and improve their listening skills. Learners' exposure to practical learning tools will be more exciting and inspiring than learning in a classroom (Kim, 2013).

In conclusion, research published by Conroy (2010) found that the use of mobile apps had a beneficial impact on English language acquisition. In addition to this, it can help pupils become better at self-regulating their own educational pursuits.

2.2.2 Some popular online learning English applications in Vietnam

The vast majority of students who are taking English classes use online applications to assist them in their academic pursuits due to their variety of convenient features, wealth of knowledge, abundance of courses, and many attractive ways of conveying information. It is not surprising that HUIT English-major students are also not exceptional. They access these online programmes in order to locate articles to use as references or to seek out new terminology.

As a direct response to the needs of the country's student population, a multitude of online language learning applications have emerged in Vietnam. Thanks to that, learners have a wide variety of options that are suitable for their demands when studying a new foreign language. Indeed, online mobile apps have been supported a lot during school periods.

Overall, Duolingo, Cake, Memrise, Babilala, Elsa Speak, and Tflat Dictionary are the most downloaded applications for studying English in Vietnam. Due to their extensive use and excellent satisfaction, HUIT students, particularly English majors, are confident in these applications.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sampling

This research was done in the first semester of 2023–2024 at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry, Tan Phu District, Vietnam. Out of a total of more than a thousand English majors at HUIT University, from freshman to senior, 97 English language students were the number chosen to conduct this research. Participants in the research were asked to answer survey queries and were pleased to take an English test. Perhaps participant names and other information are not necessary to give out because the researcher think their privacy should be secured.

3.2 Design of the research

3.2.1 Survey

A quantitative method is used in this research to address the study questions. It includes a survey and an experimental test. The quantitative method was chosen for the research paper because it produces reliable results and saves time and resources. The goals are to explore the impacts and views of students when utilising applications that are placed on their cell phones to acquire English reading and listening skills.

In this study, the survey is used to find out how English majors at HUIT feel about mobile apps for learning English. It consists of three parts: one sub-section and two main sections (Part A and Part B). The sub-part consists of three general questions about the students who are taking part in the survey. The two main parts then have six questions and eleven ones, respectively. The purpose of the first main portion is to investigate the points of view and thoughts held by students majoring in English at HUIT towards the MALL. The second part considers how the online apps are doing for their English learning. Specifically, this component of the study will show how the MALL improved reading comprehension and listening skills among English majors at HUIT.

3.2.2 Experimental test

Following Bryman and Bell (2011), a genuine test is typically used as a baseline to evaluate non-experimental studies. In addition to this, it is also often utilised as a benchmark because it inspires a substantial amount of belief in the stability and reliability of causality conclusions.

The findings from the surveys will serve as the foundation for the experiment. 97 students in an English major's class were asked to take a TOEIC test, including two skills: listening and reading, without the writing and speaking part. The researcher desired to collect and analyze score test data from their pre-test and post-test. Therefore, this test had to be done twice: once without internet apps and once with them. The time gap between pre-test and post-test is two weeks. The pre-test and post-test outcomes of individuals who participated are analysed as experiment data to answer the research queries.

The attendees in the TOEIC listening and reading exercise must do 40 queries for each test. Attendees must respond to each question in accordance with whatever they have read or heard. The attendee will not receive any points for providing a false response. Every right answer is valued at 0.25 points, and there is no credit awarded if an attendee leaves a question blank. The pre- and post-tests have a maximum achievable score of 10 points each. The final score for each test is the average of the two parts: the listening part and the reading part. The test allocation and scoring system are as follows:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Listening Test: 10 points. | Following are the suggested limits of time for |
| Each question is valued at 0.25 points. | each section: |
| • Reading Comprehension: 10 points | • Listening Test: 20 minutes |
| Every question is valued at 0.25 points. | • Reading comprehension: 30 minutes |

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The survey question was conducted by Google Forms, while an experimental test was prepared and uploaded to Google Forms. After that, both of them were sent directly to participants via the Zalo group. After collecting data from the questionnaire and test results, the data was filtered and analysed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Awareness and attitudes of English major students at Ho Chi Minh University of Industry and Trade toward using MALL

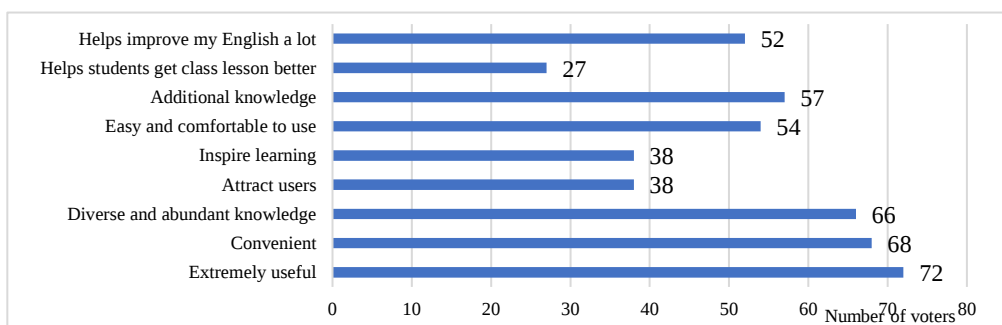


Figure 4.1 Their evaluation of mobile applications

The bar chart reveals overwhelmingly positive feedback from HUIT English major students on mobile language learning apps. With 72 votes, a majority find the apps "extremely useful," showcasing their significant impact on learning. Additionally, 68 students deem the apps "convenient," emphasizing accessibility. A substantial 66 students appreciate the "diverse and abundant knowledge" offered, highlighting varied educational content. In conclusion, the chart underscores the high value and effectiveness of mobile language learning apps for HUIT English major students.

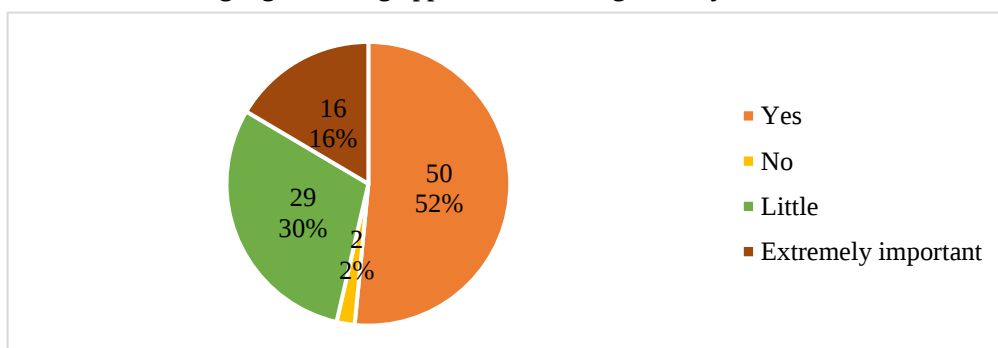


Figure 4.2 The online apps' importance level for HUIT students

Looking at the chart unequivocally underscores the significance of online apps for students at HUIT. The majority of participants express that these apps are important, reflecting their value as valuable

resources in academic pursuits (52%). 30% of them consider online apps to hold a moderate level of importance, emphasising their role in supporting studies. The 16% who deem these apps "extremely important" indicate a substantial reliance on them for academic learning. Importantly, the negligible number of participants expressing that online apps are not important highlights the widespread acknowledgment of their relevance among HUIT students. Overall, the chart reveals a strong consensus on the importance of online apps in enhancing the educational experience at HUIT.

4.1.2 The improvement of reading comprehension and listening skills in online applications for

English majors at HUIT University

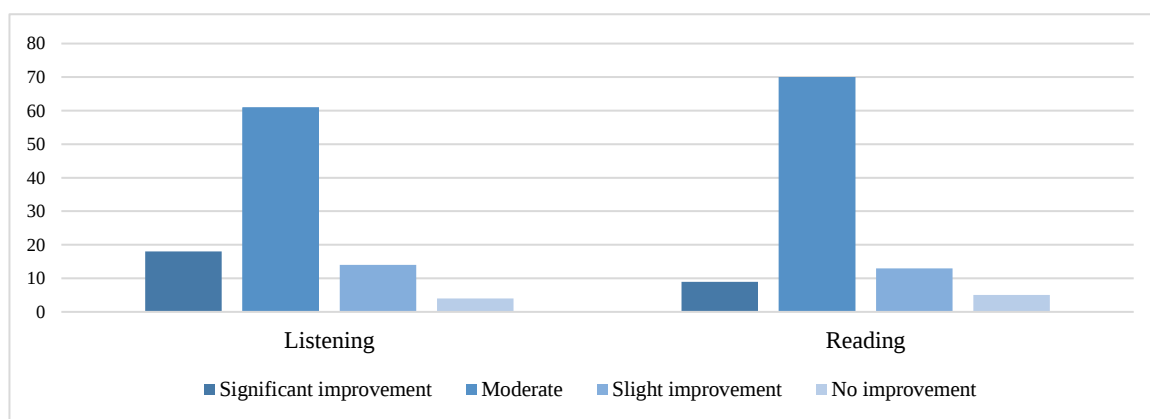


Figure 4.3 Listening and reading skills after using the online applications

The data from the chart in survey emphasises the positive impact of online apps on the listening and reading skills of English major students at HUIT. The substantial percentages of participants reporting "moderate improvement" in both skills, 63% for listening and 72% for reading, highlight the significant role these applications play in enhancing language abilities.

It's worth noting that the number of participants in item "no improvement" is really low (4% in listening skills and 5% in reading skills). That underscores the variability in the effectiveness of online apps, acknowledging that they may not work uniformly for every student.

Briefly, although the enhancement level of learning results after using MALL among individuals is not similar, most have improved. The number of voters for the item "no improvement" is really low. Only 4-5%..

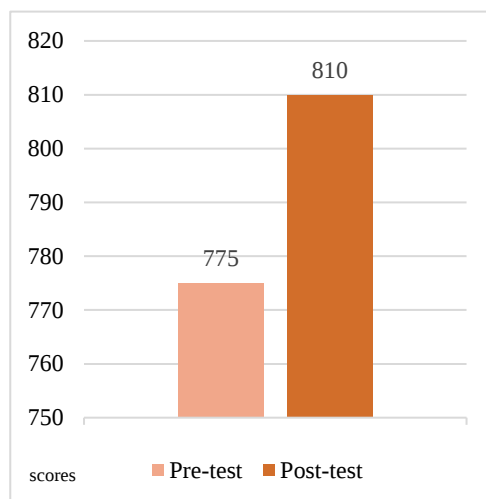


Figure 4 Difference in total pre- and post-test scores

The figure shows the difference between participants' pre- and post-test results. It shows the total scores of all 97 students. Looking at the chart, it is easy to see that the points have been raised. It can be seen that the difference in the total score of 97 participants in the next test compared to the previous test is 36 points. In fact, the difference in scores before and after for each skill of each individual is very small, only increasing by 0.25 to 0.5 points; some scores even do not increase at all, but generally, mobile apps have indeed improved their test scores. Although the score also includes their inherent language ability, it is clear that, to a greater or lesser extent, MALL has really had a positive impact on the English learning of English majors at HUIT.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of the research will be presented and discussed along with the prior studies in this item. Of course, the purpose is to answer the research questions given.

a) Research Question 1: How do HUIT English-major students perceive the usage of MALL in gaining their English language?

The questionnaire provided valuable insights into the attitudes and opinions of HUIT English major students. The findings from the survey reveal a predominantly positive reception among students regarding the educational strategy. A majority of the students expressed the belief that the implemented educational approach was not only beneficial but also instrumental in refining their English proficiency.

Interestingly, the data from the survey highlights the prevalence of MALL among participants, particularly for enhancing English reading and listening skills. Along with that, the participants clearly understood how important MALL was; this was shown by the responses to Figure 4.2, where 52% of participants confirmed its importance and 16% emphasised it.

This idea fits with research from Kitsantas and Dabbagh (2010), Hadwin and Winne (2001), and Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2004), which suggest that MALL has the potential to support self-directed learning among learners in higher education. These findings collectively underscore the positive reception and potential benefits of integrating MALL as a complementary tool for enhancing English language acquisition among university students, especially at HUIT.

b) Research Question 2: Does the use of MALL lead to considerable advancement in reading and listening English language skills among HUIT English-major students?

Based on Figure 4.3, it is easy to see that the rate of "no improvement" in both questions is extremely low. In the remaining three items, although there is a perceived difference in the level of improvement before and after using MALL, in general, there is still an improvement in the reading and listening skills of students' English learning. This is true for the two studies by Keezhatta and Omar (2019) and Kim (2013) mentioned earlier. Two studies have shown that improving reading comprehension and listening skills through online applications compared to other conventional learning methods is very effective.

However, those are just the feelings and comments of research participants, so to be more certain, a testing process was performed. Based on the research results, it can be seen that after using MALL to test listening and reading skills, children's scores increased. Although there is a difference in the level of score increase, it is still generally higher than the original score. From the results of the pilot test, it was determined that using MALL to help HUIT English majors acquire English is effective.

In summary, from the results of the study, it can be concluded that there is a beneficial correlation between learners' progress in English proficiency and online mobile applications. This conclusion coincided with previous research, in which the researcher also suggested that learners can learn languages successfully and effectively by using mobile applications (Conroy, 2010).

5. Conclusion

The outcomes of the investigation show that survey participants have a favourable opinion of MALL. Most of them feel that MALL has a certain importance for them in learning to read and listen to English. They said that using MALL helps them complete their study tasks with less pressure, save time, and feel more confident. Besides, study participants also said that their skills had improved and progressed after using MALL. The diversity in the extent of improvement indicates that MALL can reflect individual levels of concentration and application. It means that, after using the MALL technology for learning, not all students improved their scores in the same way. Some improved more, while others improved less or didn't improve at all. However, the common thread is that MALL has positively contributed to enhancing knowledge and assisting English major students at HUIT with English acquisition.

In conclusion, MALL has actually had a positive impact on the language learning of HUIT English major students. The progress of the reading comprehension and listening skills of English major students

at HUIT after using MALL not only demonstrates improvement in scores but also reflects a positive direction in the application of technology in education and learning, with the potential to enhance the quality and learning performance in the future.

Besides, participants in the survey provided some of the applications that they noted as being useful. They have indicated that they use and believe the app TFlats Dictionary to be good. Additionally, children can learn new words using the Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries, which are both great tools for swiftly growing their range of words. The other applications are nonetheless great, even though they weren't chosen much. School students can refer to those applications to find a few satisfactory applications that suit their needs.

When English major students at HUIT utilise applications to brush up on English on their own, they must look for the proper and relevant internet sources to maintain their enthusiasm for these online learning contents. In addition, individuals need to develop their educational plans, schedule daily times to study, make a commitment to maintaining the pace of the procedure, and complete it within the allotted amount of time and energy, as well as preserve an upbeat mindset and keep up the discipline. Besides, try to spend a minimum of one to two hours every day acquiring and practicing English. This is necessary to be able to study English successfully.

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