



Students' attitudes toward the use of mobile applications for learning English vocabulary

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Abstract

This paper presents an investigation into students' attitudes toward the use of mobile applications for learning English vocabulary among English-major students at Thai Nguyen university of Technology. A questionnaire survey was conducted with 30 students using a Likert scale. The study examines four aspects: frequency of use, perceived effectiveness, motivation and interest, and ease of use and convenience. The findings reveal that most students frequently use mobile applications and hold positive attitudes toward their effectiveness. Mobile applications help increase students' motivation and engagement, particularly through interactive and flexible learning features. However, qualitative responses show that there are still several challenges, including distraction, limited vocabulary scope, and dependence on internet access. The study suggests that mobile applications are valuable tools for vocabulary learning when integrated appropriately into teaching practices.

Keywords: Mobile learning, vocabulary acquisition, EFL students, learner attitudes, educational technology

Introduction

The integration of mobile technology into education has significantly transformed language learning practices in recent years. With the widespread use of smartphones, learners now have greater opportunities to study anytime and anywhere. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) provides flexible and personalized learning environments that extend beyond traditional classrooms. According to Kukulska-Hulme (2020) ^[1], mobile technologies enable learners to engage in continuous and self-directed learning. Similarly, Godwin-Jones (2017) ^[2] highlights that smartphones offer authentic language exposure and interactive learning experiences, which are beneficial for language development.

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of language learning, as it directly influences learners' ability to communicate effectively. Nation (2013) ^[3] emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in both receptive and productive language skills. In recent years, mobile applications such as Duolingo and dictionary apps have become popular tools for vocabulary learning. These applications often include features such as spaced repetition, gamification, and multimedia support, which can enhance learning effectiveness and learner engagement.

Previous studies have shown that mobile applications can positively influence language learning. For example, Stockwell (2013) ^[4] argues that mobile learning increases learner motivation through interactive and engaging activities. In addition, Viberg and Grönlund (2013) ^[5] found that students generally have positive attitudes toward mobile learning due to its convenience and flexibility. More recently, Zou *et al.* (2021) ^[6] suggest that digital tools can improve vocabulary retention through repeated exposure and practice.

However, despite these advantages, several challenges have also been identified. Mobile learning may lead to distraction, as students often use the same devices for entertainment and social media (Godwin-Jones, 2017) ^[2]. Furthermore, mobile applications may focus more on memorization rather than meaningful language use, which

may limit learners' ability to apply vocabulary in real communication.

Although a number of studies have explored mobile-assisted language learning, there is still a need for more research focusing specifically on students' attitudes toward the use of mobile applications for vocabulary learning in particular contexts, especially in Thai Nguyen university of technology. Understanding learners' perceptions can provide valuable insights for improving teaching practices and integrating technology effectively.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' attitudes toward the use of mobile applications for learning English vocabulary to answer these research questions:

- How frequently do students use mobile applications for learning English vocabulary?
- How do students perceive the effectiveness of mobile applications?
- To what extent do mobile applications influence students' motivation and interest?
- How do students evaluate the ease of use and convenience of mobile applications?

The study

The subjects

The participants were 30 English-major students at Thai Nguyen University of technology. All participants had prior experience using mobile applications for vocabulary learning.

The Instruments

The main data collection instrument for the study was a questionnaire survey.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions, 14 of which were close-ended based on five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The rest were open-ended questions. The questions were divided into five categories: frequency of use (Q1–Q3), perceived effectiveness (Q4–Q8), motivation and interest (Q9–Q11),

ease of use and convenience (Q12–Q14), open-ended questions (Q15–Q16).

Data collection and analysis

The questionnaire was administered with all the 30 students and it was returned within one day. The data was analyzed through the descriptive statistics.

Results

The findings collected from the questionnaire are presented and discussed in five categories: students' frequency of using mobile applications, perceived effectiveness of mobile applications, motivation and interest, ease of use and convenience, qualitative results.

1. Students' frequency of using mobile applications

The results in Table 1 indicate that students frequently use mobile applications for vocabulary learning, although the level of consistency varies.

Table 1: Frequency of using mobile applications

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I spend time learning English vocab on mobile apps every day.	10.7%	0%	25%	53.6%	10.7%
I often review vocab using mobile apps outside the classroom.	10.7	3.5	28.6	42.9	14.3
I prefer using mobile apps rather than traditional notebooks to study vocab.	10.7	3.6	14.3	50	21.4

2. Perceived effectiveness of mobile applications

The results show strong positive perceptions of effectiveness across all items.

For remembering vocabulary (Item 4), 64.3% agreed, while 25% were neutral and 10.7% strongly disagreed. For understanding word meanings (Item 5), agreement increased to 75% (53.6% agree; 21.4% strongly agree). A higher percentage was observed in learning how to use

For daily learning (Item 1), 64.3% of students agreed or strongly agreed (53.6% agree; 10.7% strongly agree), while 25% remained neutral and 10.7% strongly disagreed. This suggests that although many students use mobile apps every day, a considerable proportion does not engage consistently. Regarding reviewing vocabulary outside the classroom (Item 2), 57.2% of students expressed agreement (42.9% agree; 14.3% strongly agree), while 28.6% were neutral and 14.2% disagreed. This indicates that mobile apps are moderately used as supplementary learning tools.

For preference over traditional notebooks (Item 3), 71.4% of students showed positive attitudes (50% agree; 21.4% strongly agree), while only 14.3% were neutral and 14.3% disagreed.

Students tend to prefer mobile apps, but their actual usage (especially regular review) is less consistent.

vocabulary in sentences (Item 6), with 78.6% agreement (60.7% agree; 17.9% strongly agree).

Similarly, 75% of students agreed that exercises in apps help them practice vocabulary (Item 7).

Finally, 71.4% believed that mobile apps improve their overall vocabulary (Item 8).

Students perceive mobile apps as more effective for application and practice than for simple memorization.

Table 2: Perceived effectiveness of mobile applications

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Mobile apps help me remember English vocab better.	10.7%	0%	25%	50%	14.3%
Learning vocab through mobile apps improves my understanding of word meanings.	10.7	0	14.3	53.6	21.4
Mobile apps help me learn how to use vocab in sentences.	7.1	0	14.3	60.7	17.9
Exercises in mobile apps help me practise vocab.	10.7	0	14.3	57.1	17.9
Using mobile apps improves my overall English vocab.	7.1	0	21.4	60.7	10.7

3. Motivation and interest

The findings indicate that mobile applications have a strong positive impact on students' motivation and interest.

For enjoyment (Item 9), 75% of students agreed (53.6% agree; 21.4% strongly agree).

For making learning more interesting (Item 10), agreement reached 78.6%, the highest in this group.

However, motivation (Item 11) showed a lower level of agreement at 64.3%, with a relatively high neutral rate (25%).

Mobile apps are very effective in making learning interesting, but their impact on sustained motivation is weaker.

Table 3: Motivation and interest

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Learning vocab through mobile apps is enjoyable.	10.7%	0%	14.3%	53.6%	21.4%
Mobile apps make learning English vocab more interesting.	10.7	0	10.7	64.3	14.3
I feel more motivated to learn vocab when using mobile apps.	10.7	0	25	53.6	10.7

4. Ease of use and convenience

This category shows the strongest positive responses overall.

For ease of use (Item 12), 75% of students agreed. For flexibility (Item 13), 78.5% agreed, with 21.4% strongly agreeing.

The highest agreement in the entire study was found in Item 14, where 82.1% agreed that app design and features help learning.

Students highly value the design and convenience of mobile apps, which strongly supports learning.

Table 4: Ease of use and convenience

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Mobile apps for learning English are easy to use.	10.7%	0%	14.3%	57.1%	17.9%
I can learn vocab anytime and anywhere using mobile apps.	10.7	3.6	7.1	57.1	21.4
Design and features of vocab apps help me learn easily.	10.7	0	7.1	75	7.1

5. Qualitative results

The qualitative responses further support the quantitative findings. Students frequently mentioned the advantages such as flexibility (“anytime, anywhere”), engaging features (games, quizzes), and ease of use.

However, there are still some disadvantages like distraction (especially social media), dependence on internet, and limited vocabulary and lack of communication practice.

These responses provide deeper insight into students’ experiences and explain the patterns observed in the quantitative data.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of students’ attitudes toward the use of mobile applications for learning English vocabulary by combining both quantitative and qualitative data.

First, regarding frequency of use, the quantitative results indicate that a majority of students use mobile applications regularly, with 64.3% reporting daily usage and 71.4% expressing a preference for mobile apps over traditional notebooks. However, a lower percentage (57.2%) reported using mobile applications to review vocabulary outside the classroom. This pattern is supported by qualitative responses, where students described mobile apps as convenient but also admitted that they do not always use them consistently. Many students mentioned that they tend to use mobile apps only when they feel interested or have free time, rather than as part of a structured learning routine. This suggests that mobile learning is often informal and flexible, but lacks regularity and discipline.

Second, in terms of perceived effectiveness, the quantitative findings show that mobile applications are considered effective, particularly for learning how to use vocabulary in context (78.6%) and practicing through exercises (75%). However, a lower percentage (64.3%) agreed that apps help them remember vocabulary. The qualitative data provides a clear explanation for this difference. While students appreciated features such as example sentences, quizzes, and interactive exercises, some reported that vocabulary learned through apps is easily forgotten if not reviewed regularly. Others noted that some applications provide limited vocabulary or lack depth. This indicates that mobile applications are more effective for practice and application than for long-term retention, especially when learners do not follow consistent review strategies.

Third, the results related to motivation and interest reveal an important distinction. Although a high percentage of students found mobile learning interesting (78.6%) and enjoyable (75%), only 64.3% reported feeling more motivated to learn. This gap between interest and motivation is also reflected in the qualitative responses. Many students described mobile apps as “fun” and “engaging,” particularly because of game-like features. However, several students also reported being easily distracted by other applications, such as social media, when using their phones. This suggests that while mobile apps can successfully capture learners’ attention, they may not be sufficient to sustain

long-term motivation due to competing distractions in the mobile environment.

Finally, ease of use and convenience emerged as the strongest aspects of mobile learning. The highest level of agreement (82.1%) was related to app design and features, followed by flexibility (78.5%). These findings are strongly supported by qualitative data, where students frequently mentioned that mobile apps allow them to learn “anytime and anywhere” and are “easy to use.” However, some students also highlighted limitations such as the need for internet access and occasional technical difficulties. This suggests that while convenience is a major advantage, it may depend on external factors such as technology access and digital skills.

Overall, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals that students have generally positive attitudes toward mobile applications, but their effectiveness depends on how they are used. Mobile apps are particularly strong in terms of engagement, flexibility, and interactive learning, but weaker in promoting consistent study habits and long-term retention.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers should encourage students to use mobile applications regularly as part of structured learning routines, guide students in selecting high-quality applications with effective review systems, combine mobile learning with classroom activities to reinforce vocabulary retention, and raise students’ awareness of potential distractions and promote self-regulated learning strategies

Conclusion

This study examined students’ attitudes toward the use of mobile applications for learning English vocabulary. The findings show that students generally have positive perceptions, particularly regarding convenience, engagement, and interactive features. Mobile applications were found to be effective in supporting vocabulary practice and increasing learners’ interest.

However, their impact on sustained motivation and consistent learning habits appears to be more limited. Challenges such as distraction, reliance on internet access, and limited depth of vocabulary learning were also identified.

These results suggest that mobile applications should be used as supplementary tools rather than replacements for traditional learning. Their effectiveness depends largely on how they are integrated into learning processes and supported by teachers.

Overall, mobile applications offer valuable opportunities for vocabulary learning, but a balanced and guided approach is essential to maximize their benefits.

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