Using Apps to Enhance Students’ Learning of English Vocabulary

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Abstract
Nowadays, education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is entering a new phase (Saudi Vision 2030), which focuses on quality of education, ensuring that students are being prepared to deal with future challenges such as cultural diversity, economic changes, and globalization. Because of English becoming more important under the trend of globalization and internationalization, it is considered to be one of the most important foreign languages in Saudi Arabia. Teaching and learning a foreign language through technology has become a new trend in foreign language education all over the world (Schmitt, 2009). Technology instruction in our classrooms has been an important aspect of successful teaching. I find that some students are demotivated to learn English language because they do not realize the advantage of learning it. Therefore, EFL students in Saudi Arabia often struggle with literacy and vocabulary retention, which also affects their grammar learning and reading comprehension. As a result, I presume that this project will be a good opportunity to take advantage of students’ interests in technological tools, such as cell phones, apps, in order to help increase students’ vocabulary and trigger their desire to learn the language. However, I intend to implement this project with the seventh grade students at Al-Ghazayat Middle School in Al-Joumouk, Makkah, Saudi Arabia, by using two apps: Duolingo and Kahoot in a period of 12 weeks so that I can evaluate the effects of learning vocabulary through these two apps by taking a pretest, a posttest, and a survey at the end.

Statement of Need
This document outlines the need for integrating smartphone-based apps into English language teaching and learning at Al-Ghazayat Middle School in Al-Joumouk, Makkah, Saudi Arabia, in order to help increase students’ vocabulary. Going on with the 21st century, we can notice that not only is the education system developing rapidly, but also technology has invaded our life. Everyone possesses a smart phone these days using apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, etc. No one can deny that technology learning has become the key to learning English vocabulary. How can technology assist students in memorizing what they have learned? What are the advantages, disadvantages, and possible future trends of using apps in language learning? Therefore, this study will examine the effects of using mobile phones/smartphones and app-assisted vocabulary learning on the students’ vocabulary learning and achievement, and compare the results with those of traditional learning methods.

Review of the Literature

Mobile Learning
The broad definition of mobile learning should be using technology to create a personalized learning environment free from restrictions of time and space.

Apps
The term app is short for software application, which is a means to present a software program or piece of software designed to fulfill a particular purpose; “an application, especially as downloaded by a user to a mobile device” (App, n.d.).

Vocabulary Learning Apps
Determining that English vocabulary is the principal foundation of learning English (Huang, et al., 2017). In addition, the academic success depends on the comprehension of a language, which is linked to vocabulary learning (Make & Shandu, 2018). Here, the role of vocabulary learning app comes as a didactical tool for teachers which helps them to learn words in many ways to be a platform for lifelong learning.

Examples of Vocabulary Learning Apps
It has two main components: grammar and vocabulary exercises and an interface to translate articles from the web.

Implementation Plan

Goal
To find out the effect of integrating smartphone-based apps into English language teaching and learning at Al-Ghazayat Middle School in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, in order to help increase students’ vocabulary and trigger their desire to learn the language.

Objectives
1. To determine students’ strengths and needs in vocabulary learning.
2. To take advantage of activity class time, in order to foster vocabulary building.
3. To provide the students with opportunities to practice the vocabulary of their apps, and to work on their own using apps.
4. To give students enough time to practice the target apps in order to promote active learning.
5. To provide assistance and reduce technical barriers such as network.
6. To encourage students’ learning of English vocabulary and stimulate them to study on their own using apps.
7. To track the students’ mastery and progress.
8. To share students’ perceptions and acceptance toward using the mobile learning apps.

Participants
The project will be implemented and managed by English teachers at Al-Ghazayat Middle School in Al-Joumouk, Makkah, in addition to the principal, vice principal, student adviser and the learning resources secretary who will be responsible for supervision and assistance when needed. Regarding the target group, it will be seventh graders who are first-year middle school students who meet greater challenges in English learning, compared to their more playful English learning during their previous elementary schools. The duration of the project will be twelve weeks.

Evaluation Plan

Pretest
At the beginning of the project, the students will receive the pretest the English vocabulary. It aims to assess the students’ original vocabulary level prior to the project period. It also will serve to raise students’ awareness on the importance of building their vocabulary. The test will include multiple choice of vocabulary; match word and image; answer true/false; fill in the blanks; circle the correct word; and match word and definition. The vocabulary included in the test will be part of what they will learn through the apps.

Kahoot App
During the project implementation period, which will be twelve weeks, the Kahoot app will be used once every two weeks to assess students’ performance in what they learned in the previous week. This app will provide vocabulary practice, assess students’ knowledge, and identify the need for continued improving.

Posttest
The posttest of the English vocabulary, which will be assigned to the students on the last day of the project, will examine the students’ vocabulary gains in the lessons given. This test aims to evaluate the difference in vocabulary acquisition by using Duolingo and Kahoot apps.

Survey
A survey will be conducted to evaluate the students’ perspectives and attitudes toward using the vocabulary learning apps at the end of the project period. It will consist of three sections. The first section will be designed to elicit the personal information of the students. In the second section, students will be asked to express their perspectives in a five-point Likert scale about their satisfaction, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Moreover, the last section composed of three open-ended questions will be designed to elicit students’ opinions toward using Duolingo and Kahoot as vocabulary learning tools.

Acknowledgements

Instruments
Three instruments will be employed in this study, consisting of the Apps Duolingo and Kahoot, English vocabulary tests, a survey about app-assisted English vocabulary learning. A pretest and a posttest of English vocabulary test which will be taken by students ahead of and after the project period. In the end of the project, the students will take a survey on app-assisted English vocabulary learning to express their point of views whether they are highly motivated in the app-assisted mode or not.

Method
We will implement some vocabulary lessons through two apps (Duolingo and Kahoot) in order to help students, learn, practice and assess their vocabulary development. Duolingo will be used as an alternative to help students learn vocabulary of some topics chosen at the beginning of the project. All students will use Duolingo to practice the lessons for 15-20 minutes during activity classes time in the afternoon on weekdays. The week after each lesson will be studied with Duolingo, they will be assessed through Kahoot. To play the game, the class needs internet access, a projector and a screen where they can visualize the activities. During the first session, students will be introduced to the two apps and to the generalities of the topics that would be studied during the following weeks. There will be a mixture of feelings of excitement, fear and anxiety, since for most of them English is not an easy language to learn, nor their favorite school subject (Guasqaeta & Castro-Garcés, 2018).

Author Information
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References


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