Using Apps to Enhance Students' Learning of English Vocabulary

Hassan Abdullah H. Albarakati
Kansas State University Khbrat SUMMIT
Building Leadership for Change Through School Immersion

Author Information

The author is Hassan Abdullah H. Albarakati. He is a Saudi English teacher at Al-Ghuzayat Middle School, located in Al-Jamoum, Makkah, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in English from Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah. He has been teaching EFL to elementary and middle-level students for twelve years. In 2018, he was selected to be a part of Khbrat program, a teacher professional development program, in the United States of America at Kansas State University.

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 (Liu, 2009). Hence, technology integration in our classrooms has become an important aspect of successful teaching. I find that many 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-Ghuzayat Middle School in Al-Jamoum, 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-Ghuzayat Middle School in Al-Jamoum, 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 this generation we teach nowadays is the generation of technology. Whatever we do, we can't stop them from using technology, mobile phones, iPad, etc. If we compare the education system of the past to the education system now, we will find a huge gap between what teachers used in the past considering educational aids, teaching methods, motivation strategies, etc., and what we are using now to teach our students (Hamad, 2017). According to Statista (n.d.) the number of apps available in Apple's App Store as of the third quarter of 2018 is almost 2 million. For Android users, the number rises to 2.1 million. Just under 10 percent of those apps are targeted toward education, with well over 150,000 apps dedicated to learning.

In ESL/EFL learning, vocabulary items play a vital role in all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Language teachers tend to try to teach their students the vocabulary they think students will encounter; however, students' need to read grows extensively, and their vocabulary needs increase accordingly, but teachers rarely have enough time to teach them all the vocabulary they may need. In addition, individual differences exist between the learners, which makes deciding what vocabulary students should learn difficult and not easily predictable (Schmitt, 2000).

I like the idea that there are some apps that might be alternative approaches for students to be engaged in the learning process. Therefore, the focus of this paper will be on some apps that are designed to motivate students to think and to organize their ideas for learning, which contributes to increasing their English Language vocabulary.

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 means a self-contained 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
Considering 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 (Makoe & Shandu, 2018). Here, the role of vocabulary learning app comes as a didactical tool for the students that helps them to learn words in various ways to be a platform for lifelong learning.

Examples of Vocabulary Learning Apps

It has two major components: grammar and vocabulary exercises and an interface to translate articles from the web.

It gives teachers the opportunity to design an instrument to assess students' performance during a lesson.

Studies on Mobile Phones and Mobile Phones Apps
Saran, Seferoglu, and Cagiltay (2012) compared mobile phones, computer web pages, and paper formats for English vocabulary learning to see which brings about better learning efficiency. The results indicated that students using mobile phones to learn English vocabulary learn more words than through learning via other media. On the other hand, Huang, Huang, Tsai, and Chen (2017) found students are satisfied and positive about using apps to help learn English vocabulary, and app assisted vocabulary learning can effectively improve the ability of spelling English vocabularies. There are other findings indicating that the use of mobile phones/smartphones and their apps generate positive effects on learning English as a foreign language, especially in the development of learners' vocabulary and their increased motivation to study (Klimova, 2018).

Implementation Plan

Goal
To find out the effect of integrating smartphone-based apps into English language teaching and learning at Al-Ghozayat 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 introduce the apps to the students and tell them how they function.
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 by 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-Ghuzayat Middle School in Al-Jamoum, 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.

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.

Steps
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 students can visualize the activities. During the first lesson, 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 (Guaqueta & Castro-Garces, 2018).

Evaluation Plan

Pretest
At the beginning of the project, the students will receive the pretest of 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