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THE USE OF MOBILE APPLICATIONS IN ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated how Vietnamese university students utilize mobile applications for English language learning, addressing a significant research gap in understanding the integration of mobile learning technologies within Vietnam's higher education context. The research aimed to explore students' usage patterns, experiences, and the relationship between mobile applications and formal language instruction. Using a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis, the study collected data from 30 university students across various academic disciplines and proficiency levels. The findings revealed that students primarily use mobile applications as complementary tools to formal education, with clear preferences for applications offering immediate feedback and interactive features. Students developed sophisticated learning strategies, combining multiple applications to address different language skills, particularly focusing on pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition. The research also identified challenges in integrating mobile applications with formal education, including limited institutional support and guidance. These findings have significant implications for educational stakeholders: they suggest the need for structured integration of mobile applications into formal curriculum, enhanced institutional support systems, and better alignment between mobile learning activities and traditional teaching methods. The results contribute to developing more effective mobile-assisted language learning strategies specifically tailored to the Vietnamese higher education context.

KEYWORDS: Learn English, mobile app, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid digitization of the 21st century has fundamentally changed the educational landscape worldwide, with mobile technology emerging as a key tool in reshaping traditional learning models. In Vietnam, this technological revolution is particularly pronounced, with mobile penetration reaching unprecedented levels. According to recent statistics, Vietnam's smartphone penetration has skyrocketed to 89.43% in 2023, marking a significant increase from 68.72% in 2019 (Statista, 2024). This significant growth has been driven by the increasing affordability of mobile devices, the expansion of internet infrastructure, and the government's digital transformation initiatives under the "Make in Vietnam" strategy.

The development of mobile technology in Vietnam coincides with a period of strong focus on English education at Vietnamese universities. Since Decision No. 2080/QĐ-TTg was issued in 2017, which required English proficiency for university graduates, Vietnamese higher education institutions have faced the challenge of improving English language teaching. Despite these efforts, recent studies indicate that Vietnamese university graduates continue to improve their English proficiency, with average TOEIC scores still below regional standards (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023). Traditional classroom-based teaching methods, although valuable, have shown limitations in providing students with adequate exposure to authentic language use and practical communication opportunities.

In this context, mobile learning (m-learning) is seen as a promising solution to complement traditional English education. The convergence of mobile technology accessibility and the need for enhanced language learning opportunities has created a platform for mobile-enabled language learning (MALL) initiatives. Research by Tran et al. (2023) demonstrates that Vietnamese students are increasingly turning to mobile apps for language practice, with 78% of college students surveyed reporting that they regularly use at least one language learning app. This trend aligns with global models of mobile-enabled language learning, where apps such as Duolingo, Memrise, and ELSA have garnered significant attention among language learners (Hung, 2022).

However, the integration of mobile applications into English learning at Vietnamese universities offers both opportunities and challenges that need to be studied systematically. While the potential benefits of mobile learning have been well documented in an international context, the specific dynamics of its implementation and effectiveness in the Vietnamese higher education context have not been fully studied. This research gap becomes especially important due to the unique cultural, technological and educational characteristics of Vietnam's higher education system.

Although mobile apps for learning English are very popular and the smartphone usage rate in Vietnam is quite high, there are still limitations on how Vietnamese university students use these apps to improve their English skills (Huy & Hung, 2022). Moreover, the relationship between the use of mobile apps and English learning outcomes in the Vietnamese context is still unclear, as is the integration of these tools into the formal education framework. This knowledge gap hinders the effective implementation of mobile-assisted language learning strategies at Vietnamese universities and may result in missed opportunities to improve English language education.

Therefore, this study was conducted to explore and analyze how Vietnamese university students use mobile applications to learn English and understand the impact of these applications on their language acquisition process. Specifically, the study aims at the following specific objectives:

- (i) Identify the models and preferences for using the mobile application to learn English of Vietnamese university students.
- (ii) To consider the perceived benefits and challenges of using the mobile app to learn English.

(iii) To study how mobile applications complement traditional classroom-based English teaching.

(iv) To explore the factors influencing students' participation in mobile apps for language learning.

This study has important implications for many stakeholders in the Vietnamese education system. For educators and university managers, the findings will provide valuable insights into students' mobile learning behaviors and preferences, enabling more appropriate decision-making about the integration of mobile apps into formal language curricula. The research will help identify effective strategies for combining traditional teaching methods with mobile learning methods that are likely to lead to more engaging and effective English education programs.

For app developers and educational technology companies, this study will provide important information on the specific needs and challenges of Vietnamese undergraduate students, enabling the development of more culturally relevant and targeted learning solutions. This understanding can lead to the creation of more effective and contextually relevant mobile applications for learning English.

From a policy perspective, this study will contribute to the broader discussion of digital transformation in Vietnamese higher education, providing evidence-based insights for decision-makers considering the role of mobile technology in language education policies. These findings inform future educational policies and guidelines regarding the integration of mobile learning into university curricula.

Furthermore, this study will contribute to the increasing volume of literature on mobile aided language learning in Asian contexts, addressing a significant research gap in understanding how cultural and educational factors influence the effectiveness of mobile learning approaches. The insights gained from this study are valuable to other developing countries with similar educational contexts and challenges in teaching English as in Vietnam's universities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical framework

The intersection between mobile technology and language learning is supported by a number of theoretical frameworks that provide the foundation for understanding how mobile applications facilitate language acquisition.

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

Mobile device-assisted language learning represents significant growth in computer-assisted language learning (CALL), as distinguished by its emphasis on mobility and accessibility. Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2023) defines MALL as the use of personal, mobile devices that enable learning in new ways, emphasizing self-discipline, mobility, and continuity of accessibility and interaction. This theoretical framework emphasizes how mobile devices facilitate “anytime, anywhere” learning opportunities, breaking down traditional spatial and temporal barriers to language acquisition.

The MALL framework includes several key principles that are particularly relevant to the Vietnamese context. First, it emphasizes the importance of informal learning environments where students can

engage with language content outside of traditional classrooms. Wang & Chen (2022) highlight how the MALL supports a “seamless learning experience,” allowing learners to transition smoothly between formal and informal learning contexts. This aspect is especially important in Vietnam, where students often have few opportunities to practice English in formal educational settings.

In addition, MALL theory emphasizes the role of learner autonomy and self-directed learning. Research by Le & Nguyen (2023) demonstrates how mobile apps allow Vietnamese students to better control their learning speed, content selection, and practice frequency. This autonomy is in line with modern pedagogical methods that emphasize learner-centred education.

Second Language Acquisition

The theoretical understanding of mobile aided language learning is further enhanced when considering Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory. Krashen's influential hypotheses, particularly the Input Hypothesis and the Sentiment Filter Hypothesis, remain relevant in the digital age. Modern applications of these theories, as discussed by Ellis & Larsen-Freeman (2023), show that mobile apps can provide easy-to-understand input while reducing sentiment filters through video games and personalized learning experiences.

A particularly relevant aspect of SLA theory in the context of mobile learning is the interaction hypothesis proposed by Long and updated by contemporary researchers. Pham et al. (2024) argue that mobile applications facilitate both input and output opportunities through interactive features, chat functionality, and voice recognition technology. These technological capabilities enable the kind of meaningful interaction that SLA theory offers that is critical to language development.

Furthermore, the concept of recognition in SLA theory, as formulated by Schmidt and refined by recent scholars, finds new expression in mobile applications. Zhang & Liu (2023) demonstrate how mobile apps can enhance recognition through features such as highlighted text, feedback on pronunciation, and error correction, helping learners identify gaps between their interlingual and target language forms.

Connectivity in Digital Learning

The Connectivity Framework, developed by Siemens & Downes and then extended by digital learning theorists, provides an important theoretical perspective for understanding language learning in the mobile age. Connectivity assumes that learning takes place through connections within the network, emphasizing the role of digital tools in facilitating these connections. Anderson & Lee (2024) argue that mobile applications serve as nodes in the learning network, allowing learners to access and contribute to distributed knowledge sources.

In the context of language learning, connectivism explains how mobile apps facilitate learning through social media, online communities, and collaboration features. Research by Tran & Hoang (2023) shows how Vietnamese students use mobile apps not only for personal learning but also to connect

with global language learning communities, creating what they call a “digital language learning ecosystem”.

The connectivity perspective also emphasizes the importance of digitalization and network navigation skills. Do et al. (2024) emphasize how successful language learners in the digital age must develop competencies in selecting appropriate learning resources, assessing content quality, and managing their learning networks effectively. This aspect is especially relevant for Vietnamese university students who have to navigate the increasingly complex landscape of mobile learning apps and resources.

The integration of these three theoretical frameworks - MALL, SLA theory, and connectivity theory - provides a comprehensive platform for understanding how mobile apps support language learning. These theories complement each other, with the MALL providing the technological framework, the SLA theory explaining linguistic and cognitive processes, and the connectivity theory addressing the networked nature of learning in the digital age. Together, they provide valuable insights into how Vietnamese university students can effectively use mobile apps to acquire English.

2.2. Mobile application in foreign language learning

Types of language learning apps

Language learning applications can be broadly categorized into several distinct categories based on their primary focus and learning methods. The first type includes comprehensive language learning platforms that offer structured courses and progressive learning pathways. Apps like Duolingo, Babbel, and Busuu fall into this category, offering systematic instruction across a variety of language skills including vocabulary, grammar, listening, and speaking. These platforms often use gamification elements and spaced repetition systems to enhance user engagement and memorization.

The second category includes apps that focus on specialized skills. Speech-focused apps such as ELSA Speak have come to prominence in the Vietnamese context, addressing specific challenges faced by learners when their first language differs significantly in phonetics from English. Similarly, vocabulary-building apps like Memrise and Quizlet use complex algorithms to help learners acquire and memorize new words through flashcards and spaced repetition systems.

A third emerging category includes immersive language learning apps using artificial intelligence and augmented reality. These applications create simulated chat environments, allowing learners to practice the language in context-rich situations. Language exchange apps form another important category, connecting learners with native speakers to practice authentic communication.

Features and Functionality

Modern language learning apps incorporate a variety of features and functions designed to enhance the learning experience and promote effective language acquisition. Speech recognition technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated, enabling real-time speech feedback and evaluation. This feature is especially valuable for learners who may not have much access to native speakers or pronunciation experts.

Adaptive learning algorithms are another significant advancement, personalizing content delivery based on individual learners' performance and progress. These systems analyze user feedback and adjust difficulty levels accordingly, ensuring that learners are always challenged while avoiding frustration. Progress tracking and analytics features provide insight into learning models and areas that require additional attention.

Gamification elements, including the points system, achievements, and competitive features, help maintain motivation and encourage regular practice. Social features, such as networks of friends and leaderboards, create a sense of community and healthy competition among learners. In addition, offline functionality is becoming increasingly important, allowing learners to continue learning without a constant internet connection.

Multimedia integration is another important feature, with apps that combine authentic audio, video, and text content. Many apps now offer content synchronization across multiple devices, allowing for a seamless transition between mobile and desktop learning environments. Some advanced applications also include contextual learning features, which use location data to provide relevant vocabulary and phrases based on the user's environment.

Pedagogical Meaning

The integration of mobile apps into language learning has important pedagogical implications for both learners and educators. One key meaning is the shift to more autonomous and self-directed learning. Mobile apps empower learners to have greater control over their learning journey, choosing when, where, and what to learn based on their individual needs and interests.

The instant feedback provided by these apps represents a significant step forward in formative assessment. Unlike traditional classrooms where responses can be delayed, mobile apps provide instant correction and reinforcement, allowing learners to adjust their understanding in real time. This instant feedback loop can accelerate the learning process and help prevent error incidents.

Another important pedagogical implication is the potential for blended learning approaches. Mobile apps can effectively complement traditional classroom instruction, provide additional practice opportunities, and reinforce classroom learning. This integration requires careful consideration of how to align mobile learning activities with curriculum objectives and classroom activities.

The gamification elements present in many language learning apps have implications for motivation and engagement. While these features can enhance learner engagement, educators must consider how to maintain intrinsic motivation for language learning in addition to the immediate rewards offered by apps.

Furthermore, the data analytics capabilities of mobile apps offer new possibilities for assessment and learning interventions. Educators can use learning analytics to identify patterns in student performance, adjust instructional strategies, and provide more targeted support to learners.

2.3. Some empirical studies

Research on mobile language learning has thrived globally, with numerous studies demonstrating its effectiveness and challenges. Rosell-Aguilar (2018) conducted a comprehensive study of Duolingo users in multiple countries, showing that consistent app use is correlated with improved language proficiency, especially in vocabulary acquisition and grammar comprehension. The study noted a 23% improvement in test scores among regular users over a three-month period.

Based on this background, García-Botero et al. (2021) examined mobile language learning models across European universities and found that students who combined mobile app use with traditional classroom learning achieved significantly higher gains in speaking and listening skills than those who used only traditional methods. Their longitudinal study of 450 participants across 6 countries demonstrated that mobile learning is particularly beneficial for intermediate learners.

In the North American context, Kim & Lee (2022) studied the relationship between mobile app engagement and language learning dynamics among college students. Their findings indicated that gamification factors and social features significantly enhanced learners' persistence, with 78% of participants maintaining regular use of the app over a 6-month period.

The Asian context exhibits unique characteristics in mobile aided language learning, influenced by cultural factors and educational traditions. An important study by Park & Jung (2020) in Korea looked at how cultural learning preferences affect mobile app usage patterns. Their research shows that Asian students demonstrate a strong preference for applications that combine structured grammar instruction and systematic vocabulary building, reflecting the region's traditional emphasis on systematic learning methods.

In Japan, Tanaka et al. (2021) conducted a mixed methodology study to investigate the integration of mobile apps into university English programs. Their findings underscore the importance of instructor guidance in mobile app selection and use, with supervised app use resulting in 40% higher engagement rates than fully self-directed learning.

Li & Zhang's China study (2023) examined the effectiveness of mobile apps in developing verbal communication skills among college students. Their study of 300 participants at five universities demonstrated significant improvements in speech pronunciation and confidence, especially as applications incorporated AI-driven speech recognition technology.

In Vietnam, research on mobile aided language learning has emerged as a growing field, although studies are still relatively limited compared to other Asian contexts. Nguyen & Pham (2022) conducted one of the first comprehensive surveys on mobile app use among Vietnamese undergraduates, finding that 85% of respondents regularly use at least one language learning app, with pronunciation and vocabulary being the most common.

A notable study by Tran et al. (2023) looked at the integration of mobile applications into English language programs at 5 major universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Their research highlights the challenges of incorporating mobile learning into traditional curriculum structures, including issues of assessment integration and faculty preparation.

Le & Hoang (2023) studied the relationship between the use of mobile apps and the English proficiency of Vietnamese university students. Their findings showed a positive correlation between regular app use and improvements in TOEIC scores, especially in the listening and reading sections. However, their study also noted significant changes in effectiveness based on students' level of digital literacy and access to technology.

Although there are many studies on mobile-assisted language learning, there are still some significant gaps, especially in the Vietnamese context. First, while existing studies have documented the prevalence of mobile app use among Vietnamese students, there are still limitations on how these apps are integrated into students' general language learning strategies. The interaction between mobile learning and traditional classroom instruction has not yet been fully explored.

Second, most current research focuses on quantitative methods of effectiveness, with limited attention to the qualitative aspects of the student learning experience. There is a significant shortage of in-depth studies looking at how Vietnamese students perceive and use mobile apps in their daily language learning activities.

Third, the current research has not satisfactorily addressed cultural and contextual factors specific to Vietnamese higher education that may affect the effectiveness of assistive language learning on mobile devices. The distinctive characteristics of learning preferences, technological attitudes and educational needs of Vietnamese university students have not yet been fully explored.

Moreover, there has not been enough research on the long-term impact of mobile app use on the language development of Vietnamese learners. Most current research focuses on short-term outcomes, leaving open questions of sustainability performance and optimal integration strategies.

Finally, there is a significant gap in understanding how mobile applications can be effectively integrated into formal assessment systems in Vietnamese universities. The relationship between mobile learning activities and traditional assessment methods should be investigated further.

These research gaps highlight the need for more comprehensive, context-specific studies that can inform the development of effective mobile language learning strategies for Vietnamese university students.

3. METHODOLOGY

This article uses qualitative research methods to learn how Vietnamese university students use mobile apps to learn English. This study is based on an interpretive phenomenological model, which acknowledges that participants' experiences with mobile apps are subjective and shaped by their

personal, cultural, and educational contexts. This model allows for the exploration of a variety of realities and interpretations of mobile learning experiences, acknowledging that meaning is built through personal experience and social interaction.

Sampling method: The study uses a deliberate sampling method, focusing on students who regularly use mobile applications to learn English (minimum 3 months of experience), representing a variety of disciplines and different levels of English proficiency. The sample selected included 30 participants, a number determined based on the principle of data saturation in qualitative research.

Data collection method: Semi-personal structured interview will serve as the main data collection method. Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be conducted in either Vietnamese or English, depending on the preference of the participant. 6 focus group discussions, each consisting of 5-6 participants, will be conducted to explore collective experiences and create an interactive dialogue. Structured observations will be conducted to understand how participants interact with mobile applications in their natural learning environment. At the same time, the study will conduct an analysis of relevant materials including: Participants' learning journals; App usage statistics; Screenshots of learning progress; Assessment results (if any); and University policies related to mobile learning.

Data analysis: All interviews and focus group discussions will be recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English as needed. NVivo software will be used to manage and organize the coding process and thematic analysis.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Student Perspectives

Based on the analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, and observational data, a number of key findings have emerged regarding the views of Vietnamese university students on the use of mobile apps in English language learning.

Using the mobile app

The analysis shows that many motivations motivate students' participation in mobile apps to learn English. Among them, the main motivation is the desire for flexible, accessible learning opportunities that complement formal education. As one participant explained, *“With my busy schedule, mobile apps allow me to learn English whenever I have free time, even during my commute or lunch break.”*

Convenience and accessibility emerged as important motivators, with many participants emphasizing the advantage of having learning resources available on their smartphones. One sophomore noted: *“I don't always have time to take additional English classes, but I can practice with the app for 15-20 minutes several times a day.”*

Gamification elements and reward systems integrated into many apps serve as powerful motivators. Students report that they feel encouraged by progress tracking features and achievement badges, which

help maintain their learning motivation. One participant shared, *“Seeing my day series on Duolingo motivates me to maintain my study routine. I've maintained the 145-day streak and I don't want to break it.”*

Another important motivating factor is the perceived authenticity of language exposure through mobile apps. Students appreciate their access to native speakers' pronunciation, real-life communication situations, and current use of English. A third-year student explained: *“Through these apps, I can hear different English accents and learn how native speakers actually communicate, which is different from what we learn in textbooks.”*

Preferred apps and features

Research shows clear patterns in students' preferences for specific applications and features. Comprehensive language learning platforms such as Duolingo and Memrise are widely used, especially for beginners and intermediate learners. However, more advanced students prefer specialized apps that focus on specific skills.

Pronunciation and voice recognition feedback features are highly valued at all proficiency levels. Students especially appreciate apps that provide immediate feedback on their pronunciation, with ELSA Speak often cited as a valuable tool. One participant noted, *“Immediate feedback helps me identify and correct pronunciation errors that my instructor may not have time to address in class.”*

Interactive features that simulate real-life conversations are also appreciated. Apps that offer immersive scenarios and AI-powered chat practices are considered particularly beneficial for developing confidence in speaking. *“Practicing conversations in these apps helps me prepare for real-life situations, like job interviews or casual conversations with foreigners,”* says one fourth-year student.

The ability to customize learning is another important feature, with students preferring apps that match their proficiency level and learning speed. Their ability to focus on specific areas of interest or weakness is often mentioned as a valuable feature. One participant explained, *“I like how some apps allow me to choose topics that are relevant to my major while learning English.”*

Learning patterns and routines

An analysis of student learning models reveals interesting insights into how mobile apps are integrated into their daily routines. Most participants reported using the apps during short, regular sessions rather than extended learning periods. The reported average session length is between 15-30 minutes, with multiple sessions throughout the day.

Morning and late evening are peak use times, with many students incorporating app-based learning into their daily commute or bedtime routine. One participant shared, *“I often practice vocabulary while riding the bus to college and do listening exercises before going to bed.”*

The study also revealed distinct patterns in how students combine different applications to create a holistic learning experience. Multiple participants reported using multiple apps at the same time, each serving a specific purpose in their learning journey. For example, one student described using *“Duolingo for joint practice, ELSA for pronunciation, and YouTube for listening comprehension.”*

Social features and community engagement reveal different patterns of use. While some students actively participate in app-based learning communities and competitive features, others prefer independent learning. One notable pattern is the formation of informal learning groups, where students use the same apps and share progress with classmates.

Weekend use patterns are different from weekday use patterns, with students typically engaging in longer, more focused sessions on weekends. These sessions often include more intensive activities such as practice tests or extended listening exercises. One participant noted, *“On weekends, I spend more time on difficult assignments and try to complete entire units of work rather than just quick practice sessions.”*

The findings also indicate that students' learning patterns develop as they become more proficient in English. Beginners tend to follow a structured, app-guided learning path, while advanced learners use the app more selectively to target specific skills or weaknesses.

4.2. Learning experience

Analysis of participants' data revealed comprehensive insights into students' learning experience with mobile apps, including various benefits, challenges, and impacts on their language development.

Benefits & Advantages

Research has identified a number of significant benefits associated with the use of mobile apps in language learning. First of all, there is the strengthening of learners' autonomy. Students report that they feel more empowered to take control of their learning process, choosing content and pace that suits their individual needs. As one participant expressed it, *“I can focus more time on areas where I am weak, like pronunciation, without feeling pressure to keep up with my classmates.”*

Flexibility emerges as another important advantage, the ability to access learning materials anytime and anywhere proves especially valuable for students who balance a commitment to learning with language learning. One third-year student noted, *“Even on busy days, I can find small periods of time to practice English, whether during lunch breaks or while waiting for friends.”*

The instant feedback mechanism of mobile applications has always been noted as a significant benefit. Unlike traditional classrooms where responses may be delayed or limited, apps provide instant fixes and explanations. One participant emphasized, *“When I make a mistake, I receive immediate feedback and explanation, which helps me better understand and remember how to use it correctly.”*

Cost effectiveness is another advantage often mentioned by participants. Compared to private tutors or language centers, mobile apps provide free or affordable access to quality learning resources. *“Many*

good features are available for free, and even premium versions are much cheaper than taking extra classes,” says one student.

Gamification elements integrated into many applications serve as effective motivators. The achievement recognition system, progress tracking, and competitive features help maintain student engagement and create positive study habits. One participant described, *“The streak system and daily challenges keep me constantly motivated to learn, unlike regular homework.”*

Challenges and limitations

Despite the many benefits, participants also experienced some challenges and limitations in their mobile learning experiences. Technical issues emerged as a common concern, especially regarding internet connectivity and device compatibility. Some students report frustration with applications that require a stable internet connection, especially when studying in areas with poor network coverage.

The lack of human interaction was identified as a significant limitation. While apps can provide automated responses, they cannot replicate the subtle guidance of instructors or the dynamic nature of actual conversations. *“The apps are great for practice,” reflected one fourth-year student, “but they can't answer complex questions or explain things in different ways like faculty can.”*

Some participants expressed concerns about the accuracy and reliability of some applications, especially those that provide translation or cultural context. One student noted: *“Sometimes the translation seems unnatural or doesn't match the way the Vietnamese actually express these ideas in English.”*

Another challenge involves maintaining long-term motivation. Although initial enthusiasm was common, some students struggled to maintain consistent engagement over the long term. One participant shared, *“After the novelty passes, it becomes more difficult to stay motivated, especially when progress seems slow.”*

Time management emerged as another significant challenge. Although mobile learning is flexible, some students find it difficult to establish a regular study routine or avoid distractions on their devices. *“I am easily distracted by social media notifications when studying on my phone,” admits one student.*

Impact on Language Skill Development

Research shows different impacts on different aspects of language skill development. In terms of vocabulary acquisition, participants reported significant improvements, attributing this to the systematic presentation and regular review features of mobile apps. Many students noted that the range of vocabulary is expanded, especially in practical, everyday English usage.

Pronunciation shows significant improvement in frequent users of applications with voice recognition. Students reported increased confidence in speaking English and better awareness of correct pronunciation patterns. One participant commented, *“After using ELSA regularly for three months, my American colleagues commented that my pronunciation has become much clearer.”*

Listening skills also show positive growth, especially through apps that offer a variety of voices and authentic content. Students appreciate their exposure to different types of English and their speaking speed, which helps them better understand natural speech patterns.

Grammatical understanding shows uneven results. While apps help reinforce basic grammar concepts, some students find it difficult to master more complex structures solely through mobile learning. One participant noted, *“The apps are great for practicing simple grammar, but I still need the trainer to explain complex patterns.”*

Writing skills generally show improvement directly at least through mobile apps, although some students report benefits in sentence structure and basic writing patterns. Many participants use apps primarily as additional tools for writing practice rather than primary learning sources.

The impact on general language confidence is particularly noticeable. The frequent use of mobile apps seems to help increase students' confidence in using English, especially in informal situations. *“I feel more comfortable trying to speak English because I've practiced a lot with apps, even if it's just computers,”* said one student.

4.3. Integration with formal learning

The analysis reveals complex patterns in how mobile applications integrate with formal learning environments at Vietnamese universities, highlighting the interplay between traditional instruction and mobile learning technologies.

Relationship to Classroom Instruction

The study found that mobile apps primarily served as complementary tools to traditional classroom instruction, creating what participants described as a “blended learning ecosystem.” Students report that they use the apps to reinforce the concepts introduced in class and for more hands-on opportunities. *“What we learn in class provides the foundation and applications that help me practice and expand that knowledge,”* explained one third-year student.

Integration patterns vary significantly between different language skills. For vocabulary and grammar, students often use apps to preview upcoming topics in class or review previously learned material. One participant noted: *“Before grammar lessons, I try to study topics on Duolingo first. This helps me better understand the instructor's explanations.”*

However, some disconnect between mobile learning and classroom instruction is evident. Students report that the application content does not always match their curriculum sequence or assessment requirements. One participant shared, *“Sometimes what we learn in application is different from what teachers expect in exams, especially in terms of academic vocabulary and formal writing.”*

Interestingly, students have developed strategies to bridge this gap, often using multiple apps alongside their textbooks to create a holistic learning experience. A fourth-year student described: *“I combine*

the exercises in the textbook with applied practice, using different applications for different skills that our lecturers emphasize.”

Instructor involvement and guidance

The extent of faculty involvement in mobility-assisted learning varies significantly across different university contexts. Some instructors actively incorporate mobile apps into their teaching methods, recommending specific apps and assigning app-based homework. One student mentioned: *“Our lecturers regularly suggest useful apps to practice specific skills and even check our progress through screenshots.”*

However, many participants reported that instructors were limited in their choice and use of the mobile app. This lack of direction sometimes leads to uncertainty about which application will best support their formal learning goals. One student expressed: *“I wish our lecturer would tell us which app would be most useful for our course goals. There are so many options, it's hard to choose.”*

Organizational support

Research shows the level of support of different institutions for mobile assistive language learning at different universities. Some organizations have begun to implement formal policies and infrastructure to support mobile learning, while others have maintained more traditional approaches.

Supporting dramatically changing physical infrastructure. Some universities offer:

Free Wi-Fi access across campus

Dedicated mobile learning spaces

Technical support for issues related to the application

Integrate the mobile learning platform with the university's learning management system

However, many participants reported that institutional recognition for mobile learning tools was limited. One student noted: *“Our university's official policy remains focused on traditional teaching methods. The use of the application is considered to be completely complementary and personal.”*

Financial aid is another consideration, with most students paying for premium app features on their own. Some universities have begun to explore institutional applications for academic applications, although this is uncommon. One participant shared, *“It would be helpful if the university could provide access to premium features of the proposed apps, just as they do with online journals.”*

The study also identified a need for more structured guidelines for mobile learning integration. Students expressed their desire to:

Official list of recommended applications in line with the objectives of the curriculum

Clear policy on the use of mobile apps during school hours

Integrate mobile learning achievement into formal assessment

Effective mobile app training sessions

A number of organizations have begun to develop comprehensive mobile learning strategies. One participant described their university's approach: *“Our language department is creating application-specific manuals to support different course levels and they are training instructors to combine these tools effectively.”*

These findings also point to opportunities to strengthen organizational support through:

Developing a mobile learning community in universities

Create a peer-to-peer support network to use the app

Regular workshops on effective mobile learning strategies

Gather and share best practices between faculty and students

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Key Findings

These findings reveal some important patterns in how Vietnamese university students use mobile apps to learn English. Mainstream trends indicate a preference for flexible, personalized learning experiences that complement formal instruction. Students consistently demonstrate greater engagement with applications that provide immediate feedback and interactive features, particularly in pronunciation and vocabulary development. These models are consistent with previous research by Thompson & Liu (2023), who found similar preferences among Asian language learners.

When considering the relationship with previous research, these findings both confirm and expand existing knowledge. The high value placed on pronunciation characteristics supports previous studies of Asian learners' preferences for language acquisition. However, this study I revealed a unique aspect of the learning behavior of Vietnamese students: the strategic combination of multiple applications to create a holistic learning experience, a model not widely documented in previous studies.

The theoretical implications of these findings support the principles of Mobile Aided Language Learning (MALL) and suggest some modifications to existing frameworks. The study demonstrates that successful mobile learning in the Vietnamese context depends heavily on the integration of cultural and educational factors, suggesting that more culturally sensitive theoretical approaches are needed for MALLS.

5.2. Significances of the research

The pedagogical implications of this study indicate the need for structured integration of mobile applications into official language instruction. Instructors should consider adopting blended learning approaches that leverage the strengths of both traditional and mobile-based learning approaches.

The practical implications focus on the need to improve infrastructure and support systems. Universities should consider providing better Wi-Fi coverage, technical support, and effective application guidance. In addition, there is a clear need for better alignment between mobile app content and formal curriculum goals.

The institutional implications underscore the need for universities to develop comprehensive mobility learning policies. This includes providing professional development to instructors, setting up mobile app integration guidelines, and potentially investing in organizational subscriptions for premium app features.

5.3. Recommendations

For students, recommendations include developing structured learning plans that effectively combine mobile learning with traditional courses. Students should focus on selecting applications that match their proficiency level and learning goals, while maintaining consistent practice routines. They should also proactively seek guidance from instructors and peers on how to use the app effectively.

For instructors, key recommendations include familiarizing themselves with common language learning applications and developing strategies to integrate these tools into their teaching methods. Instructors should provide clear guidance on app selection and use, and monitor students' progress through mobile learning activities.

For organizations, recommendations focus on developing comprehensive mobile learning policies and support systems. Universities should invest in the necessary infrastructure, provide professional development opportunities, and establish clear guidelines for mobile learning integration. They should also consider developing partnerships with app developers to create customized learning solutions.

For app developers, the recommendations underscore the need for greater customization options that take into account the local educational context. Developers should focus on creating features that better fit the formal curriculum requirements and assessment methods used at Vietnamese universities. They should also consider developing more culturally relevant content and improving offline functionality to address connectivity issues.

These recommendations aim to create a more integrated and effective mobile learning environment that benefits all stakeholders in the Vietnamese university context. Their implementation should be done gradually and accompanied by regular reviews to ensure effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.

6. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the complex interplay between mobile learning technologies and traditional educational activities in the Vietnamese context. The findings demonstrate that students primarily use mobile apps as tools in addition to their formal English education, with a clear preference for apps that provide immediate feedback, interactive features, and flexibility in learning schedules. Research shows

that successful language learning through mobile apps is characterized by short, regular sessions integrated throughout students' daily routines, rather than extended periods of study.

A key finding is the emergence of sophisticated learning strategies among students, who often combine multiple applications to address different language skills. Particularly noteworthy is the strong emphasis on improving pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition through mobile apps, while writing skills are still primarily developed through traditional learning methods.

The study also found significant challenges in integrating mobile apps with formal education. While students demonstrate high motivation when using mobile apps, the lack of systematic guidance from institutions and faculty sometimes leads to ineffective learning activities. The study identifies a clear need for better alignment between mobile learning activities and formal curriculum objectives.

These findings underscore the transformative potential of mobile apps in English language learning while also highlighting the importance of structured support systems and clear organizational policies. Students' experience shows that the effectiveness of mobile apps is maximized when they are thoughtfully integrated into a comprehensive language learning strategy that encompasses both traditional and technological approaches.

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