

PERCEPTIONS OF THE 4TH YEAR ENGLISH PEDAGOGY STUDENTS AT HUE UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN USING MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) APPS FOR TEACHING VOCABULARY

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Abstract: The present research aimed to investigate the perceptions of the 4th year English Pedagogy students at HU-UFL in utilizing mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) apps for teaching vocabulary. The participants of the study include 60 HU-UFL 4th year English Pedagogy students. To carry out this study, questionnaires and interviews were used for data collection. The results showed that the students well perceived the use of MALL apps in their teaching vocabulary, as well as the benefits and challenges they encountered during the teaching of English vocabulary via MALL apps. MALL applications have made significant impacts on promoting the students' motivations and development in the process of vocabulary acquisition. The research findings have contributed to pedagogical practices of teaching vocabulary, and made recommendations and implications for teaching and future research in the field.

Keywords: perceptions, MALL, teaching vocabulary

1. Introduction

In the process of learning English, one of the most significant factors is a large amount of vocabulary. Many learners make their great efforts to pick up new words from both oral and written communication and memorize these words for later production. However, this does not work effectively since developing from short-term to long-term memory requires language learners not only to memorize meanings, pronunciations, and structures of new words but also to be able to produce these words in different language situations appropriately. To support students for learning vocabulary effectively, many educational institutions put forward and carry out several essential ways including using flashcards, monologue and repetition or playing lexical games. Especially, they tend to prefer using technological devices for stimulating the process of learning lexical words. More and more teachers nowadays tend to experiment the effects of using mobile devices or mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) apps on students' learning vocabulary process. Consequently, they can gain the perceptions about using MALL apps in teaching vocabulary and their students have opportunities to experience many different kinds of English vocabulary. Under the influence of the trend in using MALL in teaching vocabulary, many undergraduate students who strike to become teachers in the future constantly make their efforts to use and find out more alternative ways to apply MALL to their teaching and learning, including English Pedagogy (EP) students in general and EP students of Hue University, University of Foreign Languages (HU-UFL) in particular. Given this, examining and searching for more information about applying MALL is greatly essential and useful. Thus, the present research is conducted to investigate the perceptions of the 4th year EP students at HU-UFL in using MALL for teaching vocabulary.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Mobile-assisted language learning

The term "Mobile-assisted language learning" (MALL) has been defined in many ways. Firstly, Chinnery (2006) simply put MALL as the use of mobile devices to support language learning. Caudill (2007) also

mentioned that MALL was the technology of language learning with the implication of mobile (portative) IT devices such as cellphones, iPods, iPads and other handheld devices.

According to Miangahand and Nezarat (2012), learning via mobile now is easy to approach because numerous learning materials can be sent to learners through mobile devices. Learning a language via mobile devices allows teachers and learners to create and participate in various activities by accessing the internet, capturing pictures, recording videos or sending messages.

2.2. The effects of MALL on language learning

There are various advantages of integrating MALL and boosting the effective process of learning English. It is argued that using mobile devices allows users to take part in cooperative learning wherever they are (Nyiri, 2002; Sharples, 2007). Thus, the interaction among various people can be motivated in different contexts. In addition, Dos (2014) pointed out that due to the importance and portability mobile phones could be considered necessary things for learners to bring. Currently, mobile phones are not only used for communication purposes but also regarded as a core pedagogical activity in higher educational institutions. In fact, encouraging mobile device use has enabled students to access resources that teachers cannot provide otherwise. Students can use it anywhere and anytime convenient to them, creating a potential learning tool in both traditional classroom and informal learning environments. Overall, MALL brings about many benefits to English learning with positive features and clear-cut purposes.

2.3 The effects of applying MALL to teaching vocabulary

2.3.1. *The benefits of utilizing MALL in teaching vocabulary*

In teaching vocabulary to students, there are many advantages of using MALL in English classes. Firstly, mobile devices nowadays outweigh other wireless devices due to their portability and affordability. Secondly, teachers can allow their students to use mobile phones appropriately in the classroom or elsewhere in more practical ways. Teachers can use mobile devices for online classes in case classes on-sites are impossible. According to Chinnery (2006), mobile technologies clearly offered numerous practical uses in language learning. Several functions of mobile devices were mentioned such as voice-messaging, text-messaging, cameras or video recording allowing students to practice communication, and access authentic materials and complete tasks. In fact, mobile technologies/ mobile phones have become the popular choices for improving language skills. Thirdly, MALL can be a useful tool for teachers to add up students' motivations of learning English, especially in building up vocabulary. Helwa (2017) argued that the effectiveness of MALL depended partly on various activities, tasks and strategies the researcher introduced to the students. For this reason, in order for students to put efforts and time on studying new vocabulary items, students should be encouraged for their vocabulary development by using MALL. In short, using MALL for teaching vocabulary can be seen as the practical suggestion for helping students further progress their learning.

2.3.2 *The challenges of applying MALL to teaching vocabulary*

While MALL application shows positive impacts on teaching English, using MALL poses numerous challenges for both teachers and students. The first negative impact of using mobile phones to learn vocabulary lies in teachers' and students' health and working effectiveness. According to Chinnery (2006), although MALL brought numerous benefits for learners, several challenges of using MALL were pointed out such as screen sizes, limited power, virtual keyboarding and limited audiovisual quality. Also, Miangah and Nezarat (2012) stated the drawbacks of using mobile devices for educational purposes, including some barriers in learning because of small screens, reading difficulty, data storage and multimedia limitations.

Secondly, overusing MALL can lead to some distraction for not only students but also teachers. If learners completely focus on their mobile devices and use them for other purposes, it will affect the process of transferring knowledge and hinder the interaction between teachers and students. Many of the mobile phones are not designed for educational purposes, which is difficult for learners to use for the tasks given by the teachers. Thirdly, using MALL does not bring any absolute efficiency for every learning opportunity. The ways of organizing and teaching vocabulary effectively for students depend on the lesson's content and context. Goundar (2011) stated that the main pedagogical issue of using MALL to consider is its appropriateness to some courses or not. In fact, not all courses are suitable to the mobile learning environment. While most of the theory and informative courses seem to be appropriate for using mobile technologies to explore the course content intensively, using MALL in technical or practicum courses are not recommended. Instead, the learning opportunities can be enhanced by the use of quizzes to test knowledge, summary of main learning points, and interaction with other students and the tutor via telephony integration. Therefore, using MALL need to be considered in terms of the suitability to each situation of learning and teaching vocabulary. In short, along with the potential that MALL offers, learners and teachers also need to be thoughtful in using MALL so that all mobile technologies can serve well for the pedagogical sake.

Previous studies (e.g. Chinnery, 2006; Mehdi-pour & Zerehkafi, H , 2013; Miangah & Nezarat, 2012) have explored certain aspects of the effectiveness of using MALL in developing the ability to learn English in particular and foreign languages in general, such as the effects of some detailed applications on vocabulary acquisition such as the effect of SMS vocabulary instruction on university students' academic vocabulary retention, the categories of MALL, and the benefits and challenges of mobile learning. However, some studies might be carried out to investigate general problems, leaving behind certain targets or specific issues (involving solely teacher's affairs or students' affairs). The important point of applying MALL successfully into real ESL classroom is still absent currently. Therefore, the present study, taking into account these preliminary considerations of mobile learning merits, has set an aim to explore the perceptions of Vietnamese English Pedagogy students, particularly the 4th year English Pedagogy students at Hue University of Foreign Languages, about the effects of mobile devices in language classrooms.

Research Questions

To achieve the aims, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How have the 4th year English Pedagogy students at HU-UFL perceived the use of MALL in teaching English vocabulary?
- 2) What are students' perceived benefits and challenges in using MALL to teach English vocabulary?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

In order to conduct the study, mixed-method research design was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches allows the researcher to obtain reliable data in terms of quality and quantity as these two approaches are complementary.

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study consist of 60 4th year EP students at HU-UFL. All participants who were invited to take part in the survey had their own experiences in teaching practicum. They have participated in several internship programs in Vietnam or Thailand, tutoring at home or in English centers, joining voluntary projects or community teaching. They are invited to fill in the questionnaires and five random

students are invited express their opinions in the interviews based on their perceptions and their own experience about MALL; thus, the data collected would be more reliable and helpful for this research.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

In this study, two data collection instruments were used. First, the questionnaires were designed on Google Form and delivered to the participants to collect the information about students' perceptions of using MALL for teaching English vocabulary. The main part of the questionnaire included 17 items divided into three sections and the answers to these items served to answer the two research questions. The first section (from item 1 to 8) concentrated on gathering the data for the first research question referring to the way the 4th year students at HU-UFL have perceived the use of MALL in teaching English vocabulary. The second section (from item 9 to 14) in the questionnaire aimed at the data for the second research question relating to the benefits and challenges of applying MALL in teaching vocabulary. Items 15 to 17 seek some recommendations for applying MALL effectively to teach vocabulary from the participants' responses.

After the questionnaire data were collected and roughly analyzed, face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to gain more specific answers relating to the answers that the participants provided in their questionnaire.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was created on Google Form and sent to the participants via Facebook. The participants were invited to answer all the questions in the questionnaires without the researcher's involvement. The responses from the questionnaires will be stored and analyzed to provide statistic data for the findings and discussion. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with five students from the 4th year EP at HU-UFL. The participants were asked to answer the questions directly relating to their personal ideas or experiences about applying MALL and how to use it in their own classroom. The participants could answer the questions in Vietnamese so that they could express exactly what they perceived about the mentioned issues.

3.5. Data Analysis

All information obtained from the questionnaires was analyzed with the assistance of Microsoft Excel software. The statistical frequency and percentage and the results are presented in the tables and charts for report. For the qualitative data analysis, all transcripts from the interviews were processed by using the software NVivo 2018. In order to conduct the qualitative data analysis, the researcher initially embedded all transcripts from the interviews to the NVivo; then, the researcher processed the words, phrases, and sentences which expressed the participants' opinions and ideas that were relevant to the research questions. These words/ phrases and sentences were coded and placed in the categories.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Students' perceptions of the use of MALL in teaching vocabulary

The findings from quantitative data showed that the participants have had significant awareness of the benefits of using MALL for teaching vocabulary. Besides, they might grasp their students' expectations for the new learning method. Most of the participants agreed with the main influence of MALL on vocabulary development. As a result, they have increased the frequency of using MALL in order to satisfy the needs of their students in the process of vocabulary development.

The participants showed their effort in search of many alternative activities in order to apply MALL effectively in their class. They identified the lessons' purpose and chose suitable activities to make sure that

their students were able to use MALL not only inside their classes but also in several places outside the classes. These findings are consistent with Kukulska-Hulme and Jones (2011) to the extent that language learning via mobile devices provided numerous activities by the usage of mobile phones. Using various activities with the support of MALL boost the success of vocabulary acquisition.

The participants perceived that using MALL has helped learners in improving some elements which their student needs in the process of vocabulary acquisition such as phonetic transcription, word type, word stress or word meanings. Depending on the characteristics of different classes and the students' various levels, MALL motivated and improved different factors in the process of vocabulary development.

In terms of the first research question, they have experienced using MALL in their real teaching and suggested some suitable methods for productive results. It is a good sign that they know exactly which is the best period to use MALL and gain successful achievements in teaching vocabulary based on the condition of the class as well as the students' ability to learn English. They have also had awareness of the impact of MALL on specific elements or factors in the process of expanding English vocabulary. In addition, the research found many more useful and common English learning applications that were recommended by the students joining in the questionnaires and interviews. As a result, their awareness of using MALL in teaching vocabulary have been raised and the ability of their students in expanding vocabulary have been improved. The findings were similar to those found in Basogluand and Akdemir (2010). That is, as the usage of MALL attracted more attention from the users and vocabulary applications running on mobile phones become more appealing, students now have more opportunities to use MALL as a learning support tool for language learning.

4.2. The benefits and challenges of using MALL in teaching vocabulary

4.2.1. The benefits of utilizing MALL in teaching vocabulary

For students

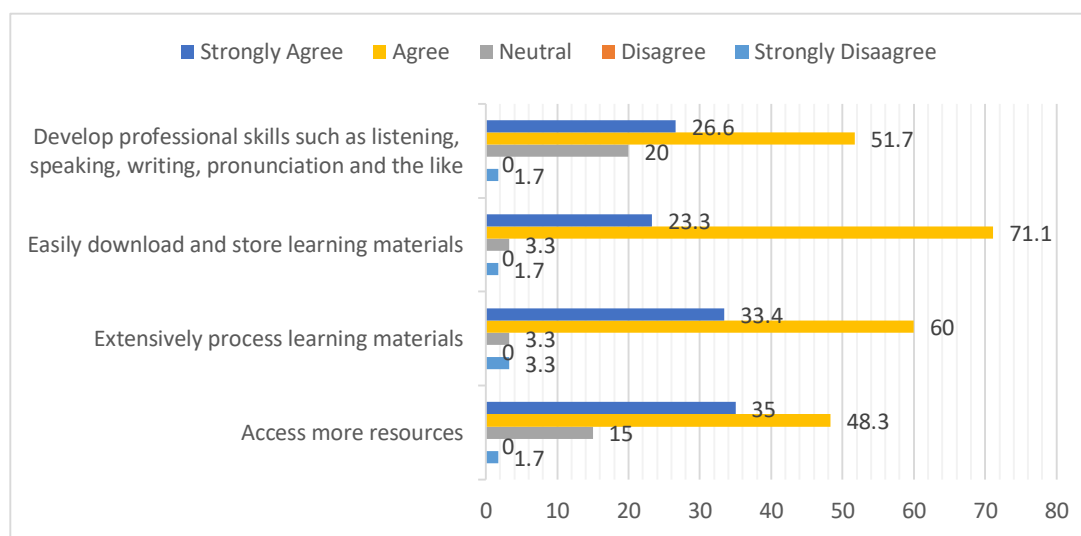


Figure 1.1: The benefits of using MALL to teach vocabulary to students

The data from Figure 1.1 and 1.2 below suggested that the participants have a clear recognition relating to the positive impacts of MALL apps on the students' vocabulary development. Having spent a large amount of time using mobile phones, students can take full advantage of them to expand

their vocabulary.

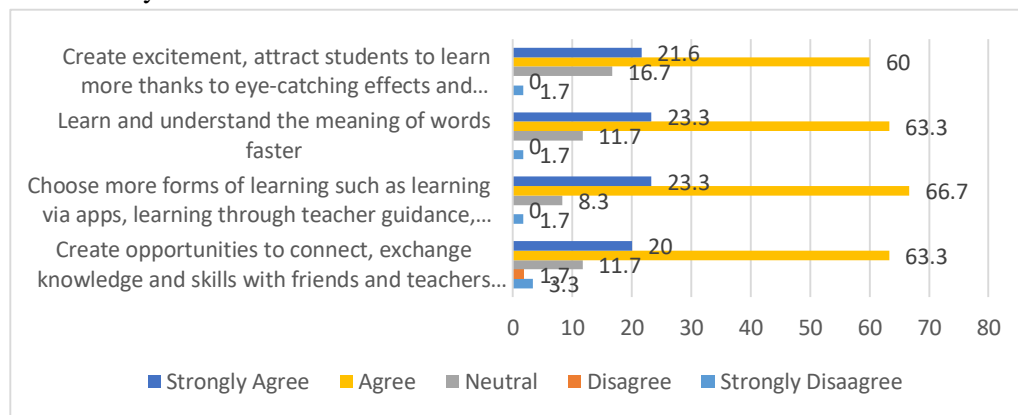


Figure 1.2: The benefits of using MALL to teach vocabulary to students

In addition, the findings of this study confirmed that updating and applying MALL could advance not only the students' academic knowledge but also their flexibility and creativity in vocabulary acquisition. The findings also show that permitting students to take part in mobile learning environment could boost the excitement and attraction for them to learn. These findings also pertain to the benefits of using MALL on students' vocabulary acquisition supported by the results from some of the previous research (Helwa, 2017; M. Lu, 2008).

For teachers

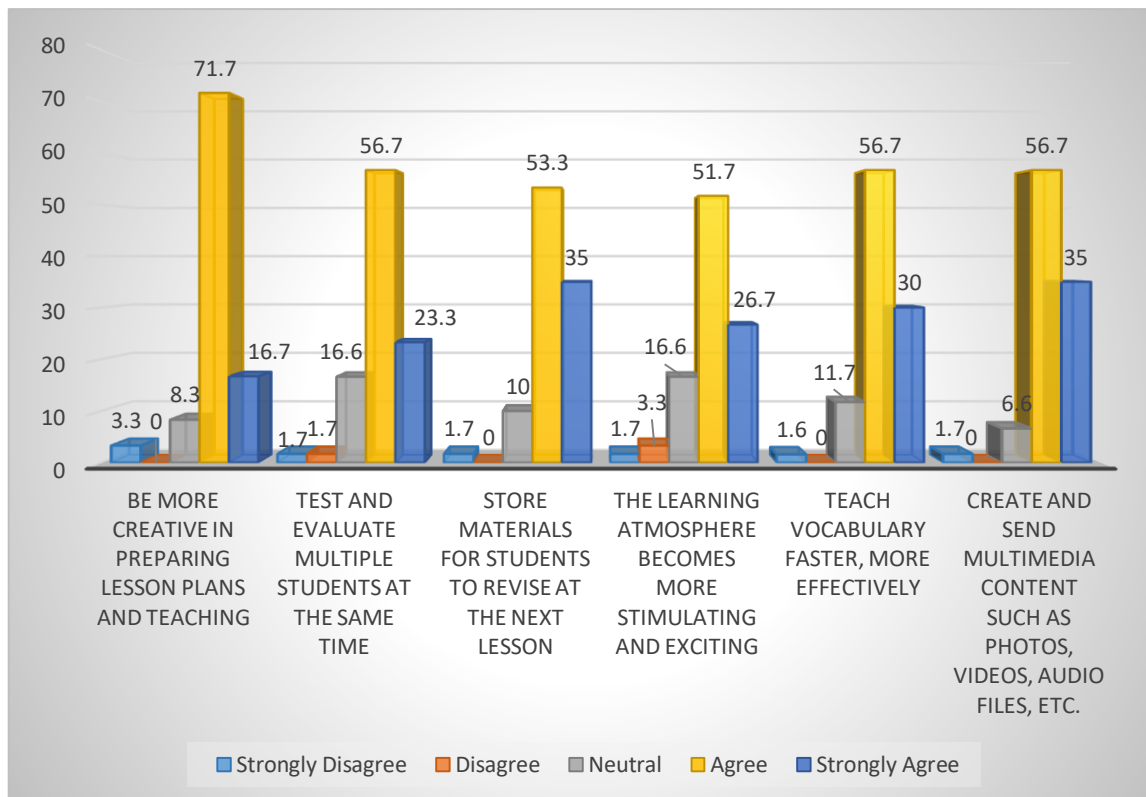


Figure 2: The advantages of utilizing MALL to teachers

Based on the collected data, it can be said that using MALL has made remarkable impacts on teachers. Teachers will not be confined to the number of traditional teaching methods, but they have the

ability to grasp the chances to develop their professional expertise. This implies that using MALL promotes the teachers' ability to create fascinating educational environments. These findings are in line with the results of several previous research relating to the effects of using MALL on teaching (Helwa, 2017; Oz, 2015; Suwantarathip & Orawiwanakul, 2015). For a long process of teaching vocabulary, since several obstacles and special situation cannot be avoided, teachers can use MALL as an advantageous way to overcome difficulties and bring many useful vocabulary lessons for their students.

When being asked to show the level of agreement for several statements in the questionnaire relating to the benefits of MALL for teachers, most of the participants agreed with these benefits of MALL for teachers in teaching vocabulary:

“Applying MALL to teach vocabulary helps teachers to be able to provide timely support when many students need help at the same time, while also increasing the interaction with students with teachers during the vocabulary teaching process.”

For this statement, the majority of the participants (81.7% including 56.7% “agree” and 25% “strongly agree”) found utilizing MALL for teaching vocabulary could be the proper way for teachers to give opportune support for many students and also strengthen the connection between students and teacher in class. Meanwhile, 16.7 percentage of the respondents showed their hesitation when evaluating this effect. Only 1.7% of the participants showed their disagreement with this statement.

“Applying teaching methods via MALL to language teaching can help teachers create a variety of interesting and varied teaching methods.”

According to the data, over 93% of the participants (including 65% “agree” and 28.3% “strongly agree”) confirmed the effectiveness of applying MALL on boosting teachers to create various fascinating teaching methods. The rate of the respondents gives the neutral expression for this effect occupied 5% while a very small of the participants (1.7%) showed their disagreement with this statement.

“When apply MALL for teaching vocabulary, teachers have opportunities to be more active and flexible in order that they can teach vocabulary for their students in several special situations.”

The majority of the statistics showed their positive attitude to the effect of applying MALL on the teachers' flexibility in teaching vocabulary (including 46.7% strongly agreed and 45% agreed). The percentage of the respondents denied and showed their disagreement with this statement occupied 5%. Additionally, 3.3% also showed their uncertainty when answering this question.

The participants joining in the interviews also gave several factual benefits of MALL in teaching vocabulary for teachers. Moreover, they could decrease the pressure in the process of teaching in class and save time in designing the lesson plans or teaching methods by using MALL. Furthermore, they believed that the students' excitement could be considered as one of their motivations in teaching vocabulary via MALL. As a result, the above data confirmed the advantages of using MALL for teachers when teaching vocabulary to their students.

4.2.2. The shortcomings of using MALL to teach vocabulary

For students

Table 1: The drawbacks of applying MALL in the process of teaching vocabulary to students (N=60)

Drawbacks of applying MALL in the process of teaching vocabulary from the students' perspectives	No of participants	Results (%)
Small screen	36	60

Limited storage	23	38.3
Distraction	41	68.3
Bad effects on students' health	25	41.7
Unsecured network connection	45	75
Others	8	13.3

As shown in table 1, the collected data show that the students might have difficulty in using MALL in vocabulary development. The results collected are that the participants identified several shortcomings faced by their students such as the complexity or some technological errors of MALL, the less control of teachers or the difficulty in maintaining the regularity of using MALL in their learning. These findings are consistent with Miangah and Nezarat (2012) that although learning vocabulary through mobile devices has some benefits, several limitations relating to the constraints of mobile phones could be the obstacles in the process of vocabulary acquisition.

For teachers

Table 2: The drawbacks of applying MALL in the process of teaching vocabulary from teachers' aspects (N=60)

Drawbacks of applying MALL in the process of teaching vocabulary from the students' perspectives	No of participants	Results (%)
Have difficulty in finding teaching methods that are suitable for all students	31	51.7
The difference in level of students	24	56.7
Being cheated as students use IT tricks	45	75
The limited ability to use technology	25	41.7
Have difficulty in finding reliable sources and suitable applications	35	58.3
Others	1	1.7

The findings imply that using MALL in teaching vocabulary can cause some negative barriers and limitations in the teaching process. Regardless numerous benefits for teaching and learning vocabulary, MALL can be identified not to replace completely the role of the traditional teaching method. In particular, the existence of objective and subjective reasons can bring out serious limitations that hinder the learning and teaching progress. The findings relating to the shortcomings of using MALL are commensurate with several previous research (Oz, 2014; Goundar, 2011; Stockwell, 2010). Besides, the familiarity with direct teaching methods that contain the direct interaction between teachers and students makes a great impact on the teachers' control of the lesson.

One of the most significant findings which is distinguished from several previous research is that MALL was investigated when applied in the specific educational institution (Vietnam) and the results from the findings stated that MALL could be considered as an educational support tool that is more appropriate for tutoring at home or at the centers than at schools. The given reason is that Vietnamese education focuses

on creating appropriate training curriculum for native student specificity. As the training program in each mobile application might not match with the lessons' content in Vietnamese schools, teachers might be limited and complicated when applying MALL. In addition, Vietnam education concentrate on the teacher-students interaction so the connection among students and teacher-students can be affected by overusing MALL in teaching vocabulary.

5. Conclusions

The findings and discussion illustrate that most of the 4th year English Pedagogy students at Hue University, University of Foreign Languages grasp many perceptions about using MALL for teaching vocabulary through their teaching practicum. They have known how to apply MALL with many alternative methods and have identified clearly which sides or factors of vocabulary acquisition that MALL can make great impacts on and found out many specific useful mobile applications that are appropriate for the level of their students.

The results also revealed that the implementation of MALL in teaching vocabulary poses numerous benefits for students in their learning progression and supports teachers efficiently in developing actively teaching methods. The results indeed illustrated that teachers can accomplish well if they are supported by MALL in the process of teaching vocabulary for their students. Nonetheless, approaching language learning via modern technology requires teachers to make more extra efforts to integrate effectively into their practical teaching and satisfy many alternative pedagogical conditions. Obviously, one of the key purposes of this research is to investigate whether MALL can be in conformity with the specific educational environment or not, especially in Vietnam. The findings are that since the content in each mobile application might not match with the education curriculum in Vietnamese schools, teachers might have difficulty in applying MALL effectively. Furthermore, it is implied that Vietnamese students have been familiar with traditional teaching methods that ensure teachers-students interaction and attach special importance to direct teaching methods. Thus, MALL is recommended to use as support devices for teachers in the process of teaching vocabulary and apply in appropriate conditions instead of using in all pedagogical circumstances.

It can be concluded from the research that the 4th year EP students at Hue University, University of Foreign Languages perceive well about the effectiveness of MALL usage for teaching vocabulary. Besides, they identify the advantages and challenges when using MALL for their specific pedagogical environment. As a result, it can be stated that the effectiveness of MALL depends on each training condition so the combination of traditional teaching methods and modern teaching methods via MALL can be regarded as the better solution for using MALL with the aim to bring out more achievements in teaching vocabulary.

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NHẬN THỨC CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM 4 NGÀNH SƯ PHẠM TIẾNG ANH TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ, ĐẠI HỌC HUẾ VỀ VIỆC ÁP DỤNG CÁC ỨNG DỤNG HỌC TIẾNG ANH QUA ĐIỆN THOẠI VÀO VIỆC GIẢNG DẠY TỪ VỰNG

Tóm tắt

Nghiên cứu này nhằm điều tra nhận thức của sinh viên Sư phạm tiếng Anh năm thứ 4 tại Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Huế, trong việc sử dụng các ứng dụng học tiếng Anh qua điện thoại (MALL) để dạy từ vựng. Khách thể nghiên cứu là 60 sinh viên Sư phạm Tiếng Anh năm thứ 4 tại Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Huế. Để thực hiện nghiên cứu này, bảng câu hỏi và phỏng vấn được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên đã nhận thức được việc sử dụng MALL trong việc giảng dạy từ vựng của họ, cũng như những lợi ích và thách thức mà họ gặp phải trong quá trình dạy từ vựng tiếng Anh qua MALL. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy việc sử dụng MALL đã mang lại những lợi ích đáng kể trong việc dạy từ vựng. Các ứng dụng MALL có tác động đáng kể đến việc thúc đẩy động lực và sự phát triển của học sinh trong quá trình thu nhận từ vựng. Các kết quả nghiên cứu đã đóng góp vào thực tiễn giáo dục về việc dạy từ vựng, các khuyến nghị và ý nghĩa đối với việc giảng dạy và nghiên cứu trong tương lai trong lĩnh vực này.

Từ khóa: nhận thức, MALL, dạy từ vựng