

Language Learning Applications for the Education 4.0

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Abstract: Education 4.0 not only plays an important role of language learning and teaching in Thailand recently, but also suggests a new and challenging role of educators in developing learners' abilities to apply the new technology for their learning. Due to the changes of educational principle in Thailand, language learning needs to be evolved from traditional methods with innovative tools designed to best fit learners' needs. A new and popular form of language learning is through applications on a mobile device. While there are a large number of applications available for language learning, it is not clear to what extent the applications can help develop language learning. This study, therefore, aims to review popular language learning applications on mobile phones in order to see to what extent the applications can help develop language learning in the era of education 4.0. This study reveals that each application has different elements that serve different needs. However, some of them share the same key elements to enhance language learning such as authentic materials (e.g. real-life dialogue with varieties of native speakers), learning motivation (e.g. learning through interactive games), progress tracking, and self-evaluation. Although these elements seem to help promote learning in a long term, there are some other missing elements that are also necessary for language learning.

Keywords: Applications, Education 4.0, Language learning, Mobile learning

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I. INTRODUCTION

The latest national economic development plan of Thailand (Thailand 4.0) has driven the need of the society in all areas, including the area of education, into an innovative era. Regarding to this need, educational principle in Thailand in this era has to gear toward Education 4.0 with a new kind of learning system which requires a new and challenging role of educators in teaching and developing learners' abilities to apply the new technology for their learning in all fields. Particularly, in the field of language learning, there must be a change in learning system aiming and attempting to build up the individuals for being ready to be creative and innovative. This not only simply means that there must be a need for a changing role of a traditional language teacher to active-learner generator [1] but the learning system also needs to be evolved from traditional methods with innovative tools designed to best fit learners' needs for the life skills and the innovative skills, especially information and media literacy, and technological literacy. Pacific Policy Research Center [2] reveals that the technological literacy, which is important skills for this era, includes using social media, e-learning, and mobile learning.

Mobile learning or m-learning, which generally refers to any form of learning mediated through a mobile device [3] is nowadays a widespread form of language learning. The main reason is due to the fact that it focuses on the mobility of the learner [4]. That is, mobile learning allows learning take place anywhere, anytime and at the convenience of the learner.

Many studies recently suggest that applications on a mobile device are suitable tools for learning and teaching for mobile learning in this era (e.g. [5]; [6]). This new form of language learning is popular because mobile applications can well assist the learners for the different categories of skills of the users [7]; [8]. In particular, many studies revealed that mobile applications can enhance English grammar acquisition, vocabulary proficiency (e.g. [9]; [10]), and listening comprehension (e.g. [11]; [12]). Furthermore, it is likely that mobile applications increase the potential of the students [13] and tend to help the users improve their self-learning habits, and develop their confidence in language learning.

However, while there are a large number of mobile applications available for language learning, it is not clear to what extent the applications can help develop language learning. This study, therefore, aims to explore popular language learning applications on mobile phones in order to see to what extent the applications can help develop language learning in the education 4.0 era.

II. METHODS




To explore to what extent the mobile applications can help develop English language learning, first of all, websites reviewing top mobile applications for English language learning were explored. By using keywords “mobile applications for English language learning” for browsing the internet, many websites suggesting top and best applications for learning English can be found. This study selected only top-ten websites which are recent and reliable and have no conflict of interest to the applications reviewed. Also, clear author’s name and descriptions of the mobile application are criteria for selection. After explored, 15 websites that match the criteria were selected for reviewing. After reviewed, ten popular mobile applications for learning English were identified and selected. Then, the applications selected were reviewed.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Top ten mobile applications that are popular for learning English and their key elements are shown in Table 1 below.

Table1: Top 10 Applications for Language Learning

No.	Applications	Icon	Levels	Key elements
1	Duolingo		Beginner to advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Motivate learning through game-like lessons with a range of activities - Allow redo of the lessons - Provide activities to strengthen weakest words - Promote goal setting - Track daily progress - Provide mode of slow pronunciation
2	Busuu		Beginner to advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lessons based on CEFR language framework and equivalent of pen pals - Provide vocabulary with examples in contexts and audio
3	Memrise		Beginner to advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apply humor to help memorize words - Practice listening to a wide varieties of native speakers - Provide audio, images, and memory techniques to help associate words for easier recall
4	Babble		Beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practice through lessons with real-world topics and real-life dialogue - Integrate with other content areas
5	Rosetta Stone		Beginner to advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Base on immersive method - Provide a lot of drills and repetition - Provide progress tracking tools - Self –evaluation
6	Mosalingua		Beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SRS methods for learning and reviewing words - Self –evaluation - Integrate with other content areas
7	FluentU		Beginner to advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural approach (real-world materials) through YouTube videos

8	Hello English		Beginner to advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interactive games - Provide daily lesson reminder
9	Mind Snacks		Beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fun games - Integrate with other content areas - Provide progress tracking tools
10	Speakingpal		Beginner to advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide dialogue from a bank of over 1000 topics - Provide interactive exercises and activities - Allow practice listening to native speakers in a real-life contexts - Give instant feedback on the speaking performance - Provide review mode - Allow recordings for self-evaluation

These applications are popular and suggested as top mobile applications for learning English because they all are user-friendly and have unique characteristics. Although each application has different elements in order to serve different purposes and different styles of learning, all of these applications are targeted to beginners (see Table 1). As a beginner, it seems to be difficult to start learning new languages. With applications personalized to suite individual educational goals, however, it will be easier for beginners to start their new language learning. The following examples of the application show how each application uses different methods to achieve different purposes.

FluentU is a good example since it takes real-world videos like music videos, commercials, news, and inspiring talks and turns them into English learning experiences. Unlike traditional applications, FluentU uses a natural approach that helps the learner learn English as it is spoken in real life with a variety of engaging videos such as topics like popular talk shows, music videos, and funny commercials. Learning this way is useful for improving language competency, especially in communication skill since it seems to facilitate their learning needs [14].

Another example is Rosetta Stone. It uses immersive method for learning languages. That is, Rosetta Stone has exercises designed to help learners learn basic words, before forming phrases and longer sentences without using your native language.

Also, Mosalingua offers a method called SRS. SRS stands for Spaced Repetition Software, and basically, it is software that was designed to help learners review words after learning. Similarly, Memrise focusing on English words offers a fun and easy way to remember words that seem foreign to new learners. This application also allows learners keep track of what have learnt so that the learners can go back and have a look for a revision. This application seems to be very helpful since it is found that the program features that students most wanted were the tracking of memorized and non-memorized vocabulary [15].

The final example is Busuu. It allows language learners talk with native English speakers to practice English speaking skill. Apart from the speaking component, Busuu offers a way to measure English proficiency based on the CEFR language framework, which stands for the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Regarding to the unique characteristics of each application, it is suggested that teachers should guide students how to use applications since learners could be confused on how to use the given applications. This matches what [16] suggested in their study that teachers should introduce main features on how to operate the applications and allow learners to use alternative applications that they are familiar with. Furthermore, since each application has different characteristics, it could be suggested that in order to lead to the success of applying m-learning in Thai education, students' perception on the use of applications for English learning should also be focused [17]. In addition, teachers playing a new role of active-learner generators need to be trained to arrange activities through mobile application in the classroom effectively [18].

Table2: The Skills Focused in the Applications

No.	Applications	Vocabulary	Grammar	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
1	Duolingo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Busuu	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Memrise	✓		✓			
4	Babble	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Rosetta Stone	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Mosalingua	✓		✓			
7	FluentU	✓		✓			
8	Hello English	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Mind Snacks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Speakingpal	✓		✓			

Table 2 shows that most of these applications focus on all four skills, including vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, as can be seen in Table 2, all of the applications particularly focus on vocabulary skills because most of the applications have been targeted to learners at the beginning level (see Table 1). Vocabulary seems to be the basic skill to start learning with and m-learning seems to well support learning vocabulary [9]; [10]. However, as the study revealed, mobile applications also help improve other skills, especially listening comprehension [12]. Interestingly, there are some applications aim to improve language ability in multi- skills. Although multi-skill application might not directly promote language efficiency, it promotes variety which can encourage learning interest and regular practice. Moreover, many studies found that mobile applications are likely to promote positive attitudes towards learning (e.g. [19]; [20]; [21]). This suggests that mobile applications should be used as a learning support and integration to improve English proficiency.

IV. CONCLUSION

In general, the researcher believes that using mobile applications in teaching and learning process seems to have a noteworthy effect on the students' language proficiency. This is because language learning applications provide elements that tend to promote self-learning, both in a short term and in the long run. The examples of the key elements are ranging from providing modes for personalizing their own studies, reminding the practice, and keeping track of progress, and providing interactive exercises, activities, and games, which not only help promote motivation but enhance memory. Moreover, the applications also provide a key element for learners to evaluate themselves. Self-evaluation is an important basis to allow learners to learn from their own mistakes and then develop themselves. However, both learners and teachers need to be aware of selecting the applications that really match the learners and their learning needs. For teachers, if mobile applications will be applied to their language classrooms, they need to ensure that various applications should be introduced to their learners since each application has different characteristics that might be suitable to different learners with different purposes and learning styles. In addition, there are some missing elements that should be included in the applications to promote learning. The example is culture element. Understanding the culture of the target language learning would not only increase motivation but also promote learning. Importantly, it is worth noting that before applying any application to language learning, learners should be guided how to use the application. This is because it not only helps promote positive attitudes towards the use of mobile applications, but also increases the effectiveness in integrating mobile applications to language classroom.

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