

An Evaluation of English Listening Mobile Applications for Grade Eleven Students of Senior High School

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Abstract: This study evaluates five English listening mobile applications to be used by eleventh grade students to supplement their learning in listening. There are two objectives of this study: (1) finding out the most appropriate English listening mobile application for eleven grade students of senior high school; (2) finding out the ways to use the application for English teachers and students for practicing listening comprehension skills. This study is categorized into an evaluation research type of study. In analyzing and evaluating the five selected applications, this study employed the content analysis method. The data of this study were taken from five selected applications for learning English listening which were selected from the *Google Play* store. The researcher limited the selection by categorizing 50 apps into five groups: (1) listening apps for practicing only, (2) listening apps with exercises, (3) listening apps with videos, (4) listening apps with news program, and (5) listening applications with games. The representative applications from each category are English Audio Books-Librivox (app 1), English Listening Lesson (app 2), Learn English GREAT Videos (app 3), BBC News (app 4), and English Games-Listening (app 5). In analyzing the five selected applications, this study modified Kim and Kwon's analytical framework of MALL (2012: 38-39) as the main evaluation criteria in this study. The modified analytical framework has four main categories: Target Learners, Content and Pedagogic Features, Technological Features, and Material Appropriateness. In analyzing the Content and Pedagogic Features and Technological Features, an application evaluation rubric was developed based on several sources of application evaluation rubrics and checklist. The researcher also obtained evaluation from 15 high school students of grade XI. The participants were assigned to use the representative apps for one week and then were asked to give feedback about the apps by filling in open-ended questionnaires developed by the researcher. The results of the researcher's evaluation and the learners' evaluation revealed that app 3 generally fulfilled the criteria of the most appropriate app by achieving 80.5% of fulfillment average score. The second position went to app 5 by having 74% and got the average appropriate criteria. App 2 was in the third place with 70.5% and deserved the average appropriate criteria of app. The fourth position was given to app 4 (68.5%), while the last position belonged to app 1 with 67% and received the least appropriate criteria.

Keywords: *mobile app, learning app, listening app, mobile learning, MALL, listening skills.*

Introduction

Mobile applications (apps) have become an essential part of human life in the recent years. They offer solutions to handle many kinds of everyday tasks. The varieties of apps which are available in android and iOS platforms range from apps for photography, music, entertainment, shopping, social media, games, news & magazine, maps and many more. Each app offers different features and facilities to help people with their needs. Therefore, there is

no doubt that our young generation will be really attached with mobile devices that Prensky (2001: 1) call them as 'digital natives'. It means that our students today are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games, and the internet.

Harmer, through his personal web page jeremyharmer.wordpress.com, on June 7, 2015, also states that one of the big issues in today's English language teaching world is technology. He says that technology is "the big game changer". The implementation of mobile technology in education will bring so many changes in the way people learn English.

In conducting this study, there were several steps to develop the background of the study. First, interviews with some eleventh and twelfth graders of senior high school to know the recent problems in learning English on senior high school were conducted. The students came from 2 private senior high schools in Yogyakarta. The results were: (1) students said that the most difficult skills in learning English were listening and speaking; (2) most students from twelfth grade said that they felt anxious knowing that in the national examination they would deal with a listening comprehension test; (3) the students also said that listening is very difficult, especially when the speaker's accent is unfamiliar and the audio recording does not work properly; (4) another factor was the limited time for them to practice listening in school; (5) they also did not know how to get learning resources for listening practice.

Second, based on the observation while teaching English for grade eleven and twelve students during her PPL, she noticed that most of high school students nowadays are smartphone users. Almost all of them used android and iphone apps in their everyday communication. On the other hand, they were not fully aware that their smartphones can be used as media to help them developing their listening skills.

Third, the researcher also conducted an interview by asking an English teacher related to how she gives listening practice for the eleventh graders in her school. The interview was conducted on September 23, 2016 in SMA N 5 Yogyakarta. During the interview, the English teacher said that the time to provide listening practices in class is limited. In a month, she did not always give a listening practice for students because she followed the materials in the curriculum. She also admitted that the students needed more listening practices outside the classroom because most of her students still had a difficulty in listening comprehension tasks.

Finally, mobile learning could be an ideal answer of how students could learn independently in their leisure time. However, there are still many pros and cons related to the implementation of mobile learning. Furthermore, it is not easy to guarantee how good is the quality of the materials provided on the apps which would be used by students. There are hundreds of apps available freely for English learning which offer different facilities and features developed by various app developers in the world. Therefore, studies need to be conducted to evaluate mobile apps which are suitable for educational purposes.

Considering the things mentioned above, the researcher decided to conduct an evaluation of English listening mobile apps for the eleventh graders of senior high school. The formulation of the problems of this research are: 1) which app is the most appropriate to be used by eleventh graders of senior high school to supplement their learning in listening, and 2) how that app can be used by teacher and students for practicing listening comprehension skills.

Research Method

This study is categorized into an evaluation research type of study. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012: 17), evaluation research is a systematic process of collecting and analyzing data about the quality, effectiveness, merit, or value of programs, products, or

practices. Therefore, this study meets the criteria of evaluation research. The overall approach to analyze and evaluate mobile apps in this study is based on content analysis of materials and users' evaluation.

The data of this study were taken from five representative apps for learning English listening which were selected from the *Google Play* store. The researcher limited the selection by categorizing the 50 apps into five groups, namely listening apps for practicing only, listening apps with exercises, listening apps with videos, listening apps with news program, and listening apps with games. The representative apps from each category are English Audio Books-Librivox (app 1), English Listening Lesson (app 2), LearnEnglish GREAT Videos (app 3), BBC News (app 4), and English Games-Listening (app 5).

In analyzing the five selected apps, this study modified Kim and Kwon's analytical framework of MALL (2012: 38-39) as the main evaluation criteria of this study. The modified analytical framework has four main categories: Target Learners, Content and Pedagogic Features, Technological Features, and Material Appropriateness. The researcher also developed an app evaluation rubric to analyze the content and pedagogic features and the technological features.

The procedure of the research was a combination of the steps in designing educational evaluation by Stufflebeam (in McMurry et al., 2016: 13) and the research procedures in content analysis study proposed by Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, Razavieh (2010: 458). The procedure are: (1) specifying the phenomenon to be investigated, (2) identifying the evaluand, (3) identifying the stakeholders, (4) selecting the type of evaluation, (5) setting evaluation criteria, (6) analyzing and evaluating the selected listening apps, (7) getting evaluations from app users, (8) developing a self-access learning guide & an app evaluation checklist.

The participants of this study were 15 high school students of grade XI. The participants were assigned to use the representative apps for one week or minimum 15 minutes usage per day. One participant used 1 listening app independently. After that, they were asked to tell their opinions related to the apps by filling in open-ended questionnaires developed by the researcher.

Findings and Discussion

The most appropriate app for learning English listening for eleventh graders was decided based on the sum of total scores from the researcher's evaluation and the learners' evaluation divided by two. The result shows that app 3 got the highest average score with 80.5% (mostly appropriate). The second position went to app 5 by having 74% (average appropriate). App 2 was in the third place with 70.5% (average appropriate). The fourth position was given to app 4 with 68.5% (less appropriate) while the last position belonged to app 1 with 67% (less appropriate). Finally, the final result of this study stated that app 3 (LearnEnglish GREAT Videos by the British Council) from 'the listening app with videos' category was the most appropriate app to be used by eleven grade students of senior high school to supplement their learning in listening.

Besides giving scores to the five selected apps, the participants of this study also wrote their opinions related to the apps. The opinions were related to the mobility in using the apps, the plus and minus points of the apps, their progress in listening skills after using the apps, their suggestions about further development of the apps, and their continuity to use the apps.

First, the mobility in using the app was relatively successful because the students already used the apps in different places and situations although the biggest frequency was still using the app in their house. Second, about the plus and minus points of the apps, from the students' comments, it can be seen that most of the students enjoyed using the apps for practicing listening although they said that some aspects of the apps need improvements. Third, related to the learners' perception whether they improved their listening skills after using the apps, from the total 15 students, 12 students said that they got some improvements of listening skills after using the apps, 2 students said that they did not find any improvement in listening skills, and 1 student did not give any comment about the question. The fourth question was about the suggestions of further improvements for the apps and the learners gave many opinions about this question. The result of last question, about the continuity to use the app, shows that 11 students said they wanted to continue using the apps, 3 students said they did not want to continue using the app, and 1 student did not give any comment related to the question. Finally, from the learners' answers through the questionnaires, the researcher concluded that most students find it useful to use the mobile apps for practicing listening.

To answer the second research question of this study, the researcher developed a self-access learning guide to be used by students and teachers in using the app (LearnEnglish GREAT Videos app). The guide can be used as a guide for teachers in giving homework or assignments to their students which go with the listening materials in the app. An evaluation checklist to select good English learning app, developed based on the criteria used in this study, was also developed. The checklist can be used by English teachers or students to select mobile apps that they will use for education purposes in the future.

Conclusions

Based on the results obtained from the evaluation, some conclusions are drawn. First, the results of the analysis show that the five English listening apps are nearly appropriate to be used for supplementing the learning of listening for eleventh graders. This is because the five apps had fulfilled most of the criteria as good mobile learning apps namely the target learners, content and pedagogic features, technological features, and material appropriateness. Hence, it is also found that some aspects were not fulfilled. From the table, it can be seen that app 3 is categorized as the mostly appropriate app to be used for learning, app 2 and app 5 are categorized as moderately appropriate apps to be used for learning, while app 1 and app 4 are categorized as less appropriate to be used for learning.

Second, the results of the analysis also revealed that app 3 generally fulfilled the criteria of the most appropriate app by achieving 80.5% of fulfillment average score. The second position went to app 5 by having 74% and got the average appropriate app criteria. App 2 was in the third place with 70.5% and deserved the average appropriate criteria of app. The fourth position was given to app 4 with 68.5% and got the less appropriate criteria. While the last position, belonged to app 1 with 67% and got the less appropriate app criteria. Finally, the final result of this study stated that app 3 (Learn English GREAT Videos developed by the British Council) from 'listening app with videos' category was the most appropriate app to be used by eleven grade students of senior high school to supplement their learning in listening.

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