

From Books to Mobile Applications: A New Way of Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract: Intentional vocabulary learning is the most important and essential part of the foreign language learning. It needs practice and repetition and learners cannot use language effectively without vocabulary knowledge. Formerly, books were the source of vocabulary and vocabulary memorizing was the main strategy while learning foreign language. This strategy was boring, difficult and wouldn't help learners much. Today, with the help of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), intentional vocabulary learning became easier and more interactive and enjoyable. The purpose of this study is to identify the most popular mobile applications used in vocabulary learning. Moreover, duration, frequency of the mobile application usage, perceptions of the mobile application users and connection between annual income and mobile application usage time were identified in this study. The results showed that most popular applications are *Duolingo* and *EnglishCentral*. Results also indicated that participants use mobile applications at least once in a month between 0-30 minutes and mostly in the evening. Another result of the study is that there is no correlation between annual income and time spent for mobile learning, and participants think that mobile applications improve not only their vocabulary knowledge but also their speaking skills.

Key words: mobile applications, vocabulary learning, technology, mobile assisted language learning.

Introduction

Technology is a central part of our life now. With the development of technology, life is changing in return and it becomes more practical, easy and rapid. It is the same in education sector. Education is developing with the technology and it begins to meet the needs of the learners. Books and notebooks are replaced by iPads, tablets,

laptops, and smart phones. Accordingly, it is inevitable for teachers to use these new tools of technology in the classroom. It is essential to keep learners engaged in the learning process and these new hardware and software technologies help teachers a lot in their profession. Today's learners grow up with very different technological gadgets and programs. Therefore, schools and teachers have started to change their teaching methods and strategies according to new technological developments. Nowadays sources of information are becoming technological devices instead of teachers. As Bezircioğlu (2016) stated, students consults their mobile devices more than their teachers. If they cannot find what they are looking for on the screens, then they ask for their teachers' help. These cause traditional learner and teacher roles to change. Learners have become more active and engaged whereas teachers have become less active but more as facilitators. The practicality, mobility, and the accessibility of the mobile devices inevitably create this situation. El Hariry (2015) claims that mobile phones could possibly have a huge effect on teaching and learning by the use of many educational applications. Thornton and Houser (2005) also claim that mobile devices can be effective tools for delivering language learning materials to the students.

Learning new language is always accompanied with challenges. It requires a lot of time and dedication. Besides reading, writing, listening, speaking exercises, learning new words is also important in language learning. According to Ahmad (as cited in Kham, Sudweeks & Armarego, 2015) vocabulary learning is a crucial process for language learners to acquire proficiency and competence in a language. When trying to learn a foreign language, most of the learners complain about memorizing the words. Learning and memorizing new words is not easy particularly for adults whose minds are busy with other works. Fortunately, today's digital world offers them a lot of Android, IOS and Windows mobile phone applications which can be used for vocabulary learning in foreign language. All these applications use different strategies and techniques; hence, many learners have difficulties while making decision on the most effective applications in vocabulary learning. In the light of

these mobile language teaching and learning tools, mobile applications which are most popular in vocabulary learning, duration, frequency of the mobile application usage, perceptions of the mobile application users and connection between annual income and mobile application usage time will be researched in this article.

Literature Review

Mobile device and mobile learning in education refers to using portative devices such as TV, CD players, computers, cell-phones, laptops, tablets etc. in the learning process. The use of mobile technology in education offers new learning experiences and flexibility. Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler (2005) defines mobile learning as an activity, which allows people to be more productive in consuming, interacting or creating the information by the compact digital devices, if a person performs these actions on a regular basis, has sustainable connection and the device fits in a pocket or purse. Using such technological devices in language learning has caused new approaches and methods to come out for language learning. All these technological devices have become a part of our life and they have helped to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of language learning. According to Oberg and Daniels (2012), the emergence of Internet made open and distance learning a means of receiving education from all parts of the world. In a short period, the attractiveness of distance learning led to the realization that various mobile devices provide a very effective resource for education. Today, almost every person has mobile devices; and they are convenient tools for accessing relevant information. (Laurensovna, Maryana, Donskaya, Evgenievna, Umeda, and Ovezova, 2016).

Among the mobile devices, mobile phones can be accepted as the most frequently used and most effective one. The developments of mobile phone technology and mobile phone applications have made the process of learning foreign languages faster and easier. The main advantage of using mobile devices in learning is the fact that their implementation does not have time and location limitation. Moreover, it gives more opportunities for the real-time communication (Laurensovna et al., 2016).

According to Cavus & Ibrahim (2009), mobile phones are the most common mobile devices due to their popularity among the student population. Today's mobile applications not only improve communication skills, but they also help to improve the four language skills.

To improve the four language skills, initially learners should improve their vocabulary knowledge, because learning vocabulary is a basic and important part of learning foreign languages. According to Francis & Simpson (cited in Deng & Trainin, 2015), vocabulary learning is an essential part of acquiring a second language as words are the building blocks of a language. Nowadays, people make vocabulary learning easier by downloading applications to their mobile phones because the use of mobile devices offer authentic and rich context for incidental and intentional vocabulary learning (Deng & Trainin, 2015). There are lots of vocabulary learning applications for Android, IOS and Windows phones and learners only need an application to start learning vocabulary and language. Occasionally, it is not easy for learners to find appropriate application for their language needs. It takes some time to find correct application after using and testing.

The aim of this study is to determine the most frequently used mobile applications in vocabulary learning; the reason for preference; how long and at what time of the day it is used, and which language skill it improves while learning vocabulary in foreign languages.

Quantitative data were collected to explore the following research questions:

1. Which mobile applications are mostly used for vocabulary learning?
2. Why do people choose mobile applications for vocabulary learning?
3. How long, how often and at what time of the day do they use mobile applications for vocabulary learning?
4. Which language skill(s) do these applications improve according to participant's view?

5. Is there any connection between annual income and time spent for learning vocabulary via mobile applications?

Methodology

This study was conducted in Turkey. Most of the participants were adults whose minds were busy with daily works and didn't have enough time to go to language courses. Implementing the study with this group may give real clues to find the most effective and popular mobile applications for vocabulary learning, since the participants represent the real and natural conditions of application users. Quantitative data collection method was used in this study. The most common instrument used for this purpose is questionnaire survey, so it was used as an instrument in this study.

Participants

The participants in the study consisted of 15 civil servants and teachers working in Gemlik District National Education Directorate. 3 participants were between 15 and 20 ages, 3 participants were between 20 and 30, 8 participants were between 30 and 40, and 1 participant was above 40. 1 participant was high school graduate, 13 participants were university graduates, and 1 participant was a post graduate student. Their mother tongue was Turkish and they didn't know any other languages. They were beginner level in English. They were selected randomly. The number and percentages of the participants according to gender were 9 (60%) males and 6 (40%) females.

Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) that was developed by taking 5 experts opinions. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions. In the first 4 questions, demographic information of the participants was collected by asking their gender, age range, level of education and annual income. In the 5th and 6th questions, information about mobile applications was collected, in the 7th, 8th, and

9th questions, information about the usage was collected, and in the 10th question, information about participants' perception was collected. The purpose of using questionnaire was explained to the participants before delivering the questionnaire.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected in this study. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was uploaded to *SurveyMonkey* website so that no paper was wasted with specific purpose to be ecofriendly in this research. Participants were invited to fill the questionnaire. Some data were analyzed statistically by using SPSS 22 and some data were analyzed according the numbers of the selected items, and some data were analyzed automatically by *SurveyMonkey* website.

Data Analysis

The SPSS 22 software was used to analyze some items of the study. Paired samples T-test was carried out in this research to compare annual income of the participants and the time spent for learning vocabulary. Results of the quantitative data analysis were revealed with the mean scores at the end of the present study.

Results

According to the survey, the findings are as follows:

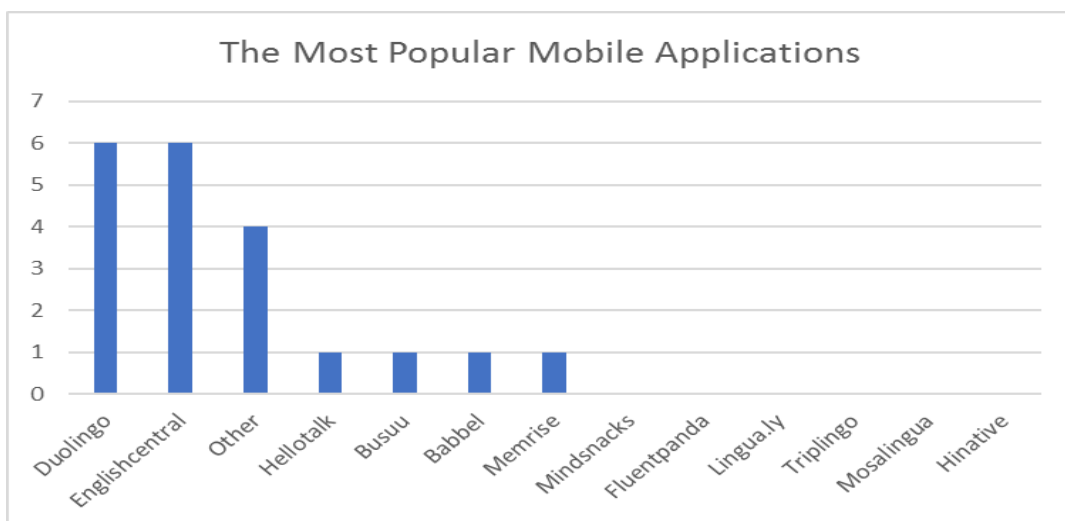


Figure 1. The most popular mobile applications for vocabulary learning.

The mean scores were calculated in order to answer research question 1 that aimed to identify the mobile applications which are mostly used for vocabulary learning. According to the results of the questionnaire, most of the participants use *Duolingo* and the *EnglishCentral* mobile applications for vocabulary learning.

6 (43%) of the participants use *Duolingo* and 6 (43%) use the *EnglishCentral* applications, while 1 (7%) of the participant uses *Hellotalk*, 1 (7%) of the participant uses *Busuu*, 1 (7%) of the participant uses *Babbel*, 1 (7%) of the participant uses *Memrise*, and 4 (29%) of the participants selected “Other” but they didn’t write any mobile application name even though it was requested to specify.

Research question 2 aimed to answer why people choose these mobile applications for vocabulary learning.

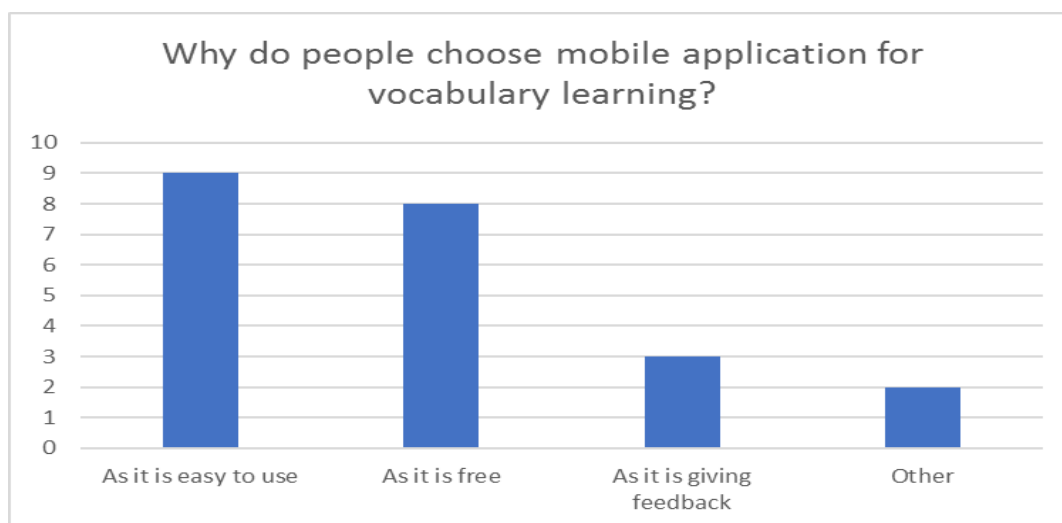


Figure 2. The most popular mobile applications for vocabulary learning.

According to the results, mobile applications’ easiness is the first reason of the participants choosing these mobile applications. 9 (60%) of the participants use mobile application as it is easy to use, 8 (53%) of the participants use it as it is free, 3 (20%) of the participants use it as it provides feedback, and 2 (13%) of the

participants selected “Other” section but they didn’t write any reason even though it was requested to specify.

Research question 3 aimed to find how long, how often and at what time of the day the participants use mobile applications for vocabulary learning. According to the results, 11 (79%) participants use mobile applications approximately for 30 minutes each time they turn on the application, whereas 3 (21%) of the participants use it between 30 and 60 minutes.

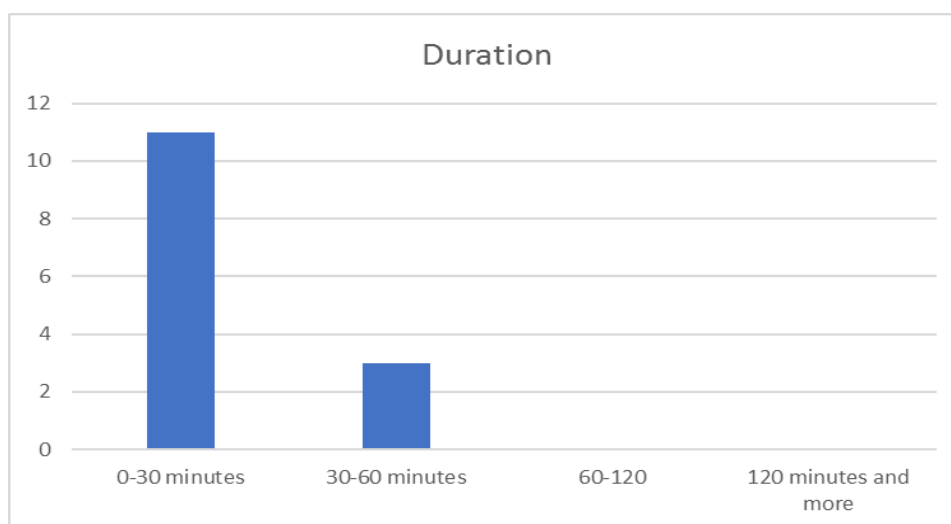


Figure 3. The duration of application usage.

When the frequency of the usage time was checked, it was revealed that 4 (29%) of the participants use mobile application once in a month, 3 (21%) of the participants use mobile application at least 2 days in a week, and 3 (21%) of the participants use it once in a week, while 2 (14%) of the participants use it 4 days in a week, and 2 (14%) of the participants use it every day.

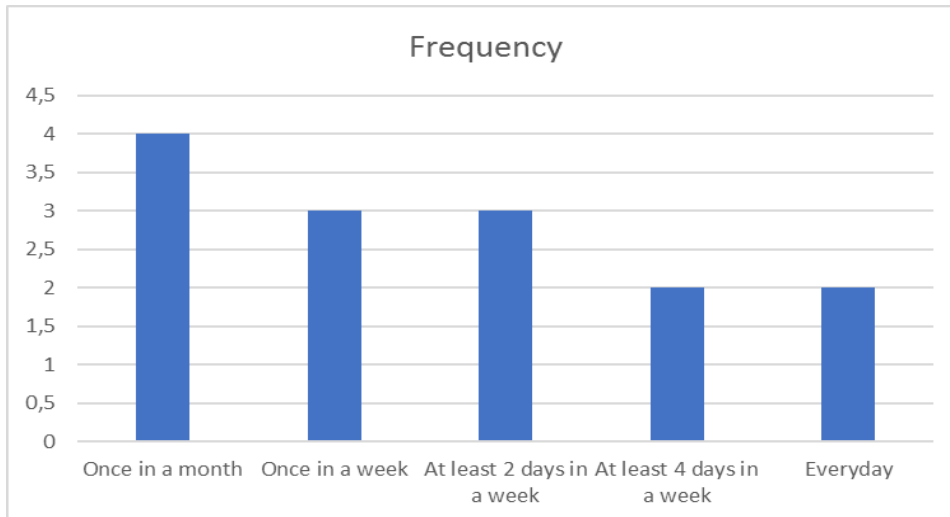


Figure 3. The frequency of application usage.

When the usage time in a day was checked, it was obvious that 12 (86%) of the participants use mobile applications for vocabulary learning in the evening, while 1 (7%) of the participant use mobile application in the afternoon, and 1 (7%) of the participant use mobile application at night.

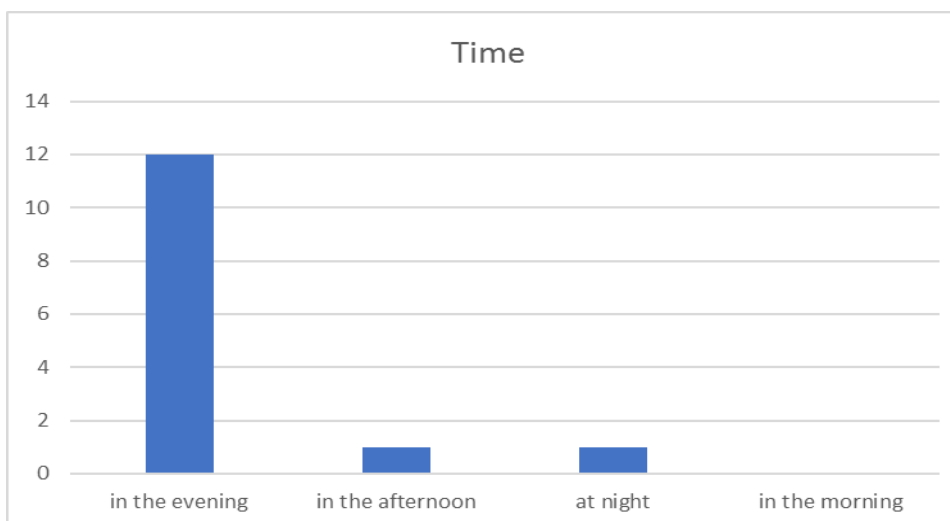


Figure 4. The application usage time.

Research question 4 aimed to find out which language skill(s) mobile applications improve according to the participant's view.

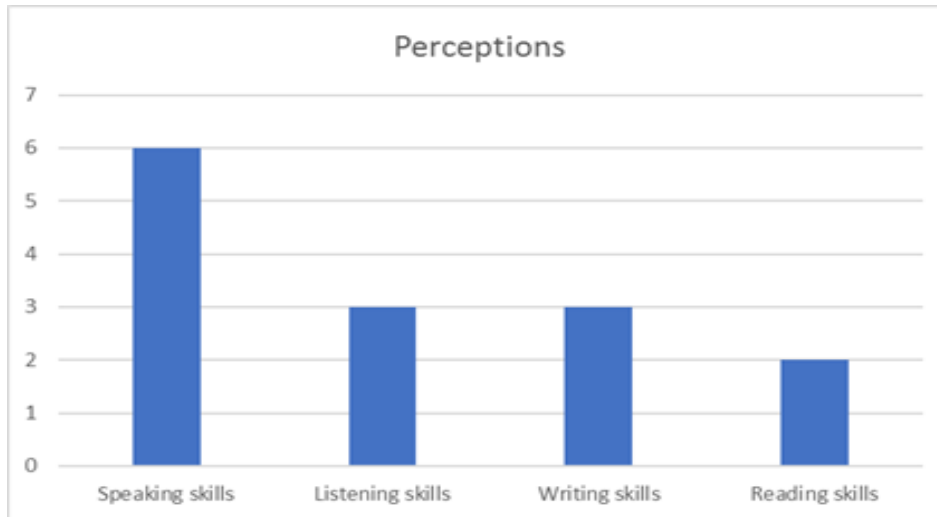


Figure 5. The perceptions of the participants related to which skill(s) mobile applications improve.

According to the results 6 (43%) of the participants think that the mobile application improves their speaking skills, 3 (21%) of the participants think that it improves the listening skills, and 3 (21%) of the participants think that it improves writing skills, while 2 (14%) of the participants think that it improves reading skills.

Research question 5 aimed to find out the correlation between annual income and time spent for learning vocabulary via mobile applications. According to the results there isn't positive correlation between annual income and the time spent for mobile learning.

Table 1. Correlations between annual income and time spent for learning vocabulary via mobile applications.

		What is your annual income?	How long do you use this mobile application?
What is your annual income?	Pearson Correlation	1	-,419
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,120
	N	15	15
How long do you use this mobile application?	Pearson Correlation	-,419	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,120	
	N	15	15

Discussion

In view of the results, it is clear that most of the participants use *Duolingo* and the *EnglishCentral* as mobile applications to learn vocabulary. *Duolingo* works similar to a game wherein users receive experience points for every correct answer. Users learn a new language through repetition of the words, audibly speaking it and conversation. The lessons are designed to increase the difficulty as the user progresses. These features of the application can be the reason of being most popular in vocabulary learning. Likewise, in *EnglishCentral* application, the vocabulary quiz application is available in each video lesson, in courses, and as a master vocabulary quiz application, in each video lesson you will focus on the words in that lesson. It has progress system that tracks all the words you have ever started to learn and use. It can also be seen that most of the participants use these mobile applications as they are easy to use and free. This result is in agreement with the study carried by Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler (2005). In addition, provision of feedback by the mobile applications can be accepted as another reason for preferring and using them. The participants use mobile applications mostly in the evening and they use them at least once a month for about 30 minutes. It shows that as the participants are civil servants they don't have time during the day time and they prefer to use mobile applications in the evening. The frequency and duration of the mobile application usage is very low. Most of the participants use mobile applications to improve their speaking skills as they don't have enough time to practice language verbally. In the last research question, it was intended to check whether studying time is getting shorter when annual income increases. The results show that there is no positive correlation between annual income and time spent for mobile learning.

Conclusion

This study attempted to reveal the mobile applications which are most popular in vocabulary learning; the duration and frequency of the mobile application usage; the perceptions of the mobile application users, and connection between annual income and mobile application usage time. The overall results of the study indicate that the

participants of the study use mostly *Duolingo* and *EnglishCentral* mobile applications for vocabulary learning at least once in a month. Most of the participants prefer to use mobile applications approximately 30 minutes in the evening and at least once in a week. Life is obsessed with doing everything quickly today, so it may be the reason for short time mobile application usage. Participants think that mobile applications improve their speaking skills and they have positive perceptions on mobile applications.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

The present study was carried out with very limited participants. Only 15 participants were examined. Similar researches can be carried out with a higher number of participants. Only quantitative data were collected in this study, so mixed method research can be used in similar researches to check variables from different angles. According to the results, participants spend very little time and they do not use these applications very often. The reasons can be investigated in depth in further researches. Moreover, gender and mobile application usage time can be investigated as well.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

This survey study was designed to get your views on mobile applications you have used to develop your foreign language skills. Please fill in the questionnaire as honest as possible. Truthful responses would provide strong basis for the study carried on reading aloud. Thank you for your time.

Please fill in the appropriate box with the sign ✓.

1. What is your gender?	Male		Female	
2. What is your age range?	15-20	20-30	30-40	40 and more
3. What is your level of education?	Primary School	Secondary School	High School	University
4. What is your annual income?	15000TL and lower	Between 15000-25000TL	Between 25000-35000TL	35000 TL and more
5. Which mobile application do you use to learn vocabulary?	Duolingo	Hellotalk	Mindsnacks	Busuu
	Babbel	Memrise	Fluent Panda	Lingua.ly
	Triplingo	Mosalingua	Hinative	Other(Please indicate)
6. Why do you prefer this mobile application in vocabulary learning?	As it is free	As it is easy to use	As it is giving feedback	Other (Please indicate)
7. How often do you use this mobile application?	Everyday	At least 4 days in a week	At least 2 days in a week	Once in a week
	Once in a month			
8. How long do you use this mobile application?	0-30 minutes	30-60 minutes	60-120 minutes	120minutes and more
9. When do you use this mobile application more often?	In the morning	In the afternoon	In the evening	At nights
10. Which language skills do you think this program helps to improve?	Reading skills	Listening skills	Speaking skills	Writing skills