

Kurdish EFL learners' perceptions about the Use of Smartphone Applications for Language Learning

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Abstract— This study explored Kurdish EFL learners' attitudes toward using smartphone applications for language learning. The data collection instrument was a five-point Likert-Scale questionnaire and the population was (101) students from departments of Medical Laboratory Science, General Science, and Chemistry Science – Charmo University. The results showed that the learners generally have a positive attitude towards using smartphone applications for English language learning. Also, the results suggest that learners generally agree that smartphone applications are useful and accessible tool for language learning. Regarding social media applications, the results indicated that learners who use social media platforms generally look for language-learning content. Nonetheless, the findings demonstrated that higher utilization of smartphone applications may not be necessarily associated with a perceived gain in proficiency. Consequently, language teachers must lead and assist students in learning how to utilize applications in general and those specifically created for language learning in particular. Therefore, EFL teachers' roles change from manager to facilitator. It is the teacher's responsibility to assist students in locating suitable material on the internet, which leads to mastery of the target language.

Index Terms— Mobile assisted language learning, smartphone applications, student perceptions, Kurdish EFL learners.

I. INTRODUCTION

Unquestionably, the enhancement of technology has an immense role in the development of education in any society. The growing usage of technology is inevitable. One of the most commonly used devices in the world is smartphone. Everyone nowadays can easily have access to mobile phones and use them for different purposes. These days, students have access to an abundant amount of information through their smartphones. Regarding language learning, there are various language learning applications on smartphones. The internet and smartphones have changed the way students learn another language and they can easily have access to authentic materials. Furthermore, Richards (2015) also asserted that nowadays learners have more chances to get exposed to authentic

materials as the internet, technology and social media platforms have made it easier for language learners to discover accurate and beneficial language learning materials. Students can communicate with native speakers of the target language through social media platforms and language learning applications. Thus, language learning outside the classroom is possible. One of the most widely used means to help learners learn about the target language is through the internet. Smartphones and other technological devices give students freedom and empower them to learn on their own. Thus, the teacher's responsibility is to assist students and guide them to attain the required curriculum objectives (Lekawael, 2017). The term mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) means utilizing mobile phones for language learning. Hence, learners can learn new material at their convenience and anywhere they want (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012). Furthermore, social networks serve critical roles in developing second language acquisition as it is a great source for finding real-life content. Students can use social media to express their thoughts (Derakhshan & Hasanabbasi, 2015). Facebook is a common social networking site. Teachers and learners use this platform when they do not have access to advanced tools and facilities for learning as it is a fast and easily accessible network. It provides learners and teachers with special features that can be used for learning a language (Yadav, 2021). Undoubtedly, one of the main benefits of using mobile devices is they are portable. As Stockwell (2022) mentioned that instructors are particularly interested in using mobile phones and other portable gadgets for the purpose of language teaching and learning as these devices are easily carried. Hence, it is beneficial to learn about the learners' attitudes and views about using mobile applications for language learning. It is of utmost importance for language teachers and researchers to find what type of material and content students need according to their level of education. Attempting to find what encourages the learners to continue learning is also necessary as the teacher has to guide learners and put them on the right path to enhance the education process. Therefore, this study aims to find the answer to the following questions:

1. What is the attitude of Kurdish EFL learners toward the use of smartphone applications for language learning?
2. Is there any statistically significant correlation among Smartphone Applications Usage, Access, and Convenience, Social Media and Interaction, and Proficiency Improvement?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL)

Defining the term mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) seems to be a challenging task. Nonetheless, scholars agree on the idea that mobile-assisted language learning does not only mean learning from a mobile phone; the process of learning can happen on the internet or in the classroom by utilizing technological devices to facilitate learning. MALL works in a way that meets the learner's needs; learners can find authentic materials on the internet platforms that boost their abilities. Burston (2014) also elaborates on the notion of mobile learning and states that it has two meanings which are the learner motility or utilizing mobile phones for learning. All these technological devices have an impact on the process of teaching as well. Nalliveettil & Alenazi (2016) asserted that English language teachers need to explore new ways of teaching, utilize technological tools, and familiarize learners with modern ways of learning the English language since students are usually dissatisfied with the conventional approaches of language teaching. Regarding the disadvantages, MALL poses some challenges. Learners may find it challenging to read on a small-sized screen (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012).

B. Autonomous Language Learning

The term learner autonomy in second language learning has been defined by Little (1997) as the ability to be a self-directed learner, a critical thinker, and a choice maker. He also implies that autonomous learners establish a link in their minds between the procedure of learning and the material they study. Self-directed learning has become popular during the past few years. This is partially because of the growing interest in the student-centered approach. Another factor that leads to autonomous learning is the growth of technology and the internet as they provide the learners with a wide range of resources. The exploitation of mobile devices, applications, and social platforms facilitates learner autonomy Godwin- Jones, 2011(as cited by Yang, 2013).

C. Language Learning Applications

Cell phones are adequate for personalized informal learning since they are personal devices. The cell phone owner decides how and what applications to use and this results in self-directed learning. Heil (2016) demonstrates that the primary emphasis in most of the applications specifically designed for language learning is on vocabulary meaning. Grammar, pronunciation, and pragmatics instruction is available on some applications as well. However, learner evaluation cannot be found in the majority of the language learning applications. Regarding language skills, most of the applications provide the learners with reading and listening content and activities. Speaking and writing materials are not available in the majority of the applications.

There are plenty of applications available that learners can use to improve their English proficiency. Chen (2016) systematically evaluated seven mobile language learning applications. **Duolingo** which is a mobile application, focuses on writing materials, corrective feedback, and instructions on language learning in general. **Speaking English Fluently** provides authentic materials. Nonetheless, additional guidance to the learners on how to correct their mistakes is not available. **Youdao Dictionary** is powered by cloud database; learners can have access to their materials on any device. **VoiceTube** is an application that helps learners to learn through YouTube videos. The learner's progress is not evaluated on this application. **Shanbay vocabulary** is also a language learning application. In this application, learners can assess themselves and do quizzes. There are groups to communicate with others and make progress as well. Another application is **Speak English** which helps learners listen to authentic materials. Then, they have their voices recorded. Finally, the **Brain Pop featured movie**, which provides learners with daily movies with subtitles and clarifications.

D. Previous studies on language learning applications and Mobile assisted language learning

The number of studies that have been done about EFL learners' and teachers' perceptions of mobile applications for language learning is not satisfactory yet. In most of the studies that have been carried out about mobile applications and EFL learners' attitudes, learners had a positive attitude towards using mobile learning applications. Darsih & Asikin (2020) explored the attitudes of 96 university students about the use of mobile applications and the types of applications that are used by these learners. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were used to elicit data from the respondents. The results of the study indicated that the participants had a positive attitude towards mobile applications for language learning. Another study by Metruk (2021) investigated the views of university EFL learners about the use of smartphones for language learning by utilizing a questionnaire. This study by Metruk investigated the learners' perceptions according to their gender as well. The findings indicated that the learners' views and perspectives were positive. Also, the results of the study by Metruk showed that there was a huge difference between the perspectives of males and females concerning smartphone usage for language learning. Nonetheless, there are some studies about a particular social platform and its correlation with language proficiency. For instance, Bensalem (2018) conducted a study about the effect of WhatsApp on a group of university students: the results of his study indicated that students who use WhatsApp for vocabulary learning did better than the group of students who used traditional ways of vocabulary learning. Moreover, the results of the questionnaire by Bensalem indicated that learners' perception of WhatsApp was good. The results of a study by Sadq (2021) highlighted the learners' positive attitude toward using Facebook as an instructional instrument in the process of teaching and learning.

In the context of Kurdistan region of Iraq, several studies have been conducted about the effect of mobile assisted language learning devices and social media on language learning. The findings of a study by Azeez & Al Bajalani (2018) showed the great role of mobile assisted language learning tools

on the improvement of language teaching and learning especially listening skill. Another study by Azeez and Al Bajalani (2018) which investigated the impact of mobile assisted language learning devices on the enhancement of Kurdish EFL learners, emphasized the positive impact of mobile assisted language learning tools on the progress of learners' speaking skill.

Several study results asserted the positive role of social media platforms in improving Kurdish EFL learners' English language skills mainly in an informal way. A study by Nuri et al (2021) examined the impact of social media platforms on Kurdish EFL learners' English language development. The results of this study indicated that social media platforms generally help learners to learn English in an informal not academic way. Thus, through using social media platforms, learners will acquire common words and expressions. Additionally, the findings of a similar study by Abdullah (2020) examined the effect of social media platforms on the development of Kurdish EFL learners' language proficiency except for writing skill as this skill needs to be learned in an academic and formal way.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Population

The participants of this study consist of (101) first-semester students from Departments of Chemistry Science, Medical Laboratory Science, and General sciences - Charmo University, who were selected by the random sampling technique. 15 of the participants were male and 86 of them were female. Also, they studied Academic English for the academic year of 2023-2024. They used various smart applications, mainly Google Classroom and e-mail to be in contact with their instructors and their colleagues.

B. Data Collection Instrument

This is a quantitative study in which a questionnaire was employed to collect data from the participants. An online questionnaire (Google form) was sent to the students via Google Classroom. The questionnaire was in the form of Five-a five-point Likert scale and it was designed to elicit information about the participants' attitudes and viewpoints on utilizing smartphone applications to learn the English Language. Further, the questionnaire was from Uzunboyly & Ozdamli (2011) which was adapted and paraphrased by the researchers to meet the needs of this study. Regarding the components of the questionnaire, it had two sections. The first section consisted of the learners' general information: their gender and their majors. The second section consisted of 16 statements and five options were listed from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, to strongly agree. The learners were required to choose one of the options which shows the extent of their approval of the statements.

C. Procedure

A pilot survey was conducted by the researchers themselves to make sure the design of the questionnaire and the statements were clear and understandable. Then, the questionnaire was sent to the respondents via e-mail and Google Classroom account. The purpose of the study was explained to them and

they were assured that their information would be kept confidential.

D. Issues of reliability

Cronbach's alpha reliability statistics offer valuable insights into the internal consistency of the survey instrument utilized to evaluate the perceptions of Kurdish EFL learners regarding the use of smartphone applications for language learning. Based on the computed Cronbach's alpha of 0.719, the survey demonstrates a moderate level of reliability, indicating that the 16 survey items consistently measure a common underlying construct related to the use of smartphone applications for language learning. In social science research, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 or higher is typically deemed acceptable, affirming the survey's reliability in accurately capturing the intended aspects of participants' perceptions.

TABLE 3
RELIABILITY STATISTICS

Cronbach's Alpha
0.719

E. Data Analysis

To gain a deeper understanding of the questionnaire's components, we utilized SPSS to analyze the collected data and examined the responses using measures of central tendency (mean; M), dispersion (standard deviation; SD), and correlation. Overall, this study implemented suitable statistical techniques for analyzing the quantitative data gathered.

We conducted a meticulous investigation to gather insights into the perspectives of Kurdish EFL learners regarding the use of smartphone applications for language learning. To achieve this, we crafted a survey, comprising questions categorized into five main themes, each uniquely focusing on various aspects of the participants' experiences. The themes include the learners' attitude, Smartphone Applications, Access and Convenience, Social Media interaction, and proficiency improvement. This methodical approach sought to unravel the intricate dynamics that shape the learners' engagement with mobile technology, culminating in a comprehensive understanding of how it affects their language learning journey.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

The first theme, "Smartphone Application Usage", delved into participants' attitudes and behaviors toward using language learning applications on their phones. This theme aimed to gain insight into how learners perceived the effectiveness of these applications in creating a conducive and enriching learning environment. The second theme, "Access and Convenience", explored the accessibility of language learning materials via smartphone applications and how convenient they were for learners to access at any time and from anywhere. The third theme, "Social Media and Interaction", addressed the evolving role of social media in language learning and how learners utilized it for interaction, collaboration, and communication

pertinent to language learning. The fourth theme, "Proficiency Improvement", sought to understand the extent to which learners perceived the authenticity of language learning materials available through smartphone apps and how these materials impacted the enhancement of their English proficiency levels.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR KEY VARIABLES

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Attitude	3.6754	0.39208	2.00	4.50
Smartphone Application	3.7977	0.55301	1.86	5.00
Access and Convenience	3.8045	0.63008	1.25	5.00
Social Media and Interaction	3.5901	0.51098	1.60	4.60
Proficiency Improvement	3.8911	0.79876	1.00	5.00

Table 2 presents a detailed summary of how Kurdish EFL learners view the effectiveness of smartphone applications for language learning across five primary areas. The average scores indicate that participants have an overall positive attitude towards all of the themes.

The findings of the study reveal that the participants held an agreeable outlook toward employing smartphone applications for language acquisition, with a mean score of 3.6754. This underscores the vital role that mobile applications play in their language learning pursuits. Moreover, the low standard deviation (0.39208) indicates that the respondents agreed on the significance of using smartphone applications for language learning consistently.

Based on the mean score of 3.8045 for the "Access and Convenience" theme, the findings indicate that smartphone applications are a practical and readily available tool for language learning. However, the moderate standard deviation (0.63008) suggests that there is some variability in how participants perceive the convenience and accessibility of language learning materials through smartphone applications. This indicates that there are differing perspectives on the subject.

Based on an average score of approximately 3.5901, it appears that most participants view social media as a viable tool for language learning, with a particular emphasis on its potential for interaction. Nonetheless, it's worth noting that the standard deviation of 0.51098 suggests that there is a degree of variance in opinion among participants, with some expressing skepticism about the authenticity and utility of social media content in this context.

Finally, the participants held a favorable outlook regarding the utilization of smartphone applications for language acquisition. Their responses particularly indicate signs of appreciation towards the convenience of accessing genuine materials and the opportunities for enhancing their English proficiency. The average rating of 3.8911 depicts a robust consensus among the respondents, which is further corroborated by the low standard deviation (0.79876).

TABLE 3
CORRELATION STATISTICS

Variables	Attitude	Smartphone Application	Access and convenience	Social Media and Interaction	Proficiency Improvement
Attitude	1	0.826	0.775	0.797	0.292
Smartphone Application	0.826	1	0.863	0.470	0.519
Access and convenience	0.775	0.863	1	0.451	0.305
Social Media and Interaction	0.797	0.470	0.451	1	0.105
Proficiency Improvement	0.292	0.519	0.305	0.105	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In Table 3, a thorough analysis of Pearson correlation results is presented. It sheds light on the connections between significant themes in the perspectives of Kurdish EFL learners regarding language learning smartphone applications. The themes explored are Attitude, Smartphone Application Usage, Access and Convenience, Social Media and Interaction, and Proficiency Improvement. This analysis offers valuable insights into the interrelationships among these themes.

There is a strong and positive correlation between attitude and smartphone application usage ($r = 0.826$). This implies that participants who have a positive attitude towards smartphone applications for language learning also tend to use these applications more frequently. Moreover, the results of our study indicate a significant positive correlation, with a coefficient of 0.775, between a positive attitude towards smartphone applications and the perceived levels of access and convenience while using them for language learning. These findings suggest that individuals who hold a favorable view of mobile applications are more likely to perceive them as a convenient and accessible tool for learning a new language.

The correlation between attitude, social media, and interaction is notably strong ($r = 0.797$). This suggests that individuals who have a positive attitude towards smartphone applications are more likely to engage in social media interactions that are related to language learning. Similarly, the results of our study reveal a significant and favorable association between the frequency of using smartphone applications for language learning and their accessibility and convenience. Specifically, the correlation coefficient between these variables was $r = 0.863$, indicating a strong and positive relationship. This means that participants who used language learning smartphone applications more often also found them to be more easily accessible and convenient to use. The correlation between the usage of Smartphone Applications and

Social Media Interaction is positive and moderate at $r = 0.470$. This means that people who use language-learning apps on their smartphones are moderately likely to engage in social media interactions related to language learning.

However, the correlation between the usage of smartphone applications and improvement in proficiency is moderate ($r = 0.519$) and statistically significant. Although there is a positive trend, the results indicate that the perceived enhancement in English proficiency may not be directly linked to the frequency of smartphone application usage. Additionally, the correlation between access and convenience, and social media and interaction, is strong and positive, with a correlation coefficient of 0.451. This suggests that individuals who perceive smartphone applications as easily accessible and convenient are more likely to engage in social media interactions related to language learning. However, there is a weak correlation between Access and Convenience and Proficiency Improvement. Specifically, individuals who believe that smartphone applications provide them with higher levels of access and convenience are less likely to report improvements in their English proficiency. The correlation coefficient for this relationship is 0.305. Finally, the relationship between social media and interaction and improvement in proficiency is positive but weak ($r = 0.105$). This indicates that although people who engage in language learning-related social media interactions tend to improve their English proficiency, this association is not very strong.

B. Discussion

In this study, we attempted to find answers to the following questions.

1) *What is the attitude of Kurdish EFL learners toward the use of smartphone applications for language learning?*

Research findings indicate that Kurdish EFL learners have a highly positive attitude towards using smartphone applications for language learning. The study reveals a strong correlation between participants' attitude and their use of language-learning applications ($r = 0.826$), suggesting that those with a positive outlook are more likely to actively use these tools. Additionally, the study found significant correlations with access and convenience ($r = 0.775$) and social media interaction ($r = 0.797$), indicating that participants who have positive attitudes also find it easy to access language-learning materials through smartphone applications and engage more actively in language-related interactions on social media platforms. The finding of a study by Reinhardt (2020) suggests that many studies support the idea that social media can promote cross-cultural interaction, societal awareness, learner identity, and improvement of various competencies. Consequently, social media has the potential to foster learner autonomy. This means the learners take responsibility for their learning which changes the role of the teachers from being a commander to being a facilitator or guide. Therefore, creating a learning atmosphere for the learners using social media platforms is critical as learning a language through social media can be enjoyable and accessible. Teachers can create language learning content on social media and try to be in contact with their learners.

These positive associations in our study highlight the important role that smartphone applications play in shaping favorable attitudes among Kurdish EFL learners toward

language learning. This finding is in line with a study by Thedpitaka, & Somphones which explored Thai EFL learners' attitudes about using smartphone applications in all aspects of language learning and teaching. The respondents' attitudes were generally positive.

2) *Is there any statistically correlation among Smartphone Applications Usage, Access, and Convenience, Social Media and Interaction, and Proficiency Improvement?*

The study's results indicate that there are notable connections between the usage of smartphone apps, accessibility and convenience, social media, and interaction, as well as proficiency enhancement among Kurdish EFL students. Those who frequently use these applications find them more accessible and convenient, as demonstrated by the strong positive correlation coefficient of 0.863 between the usage of smartphone apps and accessibility. Additionally, there is a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.470$) linking the usage of smartphone apps to social media interaction, which implies that individuals who use language-learning applications are more likely to participate in related social media activities. Furthermore, there is a moderate positive correlation between the usage of smartphone applications and proficiency enhancement ($r = 0.519$), emphasizing the relationship between application usage frequency and perceived English proficiency enhancement. Accessibility and convenience also exhibit strong positive correlations with social media interaction ($r = 0.451$) and proficiency enhancement ($r = 0.305$), highlighting the influence of perceived accessibility on engagement and language proficiency. Lastly, the weak positive correlation ($r = 0.105$) between social media interaction and proficiency enhancement suggests that active engagement in language-related social media interactions is associated with modest improvements in English proficiency. This suggests that increased usage of smartphone applications may not be directly linked to a perceived improvement in proficiency. Using the internet and the application on smartphones is extremely useful for language learning if used properly. Knowing how much time to spend on the internet and how to use it is crucial. Godwin-Jones (2011) states that the language teacher has to promote autonomous learning by facilitating and augmenting the process of supervised and unsupervised education. Consequently, language teachers need to guide learners and assist them on how to use smartphone applications in general and those applications that are specially designed for language learning in particular. Additionally, teachers need to help the learners find the right content on the internet which leads to proficiency in the target language.

These findings illustrate the interconnected dynamics shaping Kurdish EFL learners' experiences with smartphone applications for language learning.

Conclusion

Smartphones are among the most widely used devices in the world. These days, mobile phones are easily accessible to all and can be used for a variety of purposes, including language learning. This study attempted to explore the attitudes of (101) Kurdish EFL university-level students of Charmo University who study English in the first and second semesters. The findings revealed a significant and positive correlation between the use of smartphone apps for language learning and the sense

of easier access and convenience. Overall, the respondents held a positive attitude towards the usage of mobile applications for English language learning. Also, the results suggest that learners generally think that smartphone applications are useful and accessible tool for language learning. Concerning the usage of social media for language learning purposes, the results indicated that the learners generally perceive social media platforms as a useful tool for finding language learning content. The use of smartphone applications and an increase in English proficiency did not show a strong correlation. This indicates that learners need guidance and mentoring on how to use the applications and the internet effectively as they cannot find appropriate materials and content. Nonetheless, this growing usage of the internet and smartphone applications leads to learner autonomy which means the learners take control of their learning. As a result, the teacher's role in the process of education changes. As Metruck (2021) has mentioned teachers must educate their students about smartphone applications as well as how to utilize these applications in a way that develops their proficiency in the target language. Teachers can mentor the learners and put them on the right path as the teacher's role in the process of education is crucial and cannot be denied. Therefore, to help learners improve their proficiency in the English language or any other languages, they need to be educated and guided to find effective materials and methods for language learning. This study offers helpful insights to the language teachers and stakeholders in general about learners' perspectives, educational needs, and learning preferences. To conclude, this study attempted to provide valuable insights into the perceptions of Kurdish EFL learners regarding smartphone application usage for language learning. Despite this, we recommend further research on smartphone applications that are specially designed for language learning. The effect of a particular or several common language learning applications on proficiency development can be investigated.

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APPENDIX A

No.	Statements	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
1.	I use smart phone applications for language learning.					
2.	Smart phone applications do not create an effective learning-teaching atmosphere.					
3.	Mobile technologies can boost learners' motivation					
4.	I can have a quick access to language learning materials by means of smart phone applications.					
5	Using smart phone applications is a good way for language learning.					
6	I can easily have access to English language materials through mobile applications that are designed for language learning.					
7	You can use smart phone applications for language learning at anytime and anywhere you want.					
8	I believe the content on social media applications: such as Facebook, Instagram, ...etc are authentic and helpful for language learning.					
9	Social media applications are good for interacting and communicating with others.					
10	Mobile applications can be used to improve the traditional education.					
11	Course materials could be sent to colleagues via mobile applications					
12	Social media applications promote contact between the teachers and the students.					
13	Social media applications promote communication between the students.					
14	There are a lot of authentic materials for language learning on smart phone applications that are specially					

	designed for language learning.					
15	I can easily have discussions with my colleagues and share my ideas via various smartphone applications.					
16	I have improved my English proficiency level via my smartphone applications.					