



The Benefits of Android Applications for an Independent Learning in English Language

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Received August 20, 2021; Revised August 30, 2021; Published September 13, 2021

<https://doi.org/10.31629/juliet.v2i2.3692>

Abstract

Nowadays, the world has suffered caused by Covid-19. Everything has changed because of the pandemic, including in education system. Due to the pandemic condition, education relies more on technology usage. Technology presents us with plentiful advantages and features in the teaching and learning. Specifically, in smartphones, Android nowadays offers numerous applications of language learning in the Play Store. This article shows the benefits of Android applications namely Duolingo, Busuu, Rosetta Stone, and Memrise in learning English language. These apps enhance the user's four language skills mastery, namely listening, writing, reading, and writing skills using games, riddles, and other various ways. By learning language independently, students may also enhance their cognitive, meta-cognitive, and affective skills. It creates the good atmosphere for learning that aids learners to gain their goals in fun and enjoyable ways. Furthermore, it is also beneficial for students in terms of boosting students' motivation and confidence, practical, entertaining, and sustainability.

Keywords: Android, Android applications, independent learning, mobile-assisted language learning, MALL

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia has been done by involving numerous kinds of techniques, methods, and materials in recent days. Using a method such as employing technology in language learning, may boost the students' enthusiasm and motivation to meet the requirements of English as communicative purposes. Motteram (2013) discusses that technology may support students to study independently and employs them to advance the progress of language learning.

Since the current condition of COVID-19, educators have to adjust the way in learning English. The impact of the pandemic shifted us to spend more time on the screen. Di Pietro et al. (2020) states that online learning appears to create conflict on four major problems, namely (1) less time spent in learning, (2) stress symptoms, (3) a change in the way students interact, and (4) lack of learning motivation. Due to this condition, a recent breakthrough of independent learning by using technology is urgently required.

Even though we have various options in learning a language through online websites, we still do not have a suitable application that can function regularly and efficiently maintained in our daily life. Thus, the proper materials and exercises based on the technology are not yet comprehensively practical and useful in learning English.

The next issue is that university students are required to take responsibility for their studies. Especially through online learning, it is not adequate to meet students' needs. Independent learning is needed to support their learning activity, whether inside or outside the class. According to Lavrentieva (2019), Independent Study is an activity that reflects one's educational and cognitive skills to master autonomous learning at certain levels. In short, it gives the students to explore their discipline in individual learning and helps them highlight their progress on the course. Additionally, Meyers, et al. (2008) also states that independent study also develops the students' academic purposes. It is in line with what he has found in Thomas Telford School in the UK, it becomes one of the main reasons for their success in getting the best comprehensive school award. Additionally, it also enhances the students' encouragement, provides enjoyment materials, and makes them more active in learning the language.

Dealing with independent learning, we can relate it through the development of the technology itself. Nowadays we may come up with our closest functional gadget: a smartphone. Concerning smartphones, there are several educational applications for students to learn a new language and improving their skills. Currently, the most downloaded applications in the Google Play Store are Duolingo, Memrise, Busuu, and Rosetta Stone. The apps provide basic up to advanced English level learning, students can learn the language based on their needs. Several applications offer games and exercises in developing learners' four language skills. Nonetheless, some present language training only in receptive skills but they provide frequent games and tasks in detail.

Learning English by using the application and games indicates the learners to enhance their enthusiasm for language. In addition, the benefits of the application support the students in learning. The benefits are improving students' motivation, confidence, practicality, entertainment, and sustainability. Combining independent learning and the Android application to learn the language, the students can get beneficial knowledge and elevate their skills enjoyably and comprehensibly.

II ANDROID APPLICATION

What is Android and Android Application?

As stated by Felker (2011) Android Operating System (OS) is a Linux-based kernel platform under the name of Android Inc. that was purchased by Google in 2005. Later, Google first launched it in 2008 and becoming a worldwide phenomenon based on its rapid growth. It reached 160,000 users in just two years and a million in its four years anniversary. It is the biggest mobile operating system in the world today with 1.4 billion users worldwide. Android OS has various features in running their system; one of the vital features is android application. It is a program that is operated and carried out by a third party. Related to the Android application, Beal (2010) stated that 'android is a mobile software application developed for use on devices powered by Google's Android platform.' They are available in the Google Play Store, in the Amazon Appstore, and on various Android App-focused sites, and the apps can run on Android smartphones, tablets, and other devices. Thousands of android applications are free and downloadable in its official market, Google Play.

Learning English through Android applications

(1) Duolingo

Downloaded over 100 million times in Play Store, Duolingo presents all-in-one language learning by offering the four skills of language. After installing the app, the user will be given a pretest to check their capability in mastering English language. Next, it will classify the user based on their ability. The class categorizations are basic, intermediate and advanced. Each group will be given different treatment according to their own capability in learning English. The tasks presented in the app deal with speaking, listening, and reading. They are only accessible once skill in a day on the free app. To access unlimited learning, the user should buy the premium version in Play Store. Afterward, the app will make you choose the daily target in using the application starting from 5-20 minutes a day. Additionally, students could also learn languages with their friends and compete with them in order to get the best rank in the world. In this case, it may motivate students to learn more and be disciplined in learning a language. Furthermore, Duolingo received the ‘Best of the Best Educational application award’ twice in 2013 and 2014. Besides English, Duolingo also provides 20 other languages including Italian, Spanish, and Dutch for free. The detailed descriptions about the categorization and games of Duolingo are presented in Figure 1.1

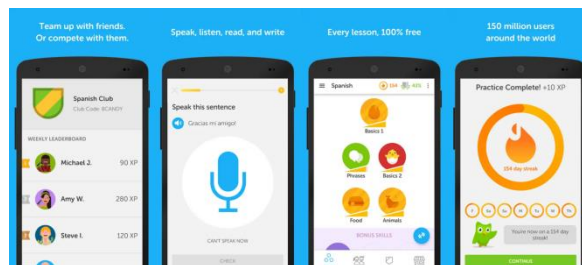


Figure 1.1 Duolingo Application

(2) Busuu

Based in London, UK, the Busuu application presents 12 major languages all over the world. Each language deals with full courses, including 150 different units of training. Similar to Duolingo, it also sets a placement test for the first time the user plays the app. The rank starts from the beginner – fluency, each of the levels also shows the difficulty that the learners will face in practicing the language. Specifically in English learning, the learners could get help from the native and achieve accent training to master the language flawlessly. In addition, Busuu also provides grammar error tasks, phrases, vocabulary, and idioms presented in that particular language. The training was offered in the form of games and enjoyable tasks. Especially for their premium user, after they finished achieving their goals in learning a language, they will get a valid certification from McGraw-Hill education. The preview of the app is presented in Figure 1.2



Figure 1.2 Busuu Application

(3) Memrise

Different from others, Memrise provides hundreds of interactive language games in the form of puzzles, riddles, and defeating enemies to get the score. While running this app, we are more likely to play games instead of learning a language. The developer of the application offers a communicative approach in using games as a trainer to enhance our English mastery. Memrise also presents 30,000 native speaker videos and a pronunciation guide to train our speaking and listening skills. The major additional feature in the app is practicing with chatbots. In this case, the learners could start the app and correct their errors based on the chat history.

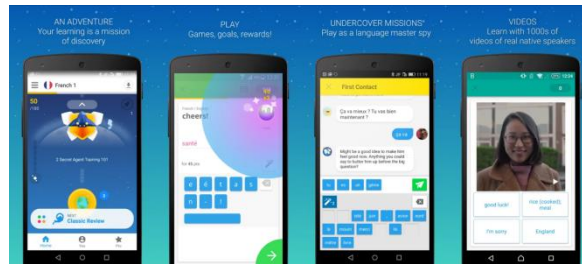


Figure 1.3 Memrise Application

(4) Rosetta Stone

Started in 1999, Rosetta Stone is based on a Computer Program in Windows and iOS. In 2015, it launched mobile apps based on synchronization in PC. Since it is an already well-known application, the language learning in this app is similar to the PC program. It specifies on grammar and vocabulary, and phrases. In addition, it also offers how to start conversations with 24 languages worldwide. This app has an audio companion to learn offline and TruAccent technology, a copyright technology in learning various accents.

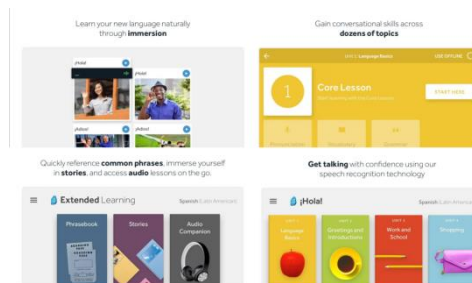


Figure 1.4 Rosetta Stone

The Benefits of Android Application in English Language Learning

(1) Increasing motivation and confidence

By using the application, it can boost the students' motivation and confidence. It refers to their intrinsic motivation in learning using android, students study what they like and what they feel comfortable with. Besides, the students can be more motivated because it provides with the games and puzzles that make them enthusiastic and excited. It also can lift their confidence in learning as it provides a reward in the form of students' achievement progress.

(2) Easy and Simple

Learning English towards the app is also easy and simple, it does not need any sophisticated stages and sequences in learning. Besides, the students are already familiar with and enjoy with the operational system of android since it is already their day-to-day habits in daily life circumstances. It deals with the learners and the application itself without having the complex requirement standards (e.g. syllabus and lesson plan) in conventional learning. The measurement and the standard that the learners want to achieve are set based on their own needs and level in learning (e.g. advanced, upper-intermediate, etc.).

(3) Practical and Entertaining

Besides being simple and easy, it is also practical and entertaining. Using the application is practical for the learners since it gives them plenty of experiences in learning through technology and the Android application system. Additionally, it is entertaining because it gives students games and enjoyable materials for us to learn the language. For instance, in writing section, provides us a game that encourages us to finish it by completing the blank gaps. In the game, we have to drive away from the five birds in the application. Once the gap is fulfilled, one bird will flow away and the rest will be flown away when we complete the test.

(4) Sustainability

The application does not only benefit people, it has also been shown to benefit the earth. It is much more sustainable than traditional or conventional learning, which involves a lot of paper materials and pencils. Completing numerous training or exercises on a mobile app does not require any new materials. It is one of the ways in learning that may result in many fewer trees being torn down for paper every year.

III INDEPENDENT LEARNING

According to Meyer et al. (2008), Independent Learning has 4 major characteristics, namely:

1. Set their (students) own goals. In this case, the learners determine their objectives to meet based on their needs.
2. Plan how to realize these goals. The pupils plan on how the objectives are successful and permanent on their learning. It also deals with the progress and terms and conditions on how they achieve goals in their achievement.
3. Monitor their progress as they follow this plan (which will entail controlling their behavior, motivation, and cognition and may also involve adapting and changing their plan).
4. The learners should be consistent and stable in learning the course by monitoring their own progress and following the plans.
5. Assess and reflect on what they have achieved (which will hopefully include making links with their prior knowledge). They may assess and reflect on their learning on how far they learn the subject. The reflection is based on the criteria of success that they want to accomplish in learning.

Definition of independent learning

Independent learning was defined by Candy (1991) as a combination of progress, technique, and a philosophy of education when the pupil obtains knowledge by their efforts and advances for a critical evaluation. The teacher's role is becoming a facilitator rather than the instructor or controller for the learners. It also emphasizes students' discovery in learning, formulating the

problems, and deciding the course of action, and reflecting the progress outcome (Hughes, 2001:9). The learners are required to find out and set their best method in learning a subject. Furthermore, it also demands the students to organize their individual needs and success in the learning process.

Skills involved in Independent Learning

According to Meyer et. al (2008), independent learning in ELT covers two varieties of skills for the learners: external and internal. The first skill deals with the learners’ external factors and circumstances which involves the physical environment and how the relationship between the pupils and teachers. The internal skill refers to the pupils’ ability to learn the subject matter, including cognitive, affective, and meta-cognitive skills. Further descriptions related to both of the skills are presented below in Figure 1.1

Meyers, et al. (2008)

External skill	What is involved
An enabling physical environment	This is believed to have four elements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The physical space to complete the task is available (some recommend that there should be dedicated spaces within each classroom for independent learning that may include activities and resources that will help with this). 2. The right amount of time is given to complete the task. 3. The necessary resources are provided and (if necessary) it is explained how to effectively use these prior to the exercise. They include, books, magazines, ICT, etc. 4. The support of the teacher is available to provide mentoring as and when required. <p>It is also recommended that charts explaining what an independent learner is and key words associated with this are displayed in classrooms and that they are routinely referred to.</p>
Relationship between pupils and teachers	This involves the teacher moving towards a more process orientated style of teaching which helps the pupil to see that they already have a wealth of experience to build upon and that they can acquire knowledge for themselves (with help). This approach is opposed to a traditional style of teaching in which the teacher is seen as being the person who has all the relevant knowledge which the pupil should passively receive. There are many things a teacher can do to enable a pupil to become more responsible for their own learning and these are discussed further below.
Internal skill	What is involved
Cognitive skill	This refers to a pupil's mental ability. Thus it includes a child discovering how people think and learn; how they can improve their memory and their attention; effective ways of acquiring and understanding information; and what the differing strategies are to solve problems. This skill can be taught, following programmes such as learning to learn. Once this skill is developed a student should be able to select the best way they can learn about and gain information on a particular topic through the use of this skill.
Meta-cognitive skill	This refers to the pupil's ability to reflect on and assess their own thinking. It involves reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses generally and within a particular task, as well as thinking about how this can be improved. This skill can be nurtured in the classroom but it requires a lot of support from the teacher.
Affective skills.	The affective skills refer to the pupil's feelings and emotions which motivate them to learn despite the difficulties they may encounter. The most important affective skills include: self-motivation; delayed gratification; persistence; seeing themselves as a competent learner; and understanding that a person's attitude can affect their ability to succeed and learn.

Figure 1.1 Skills involved in Independent Learning (Source: Meyer, et al., 2008).

IV CONCLUSION

Learning English using android applications to facilitate Independent learning can help students to discover and record their ability in learning the language. Duolingo, Memrise, Rosetta Stone, and Busuu applications could be optimized based on the users’ choices. In this case, learners could choose what to learn and what to enhance their least mastery language skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) or language components. Students may also enable their cognitive, meta-cognitive, and affective skills in Independent learning. Thus, it aids learners to gain their goals in fun and enjoyable ways. It is also beneficial in terms of improving students’ motivation and confidence, easy and simple, practical and entertaining, and

sustainability. It is also well-applied in use and valuable to improve their mastery of English skills comprehensively and effectively.

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