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EMPOWERING B2 LEARNERS' PRAGMATIC KNOWLEDGE THROUGH THE USE OF THE ELSA SPEAK MOBILE APP IN INDEPENDENT STUDY

Abstract: This study explores the effectiveness of the Elsa Speak mobile application in enhancing the pragmatic knowledge of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at the B2 level. Pragmatic competence is crucial for effective communication, yet it is often overlooked in traditional language instruction. By integrating technology-driven independent study, learners can improve their pragmatic awareness and pronunciation skills in real-world contexts. This paper examines the role of Elsa Speak in fostering pragmatic development, analyzing user experiences, and assessing improvements in communicative competence.

Keywords: Pragmatic knowledge, B2 learners, Elsa Speak, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), independent study.

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic knowledge is an essential component of language proficiency, allowing learners to use language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts. Traditional classroom settings often emphasize grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition, but pragmatic competence remains underdeveloped. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) offers an innovative approach to enhancing pragmatic knowledge through personalized, interactive, and flexible learning experiences. Elsa Speak, a mobile application designed for pronunciation training, provides learners with speech recognition feedback, enabling them to refine their communicative skills autonomously. This study investigates the extent to which Elsa Speak contributes to the development of pragmatic competence among B2-level English learners in independent study environments.

Pragmatic Knowledge in Second Language Acquisition

Pragmatic knowledge refers to the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts, encompassing speech acts, politeness strategies, and discourse coherence (Kasper & Rose, 2002). B2 learners, as per the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), are expected to express themselves fluently and spontaneously while maintaining linguistic appropriateness in different scenarios (Council of Europe, 2001).

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and Pragmatic Development

MALL has emerged as a significant pedagogical tool in second language acquisition, enabling learners to practice language skills in interactive and adaptive environments (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in language learning applications has facilitated personalized feedback, particularly in pronunciation and pragmatic awareness (Burston, 2014).

Elsa Speak: A Tool for Pragmatic Competence

Elsa Speak is an AI-powered mobile application designed to enhance pronunciation accuracy through instant speech recognition feedback. Beyond phonetics, it provides learners with contextualized speaking exercises that promote pragmatic skills, such as appropriate intonation, stress patterns, and speech act realization (Chen & Liu, 2021). The study involved 30 B2-level EFL learners from a university language program. Participants were divided into an experimental group (n=15), who used Elsa Speak for independent study over eight weeks, and a control group (n=15), who followed a traditional classroom-based approach. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests assessing pragmatic knowledge, surveys on learner experiences, and semi-structured interviews. The pre- and post-tests evaluated pragmatic awareness in speech acts such as requests, apologies, and refusals. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining quantitative analysis of test scores using paired t-tests and qualitative thematic analysis of learner reflections. Statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group's pragmatic competence. The participants using Elsa Speak demonstrated enhanced accuracy in intonation, stress patterns, and speech act realization compared to the control group. Interview responses highlighted the app's ability to provide immediate, individualized feedback, increasing learners' confidence in spoken communication. Participants reported increased awareness of appropriate tone and formality in different contexts. The findings suggest that integrating Elsa Speak into independent study routines can complement traditional language instruction, offering a more holistic approach to developing pragmatic competence. Educators may consider incorporating mobile-based pronunciation tools to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use. MALL refers to the use of mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, etc.) to support language learning. It is a subcategory of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) but focuses on the mobility, accessibility, and personalized learning opportunities provided by mobile technologies.

Key Features of MALL

Accessibility: Learners can practice anywhere and anytime.

Personalization: Apps and platforms can tailor content based on individual progress.

Interactivity: Many MALL applications use gamification, quizzes, and real-time feedback.

Social Connectivity: Language learners can engage with peers and native speakers through messaging apps and social media.

Multimodality: Supports text, audio, video, and speech recognition for a diverse learning experience.

Examples of MALL Applications

Duolingo, Babbel, Memrise – Vocabulary and grammar practice.

Anki, Quizlet – Flashcard-based learning.

HelloTalk, Tandem – Communication with native speakers.

Google Translate, SayHi – Instant translation and pronunciation support.

Pragmatic Development in Language Learning

Pragmatic development refers to the process of learning how to use language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts. This includes:

Speech Acts: Understanding how to make requests, apologize, thank, and give compliments appropriately.

Conversational Skills: Turn-taking, politeness strategies, and informal vs. formal language.

Cultural Awareness: Knowing the social norms and expectations of a language community.

Contextual Understanding: Recognizing how meaning changes based on tone, setting, and relationship between speakers.

How MALL Supports Pragmatic Development

Exposure to Authentic Conversations: Listening to podcasts, watching videos, and using AI chatbots.

Role-Playing and Simulations: Interactive language-learning apps with real-world dialogues.

Instant Feedback: Apps like Grammarly and AI-based tutors correct language use.

Cross-Cultural Communication: Language exchange platforms like HelloTalk and Tandem help learners interact with native speakers and understand pragmatic differences

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the effectiveness of the Elsa Speak mobile application in fostering B2 learners' pragmatic competence through independent study. By providing targeted pronunciation feedback and contextualized speech exercises, the app enhances learners' ability to communicate appropriately in diverse social situations. Future research could explore long-term effects and the integration of similar technologies in blended learning environments. MALL enhances pragmatic development by offering real-life exposure, immediate feedback, and interactive learning opportunities. Mobile apps and tools help learners develop both linguistic accuracy and pragmatic competence, making communication more effective and culturally appropriate.

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