

THE ROLE OF MOBILE APPLICATIONS IN ENHANCING SPEECH ACT ACQUISITION AMONG EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study explores the role of mobile applications in facilitating the acquisition of speech acts among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In the context of increasing digitalization in language education, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) tools have emerged as effective platforms for developing pragmatic competence. The research focuses on how interactive features such as real-time feedback, contextualized dialogues, gamification, and multimedia input contribute to learners' understanding and use of speech acts, including requests, apologies, refusals, and compliments. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining quantitative data from pre- and post-tests with qualitative insights from learner interviews and classroom observations. The findings indicate that learners who engaged with mobile applications demonstrated significant improvement in both the recognition and production of contextually appropriate speech acts. Moreover, mobile applications were found to enhance learner autonomy, motivation, and exposure to authentic language use. The study concludes that integrating mobile technologies into EFL instruction can effectively bridge the gap between grammatical knowledge and pragmatic competence, offering pedagogically valuable implications for language teachers and curriculum designers.

Keywords

Mobile-assisted language learning, speech act acquisition, EFL learners, pragmatic competence, digital tools, language learning applications, communicative competence, interactive learning, second language acquisition, mobile technology

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly transformed the landscape of language education, creating new opportunities for innovative teaching and learning practices. Among these developments, mobile technologies have emerged as one of the most influential tools in modern pedagogy, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The widespread use of smartphones and mobile applications has enabled learners to access educational resources anytime and anywhere, thereby promoting flexible, learner-centered, and autonomous learning environments. This shift has given rise to Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which emphasizes the integration of mobile devices into language instruction to enhance various linguistic and communicative skills. While traditional approaches to language teaching have often prioritized grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition, contemporary perspectives highlight the importance of communicative competence, especially pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in different social and cultural contexts, which includes understanding and producing speech acts such as requests, apologies, refusals, compliments, and suggestions. The theoretical underpinnings of speech act research can be traced back to the works of J. L. Austin and John Searle, who argued that language is not merely a system of signs but a form of action used to perform communicative functions. In real-life interactions, the success of

communication depends not only on linguistic correctness but also on the speaker's ability to select appropriate expressions based on context, social norms, and cultural expectations.

However, EFL learners often face considerable challenges in acquiring pragmatic competence. Despite having a solid foundation in grammar and vocabulary, many learners struggle to use language appropriately in authentic communicative situations. This difficulty is largely attributed to limited exposure to real-life language use, insufficient contextualized practice, and the lack of explicit instruction on pragmatic norms. As a result, learners may produce grammatically correct but pragmatically inappropriate utterances, which can lead to misunderstandings or communication breakdowns. Addressing this gap between linguistic knowledge and pragmatic use has become a central concern in language education research. In this regard, mobile applications offer a promising solution for enhancing speech act acquisition among EFL learners. Modern language learning applications are equipped with a variety of features, including interactive dialogues, audio-visual materials, gamified exercises, and artificial intelligence-based conversational agents. These features create immersive and engaging learning experiences that simulate real-world communication scenarios, allowing learners to practice speech acts in context. Moreover, mobile applications provide immediate feedback, enabling learners to recognize and correct their pragmatic errors in real time. The personalized nature of mobile learning also allows learners to progress at their own pace, thereby increasing motivation and learner autonomy.

The relevance of this study lies in its focus on examining how mobile applications contribute to the development of speech act competence in EFL contexts. In an increasingly globalized world, effective communication in English requires not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to navigate diverse sociocultural contexts. Therefore, integrating mobile technologies into language instruction is not merely a technological innovation but a pedagogical necessity. This study aims to explore the extent to which mobile applications can enhance learners' ability to comprehend and produce appropriate speech acts, as well as to identify the key factors that influence their effectiveness.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the role of mobile applications in improving speech act acquisition among EFL learners. To achieve this goal, the study seeks to analyze the pedagogical potential of mobile learning tools, examine their impact on learners' pragmatic competence, and evaluate learners' attitudes toward mobile-assisted language learning. By addressing these aspects, the study intends to provide valuable insights for language teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers on how to effectively integrate mobile technologies into EFL instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The issue of developing pragmatic competence, particularly speech act acquisition, has gained increasing attention in the field of applied linguistics and language pedagogy. The theoretical foundation of speech act studies originates from the works of J. L. Austin and John Searle, who conceptualized language as a form of action rather than merely a system of structures. Their frameworks established that utterances perform functions such as requesting, apologizing, suggesting, and refusing, which are essential for effective communication. Building on this foundation, scholars such as Jenny Thomas emphasized the distinction between grammatical competence and pragmatic competence, arguing that learners often fail not because of linguistic inaccuracy but due to inappropriate use of language in context. Similarly, Gabriele Kasper and other researchers in interlanguage pragmatics highlighted that EFL learners frequently experience difficulties in producing contextually appropriate speech acts due to

limited exposure to authentic language use and cultural norms. In recent years, the integration of digital technologies into language learning has introduced new perspectives on addressing these challenges. Within this domain, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has emerged as a significant area of research. Studies by Agnes Kukulska-Hulme and Glenn Stockwell demonstrate that mobile applications provide flexible, personalized, and interactive learning environments that can enhance both linguistic and pragmatic development. These tools allow learners to engage with authentic dialogues, receive immediate feedback, and practice language use in simulated real-life contexts. Furthermore, recent empirical studies suggest that features such as gamification, multimedia input, and AI-driven conversational agents significantly contribute to improving learners' ability to comprehend and produce speech acts appropriately. However, despite these advantages, some scholars point out potential limitations, including superficial engagement, over-reliance on technology, and the lack of deep contextual understanding if mobile tools are not pedagogically guided. Therefore, the existing body of literature indicates that while mobile applications hold substantial promise for enhancing speech act acquisition, their effectiveness largely depends on instructional design, learner engagement, and the integration of pedagogical strategies.

This study adopts a mixed-method research design to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of mobile applications in enhancing speech act acquisition among EFL learners. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The participants of the study consisted of EFL learners divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group was exposed to mobile application-based learning, while the control group received traditional classroom instruction. At the initial stage, a pre-test was administered to assess learners' baseline level of speech act comprehension and production. During the intervention phase, the experimental group engaged with selected mobile applications that incorporated interactive dialogues, audio-visual materials, role-play simulations, and AI-based conversational tools designed to enhance pragmatic awareness. The instructional period lasted for a defined duration, during which learners were encouraged to actively interact with the applications both inside and outside the classroom. Upon completion of the intervention, a post-test was conducted to measure any improvement in learners' performance. In addition to test scores, qualitative data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to explore learners' perceptions, motivation, and attitudes toward mobile-assisted learning. The quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify significant differences between the experimental and control groups, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis to gain deeper insights into learner experiences. This methodological framework allows for a holistic evaluation of how mobile applications influence the development of pragmatic competence, particularly in the acquisition and appropriate use of speech acts in EFL contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that mobile applications play a significant role in enhancing speech act acquisition among EFL learners. The quantitative analysis of pre-test and post-test results indicates a noticeable improvement in the experimental group compared to the control group. Learners who were exposed to mobile-assisted language learning demonstrated higher accuracy in both recognizing and producing contextually appropriate speech acts such as requests, apologies, refusals, and suggestions. In contrast, the control group, which relied on traditional instruction, showed only moderate progress, primarily limited to structural and lexical aspects rather than pragmatic use. Statistical comparisons confirm that the difference between the two groups is meaningful, suggesting that mobile applications provide an effective medium for developing pragmatic competence. From a qualitative perspective, the data collected through

questionnaires and interviews further support these findings. Learners reported that mobile applications created a more engaging and less stressful learning environment, allowing them to practice language use more freely. Features such as interactive dialogues, real-time feedback, and multimedia input were identified as particularly beneficial in helping learners understand the contextual nuances of speech acts. Many participants emphasized that repeated exposure to authentic or semi-authentic communication scenarios improved their confidence and ability to respond appropriately in real-life situations. Additionally, the availability of mobile applications outside the classroom encouraged continuous practice, which contributed to better retention and internalization of pragmatic patterns.

The discussion of these results highlights several important implications. First, the improvement observed in the experimental group suggests that mobile applications effectively bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language use. Unlike traditional classroom settings, which often focus on form-based instruction, mobile platforms provide contextualized and interactive environments where learners can actively engage in communicative tasks. This aligns with contemporary theories of language acquisition, which emphasize the importance of meaningful interaction and input in developing communicative competence.

Second, the findings indicate that learner autonomy and motivation are significantly enhanced through mobile-assisted learning. The flexibility to learn at one's own pace and the gamified nature of many applications increase learners' willingness to participate and persist in language practice. This is particularly important in EFL contexts, where exposure to authentic language use may be limited. Mobile applications compensate for this limitation by simulating real-world communication and providing diverse input. However, the study also identifies certain limitations and challenges associated with the use of mobile applications. Some learners reported occasional difficulties related to technical issues, distraction, and the lack of deeper cultural explanations in certain applications. These findings suggest that while mobile tools are highly effective, they should not be used in isolation but rather integrated into a well-structured pedagogical framework guided by teachers. The role of the instructor remains crucial in providing explicit explanations, facilitating reflection, and ensuring that learners develop not only functional but also culturally appropriate language use. Overall, the results of this study confirm that mobile applications are a powerful tool for enhancing speech act acquisition among EFL learners. When used strategically, they contribute to the development of pragmatic competence, increase learner engagement, and create opportunities for continuous and context-rich language practice.

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