

Chapter 5

Korean EFL College Students' Acceptance of Smartphone Applications for English Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Smartphones have deeply penetrated all aspects of our lives. The impact of smartphones has reached education and led to the development of countless language learning applications (apps). However, before merging this new technology with language education, it is critical to identify determinants affecting students' acceptance of smartphone apps for English language learning (SAELL). The purpose of this chapter is to investigate factors affecting the students' intention to use SAELL, and gender and academic major differences in acceptance of SAELL. A quantitative method was used to analyze data collected from 675 participants in Korea. The results indicated that perceived usefulness, perceived convenience, social influence, perceived enjoyment, and self-management of learning significantly affected the students' intention to use SAELL. Gender and academic major moderated the acceptance of SAELL. This chapter adds to the knowledge of how to use smartphones for language learning and provides useful insights on the acceptance of SAELL.

INTRODUCTION

The widespread adoption of mobile technology in recent years has brought about a tremendous increase in the number of people carrying mobile devices worldwide. Korea is no exception. Almost every teenager and adult in Korea have a smartphone. The Statista (2019), an online portal for statistics, reported that 99.9 percent of respondents aged 20 to 29 years in Korea own smartphones. They watch television, access social networking sites (SNS), listen to music, text and call, send emails, and perform various other daily tasks on their smartphones. In addition to this “smartphone fever,” the English education

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boom in Korea in recent years has encouraged the development of smartphone apps to support different aspects of English learning. Mobile apps are proliferating rapidly and may make desktop computing obsolete (Godwin-Jones, 2011).

The rapid emergence of smartphones has enabled foreign language learners to practice their target language skills “anywhere, anytime” (Geddes, 2004, p. 1) and to access various apps, which provide an ideal platform for informal, individualized language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Pindeh, Suki, & Suki, 2016). The growth in the number of smartphone users has boosted the educational potential of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). However, the availability and prevalence of mobile apps do not guarantee their success in an educational context (Godwin-Jones, 2017; Liu, Li, & Carlsson, 2009). It is essential to understand that students’ acceptance of technology plays a critical role in determining the success of MALL. If students perceive that technology is useful and easy to use, they tend to show a positive attitude and higher satisfaction and motivation, which will drive them to capitalize on the technology (Azli, Shah, & Mohamad, 2018; Chung, Chen, & Kuo, 2015; Pindeh et al., 2016). Thus, it is essential to understand the factors that drive the students’ acceptance of smartphone language learning. Despite the popularity of smartphones and English learning apps, few studies have explored students’ acceptance of smartphone apps for English language learning (SAELL) in Korea. Therefore, this paper explores Korean EFL college students’ acceptance of SAELL.

BACKGROUND

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

Mobile learning (m-learning) is defined as the acquisition of any knowledge by learners through access to learning materials anytime, anywhere with any mobile devices (Geddes, 2004; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2007). This definition emphasizes the dual perspectives of m-learning: mobility of learner and mobility of learning (El-Hussein & Cronje, 2010; Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Sharples, 2013). In other words, m-learning provides an opportunity for learners to access educational activities anywhere and anytime, and participate in more flexible, accessible, and personalized learning activities that enhance their productivity and effectiveness of learning (Sharples & Pea, 2014; Sharples, Taylor, & Vavoula, 2005). The proliferation of mobile device ownership and wireless networks have quickly brought mobile technology into formal and informal language learning.

MALL refers to any type of language learning via mobile technology. Ever since Chinnery (2006) first coined the term MALL, it has played a crucial role in supporting language learning (Ahmed, 2015; Ota, 2015; Steel, 2012). Due to its mobility and accessibility, MALL enables new ways of language learning (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). Learners can actively discuss and share information in a collaborative and networked learning environment across a variety of learning contexts (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018). For instance, social media such as Facebook and Instagram enable learners to communicate with others in an authentic environment and to have opportunities to create content and refine their own knowledge through social interactions in a virtual environment. It connects their social life and the educational environment (Sherif, 2015; Yunus & Salehi, 2012; Winet, 2016). Learning becomes more real and permanent when connected to learners’ lives outside the academic environment (Godwin-Jones, 2011). Thus, learning can increasingly move outside the classroom and becomes more meaningful for learners. As a result, learners can have freedom and autonomy in their learning (Bezircilioğlu, 2016; Naismith, Lonsdale, Vavoula, & Sharples, 2004).

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