

Mobile Devices and the Autonomy in English Language Learning: A Deeper Look at Van Lang University

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: *English-major students, learner autonomy, mobile devices, MALL*

List of abbreviations:
EFL: English as a Foreign Language, VLU: Van Lang University, LA: Learner Autonomy

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is gaining increasing interest in autonomous language learning due to the increased necessity of learner autonomy for EFL students. This study aimed to determine how students used mobile devices to support their English learning and whether they assisted learner autonomy development. The study was conducted with the participation of 33 English majors at Van Lang University (VLU). The data was collected using open-ended questions for structured interviews under the qualitative method with convenience samples. It was found that VLU students made many usages of mobile devices in learning English and proved that they possessed characteristics of autonomous learners. They were not restricted by the learning time and space; they could work independently and effectively and were socially acceptable to collaborate. As a result, it is strongly advised that MALL should be used in the context of English instruction and learning in universities in Vietnam.

Introduction

As a growing nation, Vietnam places a high value on English and the increasing use of mobile multimedia devices and applications coupled with technological advancements has created enormous prospects for English as a foreign language (EFL). In the twenty-first century, technological use in education is crucial, and qualified teachers at the tertiary level play crucial roles in helping EFL learners acquire foreign languages. Along with that, teachers in the twenty-first century are being challenged to incorporate new technologies into their lesson plans (Kurniawati, Maolida, & Anjaniputra, 2018; Suherdi, 2017). Nevertheless, the majority of lecturers at higher education institutions have to teach longer hours in large classes, which may lower the quality of their English teaching methodologies in Vietnam. In addition to that, students of foreign languages have fewer opportunities to engage with their partners outside of the classroom and have fewer opportunities to practice their English in class. Therefore, integrating technology into EFL classes can potentially boost student English proficiency and

the efficacy of the teaching and learning process (Ahmadi & Reza, 2018; Costley, 2014). Furthermore, as Van Hoang (2010) noted, it is uncommon to find a strong language learning environment for English communication at Vietnamese higher institutions. According to the researchers' observations, students enter tertiary levels as exam-driven learners. This is a result of being accustomed to receiving information spoon-fed to them; hence, very little interaction takes place. According to Nezami (2012), this passive knowledge acquisition has made students less engaged in the classroom, less driven, and more educationally isolated. Learning a foreign language in a nation where the majority of people only speak their native tongue decreases the likelihood that the language will be mastered and makes it nearly impossible to have continuous and instant access to people who can help language learners practice, acquire, and communicate in the new language (Kukulska-Hulme, 2016). Learner autonomy and technology, however, are closely related when it comes to language learning, as technology has been shown to be an effective tool for assisting language learners in achieving their academic objectives. Since learners in the 21st century are becoming familiar with the use of technology, bringing technological devices into the classroom setting will meet their needs and boost their motivation, especially when it comes to language learning (Pazilah, Hashim, & Yunus, 2019; Ramadhiyah & Lengkanawati, 2019), and offer them a great opportunity to study independently and collaboratively (Yeh & Lan, 2018). Therefore, EFL learners can enjoy their education by utilizing creative teaching techniques and in control of their language acquisition by engaging in mediated mental tasks (Benson & Voller, 2014).

Learning EFL in developing countries like Vietnam can be challenging and not fully facilitated due to limited exposure to English in daily life and educational institutions (McCarty, Obari, & Sato, 2017). Language learners can encounter different learning modes beyond the traditional classroom setting with the help of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The research gap the authors identified is the lack of studies on how MALL can enhance learner autonomy in Vietnamese EFL contexts, where traditional teaching methods are still prevalent. Therefore, the study aims to fill this gap by exploring the experiences of English majors at Van Lang University using mobile devices to support their language learning and autonomy. This study was conducted on a limited scale within the Vietnamese environment. It made an effort to look into how advanced English language learners with varying degrees of autonomy utilized mobile devices to help them learn the language. We will start by providing a summary of the literature. The definition of learner autonomy, mobile devices, and MALL applications will all be briefly covered. The research project's description, including information on participants, instruments, data collection tools, and analysis, will then be given. The results presentation will come after this. A brief analysis and conclusion will round out the study.

Literature review

Learner autonomy

Technology for autonomous language learning may have long-term effects in an EFL classroom when most students are accustomed to traditional teaching methods (Kamilah, 2017). In the context of teaching English as a foreign language, the subject of learner autonomy has long

been a favorite one. Learner autonomy in language learning refers to the ability of learners to take responsibility for their learning, make decisions about what, how, when, and where they learn, and monitor their progress (Benson, 2018). Learner autonomy is important for language learning because it empowers learners to take control of their learning process and develop the skills and strategies that will enable them to continue learning beyond the classroom (Little, 2019). Hermagustiana and Anggriyani (2020) believe that autonomy is necessary for language acquisition to succeed. As they develop their areas of competence, each student applies their distinct experiences and knowledge to the currently assigned tasks in the target language (Godwin-Jones, 2019). In language learning, a number of factors can affect learner autonomy. They comprise both contextual and individual elements, such as the learning environment, the role of the teacher, and the accessibility of learning materials, as well as motivation, self-efficacy, and learning styles (Li, 2019; Tella, 2020). According to Tella (2020), and students who receive proper supervision from their teacher and are placed in a supportive learning environment are more likely to become independent.

The technology that language teachers use has an effect on the learners' autonomy to learn a language. Alghamdi and Abo-Khalifa's (2019) study investigated how EFL students in Saudi Arabia can benefit from independent vocabulary acquisition through the use of a mobile application. According to the study, the application increased students' motivation, engagement, and autonomy while learning new terminology. Liang and Li (2018) looked into the usage of online collaborative technologies to help Chinese EFL learners learn languages on their own. The study discovered that the tools encouraged students' sense of autonomy and responsibility in their learning as well as their ability to communicate and work together. This study supports the association between the use of technology and the growth of language learners' autonomy. Nevertheless, some proof of a similar relationship had to be shown to discuss the context of Vietnamese EFL learners.

Mobile devices in the classroom context

Researchers have recently been interested in mobile devices, especially tablets and smartphones (Byrne & Diem, 2014). Generally speaking, mobile devices are described as either “hand-held electronic devices that can be comfortably carried around in a pocket or bag, including MP3 players, digital recorders, e-readers, tablets, and smartphones” (Kukulka-Hulme, Norris, & Donohue, 2015, p. 39). Given how commonplace mobile devices are in today's world, students probably anticipate using them when they attend school (Stephens & Pantoja, 2016). This is due to the fact that these new technologies are an important and potentially helpful addition to formal and informal language learning because of the opportunities they may present (e.g., individualized learning, the variety of mobile apps available, easy access to the internet), as well as the fact that learners are using them more frequently. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that the field of learner autonomy began to be impacted by technology in the mid-1990s due to the internet's increasing influence on nearly all facets of our lives, including the teaching of second and foreign languages, as well as the opportunities for online collaboration and communication (Reinders & White, 2016). Language learners who do not have direct access to the target language can take advantage of opportunities presented by modern

technology, which is perhaps one of the most significant advantages of integrating them into language learning. Furthermore, Warni et al. (2018) found that using technology to study English outside of the classroom can have an impact on motivation, metacognition, self-confidence, and social skills.

The educational landscape is changing at an accelerating rate due to mobile devices, which are digital, easily portable, internet-accessible devices like tablets and smartphones that can help with a variety of tasks (West & Vosloo, 2013). These devices enable students to access information, simplify administrative processes, and support learning in novel and creative ways (Alexander, 2014). Since more students have access to and a natural ability to utilize these kinds of devices, it seems sense that more focus has been placed on the appropriate role of these devices in educational settings—both as teaching tools for teachers and as instructional tools for students. Vietnamese students are known to be quiet and reluctant to ask direct questions in class—However, some research has shown that mobile devices impair students' capacity to pay attention in class. For example, in McCoy's (2016) study, 89% of US college students reported that using a mobile device made them less attentive, which led to them missing lessons. As a result, in this scenario, student autonomy is emphasized as a crucial quality to improve language acquisition in the classroom.

MALL in EFL context and learner autonomy

The use of mobile devices for language learning is known as MALL. According to UNESCO (2013), tablets, mobile phones, e-readers, handheld gaming consoles, digital audio players, notebooks, netbooks, and consoles are among the devices used for active electronic training and education. The MALL method of teaching English as a foreign language is seen as a potential technological tool for language instruction in the learning environment because of its accessibility and universality (Isamiddinova, 2019). Consequently, MALL allows EFL students to engage with alternative learning environments outside of the classroom, giving them greater freedom and options regarding language content, delivery methods, learning environments, and scheduling, all of which contribute to increased autonomy (Djoub, 2014; Kukulska-Hulme, 2016).

Thanks to the quick advancement of modern technology and an internet connection, MALL in education is known as an effective language learning and teaching approach in which mobile devices are applied to support and integrate language skills. According to Wankel and Blessinger's study (2013, p. 103), students bring in and utilize their mobile devices in creative ways that can boost motivation since they see them as essential parts of their lives. In accordance with a 2014 study by Phillips, Grosch, and Laosinchai, students utilize their mobile devices for a variety of beneficial learning activities, including taking pictures, presenting, translating, playing Kahoot, Quizlet, Quizziz... and utilizing Google to check their spelling. Moreover, for writing skills, students are eager to use cell phones and other portable devices to access additional material for background knowledge and idea generation (Le, 2021). Additionally, research indicates that students who use technology to help with their grammar learning (Kulçkaya, 2013; Saeedi & Biri, 2016) achieve the best levels of reading competence (Dwaik, 2015) and study vocabulary. All they have to do is open their phones and use the AWL program. They didn't need to take notes because they could quickly pick up a lot of additional

terms (Ngo & Doan, 2023). Also, MALL and technology can assist teachers in transforming the language classroom so that English instruction is more individualized, interactive, and accessible (EF EPI, 2018). Kolbuszewska (2015) also noted that a new learning environment through MALL will undoubtedly arise because of the mobility of mobile devices, which can help students carry materials around on their phones. A growing number of publishers are also able to provide a large portion of their materials online rather than in print. Furthermore, it was confirmed by Viberg and Gronlund (2012) that language learners were highly motivated and found learning with MALL to be more enjoyable. Furthermore, numerous other studies have explicitly stated that the application of MALL for outside-of-class exercises has received far greater attention. As Pereira (2015) claimed, MALL is primarily used in four ways: delivering content instantly through YouTube videos; helping students create their own favorite learning materials; helping them review previous language lessons through games like Kahoot and Booklet; and sharing and cooperating for their in-class language learning activities.

From these above perspectives from MALL and learner autonomy, we can see the traditional model of teaching, where EFL students typically expect teachers to impart L2 knowledge, so that students can memorize the meanings and pass paper tests, is giving way to a model where students actively participate in their own learning through mobile devices (Matchan, 2015). Students will be drawing connections from a variety of knowledge sources more quickly in the future than they have in the past (Van De Bogart, 2014). Encouraging students to use mobile devices independently while they work on digital devices also maximizes instructors' time to give instruction to small groups of students, which is one of the most important and scarce resources in the classroom (EF EPI, 2018).

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey was seeking to answer the following research question:

1. In what way do students at Van Lang University (VLU) use mobile devices in English language learning?
2. How does the use of mobile devices in English language learning affect learner autonomy?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study was implemented at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Van Lang University, 45 Nguyen Khac Nhu Street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It is reported that more than 2000 students are majoring in English at present (2023). Participants cover students majoring in English in their third and final year of college education who experience some phases of their school time during the COVID-19 pandemic. The students were in different minors, including Teaching Methodology, Translation and Interpretation, Business English, and Tourism English.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

33 English majors in their third and final year of tertiary education participated in this study. Two types of samples were used for the sampling procedures. Initially, the authors used purposive non-random sampling to select groups of individuals. Afterward, participants were selected with equal and independent probability for each group. In other words, convenience random sampling was used (Creswell, 2012)

Design of the Study

This study used qualitative procedures to collect data. This is because the authors wanted to address the insights from English majors regarding learner autonomy. According to Creswell (2012), this method is perfect for exploring a situation from different perspectives. Based on the theory of LA and MALL mentioned in the Literature Review, the authors designed a group of nine open-ended questions to interview. The questions were piloted for interpretation and understanding before interviewing.

Data collection & analysis

The authors of the study requested permission from the Faculty of Foreign Languages to interview students during break times directly and via the Microsoft Teams accounts given by the university to all staff and students with the help of Microsoft Excel. Responses from direct interviews were recorded and then transcribed using a computer program called Microsoft Excel (Dörnyei, 2007). The data were then analyzed thematically when responses were coded in themes that supported the research questions. Besides, the authors of the research also interpreted the participants' stories about their experience with mobile devices in learning. For convenience of reference, 33 participants in this study were coded from S1 to S33.

Results/Findings and Discussion

Usage of Mobile Devices in English Learning among English Majors

This section discusses the length of time students spend using mobile devices and how they use them in learning in and out of school. In order to answer the research question 1, the researchers have collected data from the following interview questions:

Q1: How long do you use mobile devices in support of your language learning a day?

Q2: What do you often do with your mobile device in support of language learning?

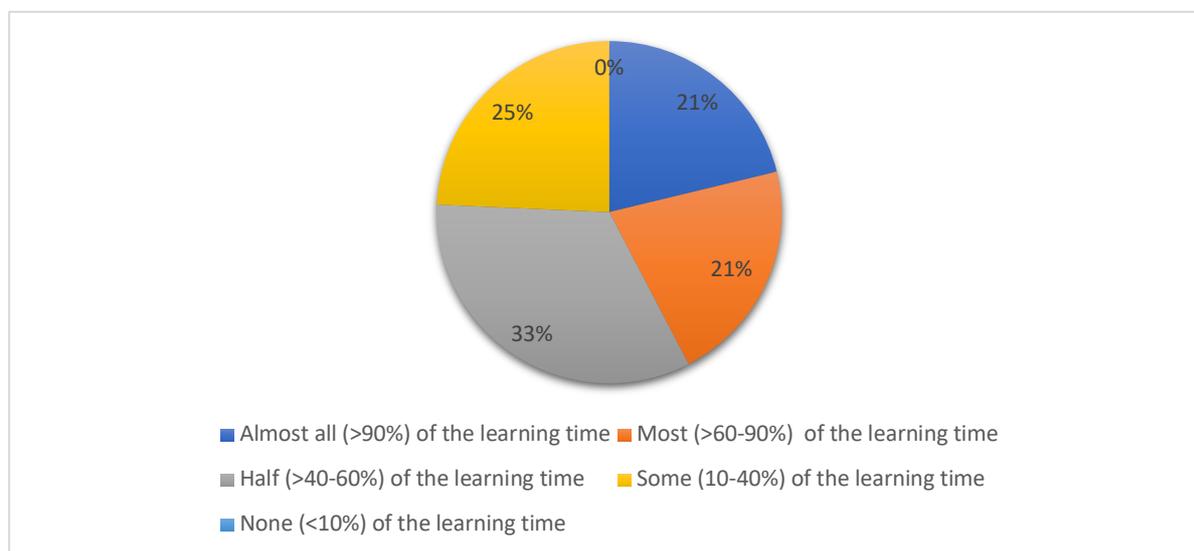
Q3: Do mobile devices enable you to connect with forums, websites, and communities to learn English outside of school? Give examples.

Q4: Do mobile devices give you more chances to interact with your teachers and learning mates? Give examples.

Length of Usage

Figure 1.

The Amount of Time Using Mobile Devices in English Learning



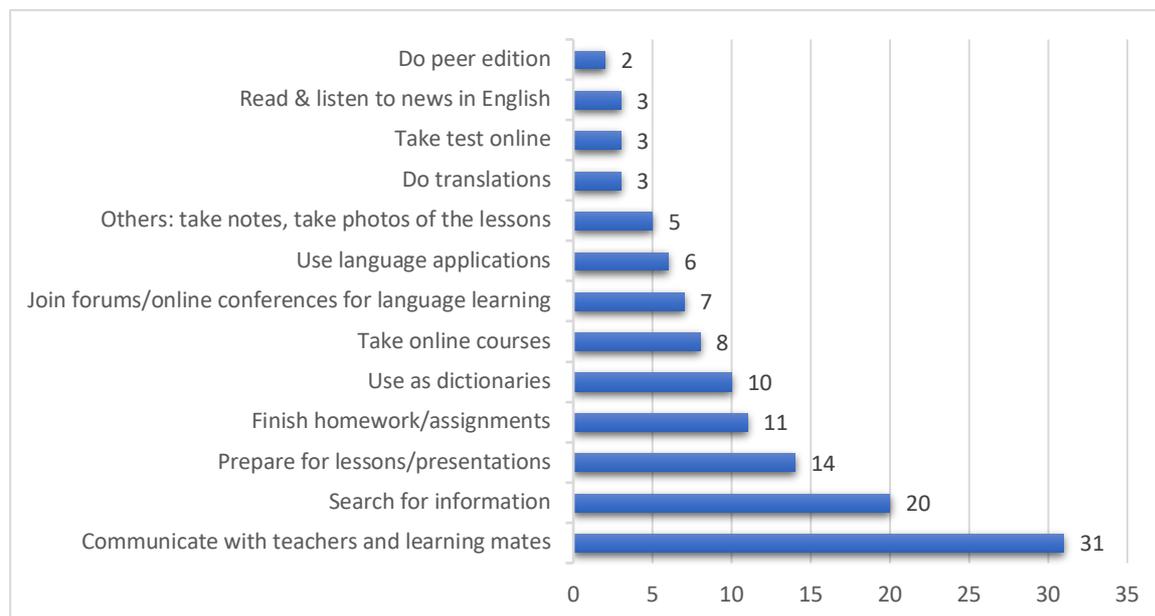
As can be seen in Figure 1, all participants confirmed the use of mobile devices in learning English when being questioned about how much time they spent learning with such a device. In particular, three-thirds of the participants revealed that they spent much of their English learning time with mobile devices. This finding is somehow equivalent to what was found by Junco and Cole-Avent (2008). The research indicated that students devoted an enormous amount of learning time to engaging with mobile devices, and it supported the idea that they are autonomous in learning, according to Little (2006) and Benson (2001).

How VLU Students use mobile devices for learning

Participants revealed various answers when asked about what they often do with mobile devices in support of language learning, as in Figure 2. The top choice given by two-thirds of the answers is about the capability to search for information on the Internet. This result is supported by Elahi, Islam, and Begum (2018), who proved that devices contribute a lot to retrieving information, especially from online libraries. Besides, other scholars highlight that applications and web browsers allow students to find research articles and relevant data in support of their research (Smith & Brown, 2020).

Figure 2.

The Use of Mobile Devices in English Learning



It was also revealed that VLU students made good use of mobile devices to support their learning of English when most participants (25/33) disclosed that they are useful for preparing for school tasks like presentations, lessons, homework, and assignments. One of the 14 questioned students, S28, said that she found it convenient and useful in preparing not only her home assignment but also her group presentation with the laptop. S15, minoring in Business English, contributed that his courses required a lot of presentations and group work which could be easily done with the help of a tablet, a laptop, or even a mobile phone. This is equivalent to a review done by Sophonhiranrak (2021) indicating that learners use mobile devices to submit homework, express opinions, and reflect on learning experiences like assignments and presentations.

Besides, a third of participants emphasized their use of mobile phones in support of extra learning activities. It is obvious from Figure 2 that six of them admitted that they relied on language learning applications such as Elsa, Duolingo, etc. Furthermore, 15 respondents indicated that they joined other learning platforms such as forums, online conferences, and web-based courses. For example, S17 confirmed that he took an online class for IELTS via Google Meets; meanwhile, S12 often accessed online forums to search for answers to a lot of questions regarding English learning. The other ten participants said they found it easier to look up words online or in-app dictionaries. The findings are aligned with Junco and Cole-Avent's (2008) study, which indicates that students use mobile devices for educational purposes, including joining online courses and discussions.

The remaining students, when questioned, revealed astonishing use of mobile devices. For instance, S3 and the other four used mobile phones to take notes and capture the class lessons. Some others confirmed that mobile phone applications could give them good translations in a short time and that they could read news in English or listen to podcast programs in this

language. This finding proves that mobile devices are flexible when they enable students to learn from various educational apps, digital and multimedia resources, and academic databases suitable to their learning objectives, as mentioned in similar research by Kay & Lauricella (2011).

Additionally, to learn more about communication purposes, the researchers raised the following question: "Do mobile devices give you more chances to interact with your teachers and learning mates? Give an example." The finding was impressive when 94% (31/33) of the participants emphasized that mobile devices did help them much in communicating with their teachers and classmates. Half of the students insisted that contacting their teachers and friends was very convenient no matter whenever and wherever it was. The other half proved that the university provided all teachers and students with Microsoft Team accounts, and this gave them the chance to communicate with teachers and friends effectively, even outside of classrooms. S14 said that thanks to the Microsoft Team application on his mobile phone, he could instantly get feedback from the teachers. Meanwhile, S31 and S4 mentioned that their group meetings became easier than ever thanks to online meetings with this application. The situation is similar to that of a university in India where WhatsApp was selected for students of a Bachelor in Education program to use with their mobile devices in support of their learning (Bansal & Joshi, 2014). Bansal & Joshi (2014) found that the social interaction with teachers and peers increased, and students learned more collaboratively. In addition, this finding is aligned with that found from a study in 2010 when Caballé, Xhafa, and Barolli showed that mobile technology offered more chances for learners to collaborate more effectively both inside and outside of the classroom.

In summary, it can be seen that VLU students' use of mobile devices in learning English proved that they possessed characteristics of autonomous learners. They were not restricted by the learning time and space (Benson, 2001) and were able to work with extracurricular activities out of class (Benson, 2011). Besides, students tended to use interactive ways and were more likely to take risks in trying a variety of mobile applications and platforms, and they focused on not only the accuracy but also the appropriateness as defined by Wenden (1998). Student's ability to communicate with both teachers and peers using mobile technology showed that they were able to work independently as well as effectively and socially acceptable in collaboration with others, according to theories given by Crabbe (1999), Hasim and Zakaria (2015) and Wenden (1998), regarding autonomous learners.

How the use of mobile devices in English language learning affect the development of LA

This section aims to find out the answer to research question 2. Therefore, it discusses the use of mobile devices in English learning among students and the contribution to promoting English learners' autonomy with the following interview questions:

Q5: Do mobile devices help you choose a suitable language learning strategy/method? Clarify your answer.

Q6: Do mobile devices contribute to your choice of learning materials? To what extent?

Q7: Do mobile devices help increase or decrease your language learning time? To what extent?

Q8: Do mobile devices contribute to the continuity of English learning when the learning environment suddenly changes? Clarify the answer.

Q9: Do mobile devices prevent and contribute to your self-study ability? To what extent?

Contribution to students' choice of language learning strategy/method

For this insight, interview question 5, "Do mobile devices help you choose a suitable language learning strategy/method? Clarify your answer," is raised. It was astonishing that all participants decided that they preferred using mobile devices to learn English because they were able to adapt various learning strategies or methods. They (90%) agreed that mobile devices allowed them to access different resources for language skills, such as movies, films, music, books, etc. S21 revealed that she often saw videos and short movies with native English speakers, which helped her improve her listening and speaking skills. Participants, including S7, S8, S9, S10, S13, S21, S25, and S31 (25%), shared a similar viewpoint, while others felt happy when improving their reading skills with e-books and online newspapers and magazines. Besides, 18/33 participants emphasized several useful learning platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, etc. S16 indicated that in addition to relaxing purposes, he often watched short videos from social networks like TikTok and Facebook which were interesting and attractive. He learned most of his vocabulary there. Students S2, S13, S26, and S29 introduced many applications for learning English, such as Elsa, Cake, and Duolingo. Another point is that participants S3, S4, and S7 confirmed the use of applications and websites for dictionaries and translation purposes. S3 said that it was extremely easy and free to look up words on famous reliable dictionaries via the Internet with any mobile device; meanwhile, S7 insisted on the effectiveness of Google Translate and other translation applications. S2, S5, S9, and S14 claimed to take online tests, quizzes, and courses. Especially, S5 took an online course with an Australian tutor 2 hours per session via Cambly, twice a week so that she could improve her speaking skills and seemed satisfied with this.

All I need to do is to join our online meeting twice a week, then I could talk to my tutor, and he will help me with everything from pronunciation, and intonation to ideas and how to organize a talk, said S5.

Participants have adapted to multiple new learning strategies in addition to traditional ones and have been satisfied with that.

The findings were supported by Chen and Lin (2019), who emphasized that mobile applications and online learning platforms provide a variety of language experiences and interactive activities that enhance learning acquisition and adaptation. Furthermore, Nurhaeni and Purnawarman (2018) agreed with this point of view. They found that using one type of mobile device, i.e., smartphones, has affected students' learning strategies because they are fast, convenient, and useful in learning English. It was proved that students accessed educational applications for English of their choice, interests, and needs. This is known as the metacognitive strategy. Students could also use cognitive strategies when trying to translate to and from English with a smartphone. All of the findings are equivalent to the definition of autonomous learners provided by Littlewood (1996) as individuals who are able and willing to make decisions in connection with their learning on their own, such as establishing learning objectives, selecting learning resources, and applying learning method criteria.

Contribution to students' choice of learning materials

Q6: Do mobile devices contribute to your choice of learning materials? To what extent?

In learning a language, choosing the most suitable materials is important. VLU students responded very positively to the strengths of mobile devices in selecting learning materials for the English language when 28 over 33 participants confirmed this. This is because they could have access to a diverse range of resources at their fingertips, as mentioned by 14 students. This idea was also supported by S4 when he referred to mobile devices as the most updated and modern ones, assisting him in approaching search engines like Google, Google Scholar, etc. In addition, S5 and S9 revealed that mobile devices offer flexibility and convenience in finding free materials from the internet. S18 indicated that they can explore eBooks, podcasts, and digital libraries for their learning experience anytime and anywhere. Astonishingly, S21 and S27 emphasized that social networks and media like Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube become their limitless sources of language learning when they could find videos of all kinds of teaching and sharing learning English experiences. The finding revealed that VLU students made their own decisions on selecting learning materials as autonomous ones (Littlewood, 1996). This finding could be explained more by Liu and Tong (2018), who assumed that mobile devices allowed students to select learning materials that are well-matched with their needs, interests, and goals so that they could create their own learning pathways. Delil (2017) proved the findings by emphasizing the contribution of mobile devices as educational materials because they could provide students with visual, auditory, and communicating experiences in the learning process. Looi et al. (2019) shared the same idea when indicating that mobile technology could provide limitless access to multimedia materials in support of learning.

Contribution to the increase in students' time of English learning

Q7: Do mobile devices help increase or decrease your language learning time? To what extent?

When asked whether mobile devices help increase or decrease English learning time each day, about 25% of students (8/33) gave negative feedback. According to S12, "surfing mobile phones results in a decrease in learning time because I am distracted by social networks or games." The remaining participants found that they spent more time learning with a mobile phone or laptop. This is due to the fact that many of their learning tasks nowadays can be done with the help of a mobile device. "I use all my time learning English with either my smartphone or laptop. I could not imagine how I could finish all the tasks without them" (S9). "You know what? My teacher asked me to find information about a traditional festival in another culture and prepare a short presentation for the class within a week. Then, I googled the information, searched for photos, and created my PowerPoint slides with the help of my laptop and smartphone. It seems that I use all my learning time with mobile devices" (S21). The findings are equivalent to those of Junco and Cole-Avent (2008) and Kinshuk and Chen (2005). These researchers found that students could study at any time. Similarly, Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) said that mobile devices also offered informal and instinctive learning opportunities because students could access information and resources whenever they wanted. Therefore, it helped increase the quantity of learning time. As a result, it can be seen that they are autonomous (Littlewood, 1996).

Contribution to continuity of English learning when the learning environment suddenly changes

Q8: Do mobile devices contribute to the continuity of English learning when the learning environment suddenly changes? Clarify the answer.

The participants of this research, who were in their third and final years, have experienced much of their tertiary learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, in answering Q8, they emphasized the usefulness of mobile devices in their learning process. Almost all (31/33) agreed that Van Lang University tried its best to keep its learning from interruption by setting up online classrooms and e-learning sites. During the pandemic, they had to rely on computers, tablets, laptops, and smartphones to take all courses via Ms. Team classrooms with teachers and mates and to finish all tasks, tests, and exams through the Moodle system. According to S4, S18, S21, S22, S24, S26, S28, S29, S30, and S33, during the social distancing time when all schools and universities were closed, they were lucky to keep up with their learning schedule when all classes and exams were taken online using completely mobile devices. Similarly, S5 revealed that when he was discovered to be positive with COVID-19, he had to move to an isolation area, and a cell phone was the only way for her to keep up with the lessons via Ms. Team. Besides, respondents indicated that it was convenient to take online courses with the help of a mobile phone anytime and anywhere. According to S9, he improved his language skills with the help of an application. Every day, when he was on a bus to school or work, he took at least one lesson. Furthermore, S13 revealed that some of her teachers applied Flipped Classroom, in which she had to finish tasks given at the course's E-learning site before the session so that she could discuss them with teachers and friends. Of course, she could only do that with a computer or a mobile device.

The findings are allied to those of Dolgunsöz and Yıldırım (2021). The researchers discussed that EFL students preferred using smartphones, tablets, and notebooks for taking online lessons to using computers during the lockdown because of Covid-19. Furthermore, Bacolod (2022) indicated that before the pandemic crisis, mobile devices with internet access seemed to be a basic educational device for learning already, and students, though with limited experience in using it, were said to be familiar with mobile learning. Therefore, during and post-pandemic crisis, teachers and students saw mobile technology as an essential tool for learning. Similarly, Alanezi & AlAzwani (2020) revealed that students in Kuwait positively perceive the use of mobile devices for learning at the tertiary level, assuming that they are prepared to benefit from mobile learning courses. All supported the idea that VLU students were able to continue their studies far beyond the limitations of the learning environment, which is an outstanding characteristic of autonomous learners (Benson, 2011).

Students' perception regarding the contribution to English learner's autonomy

Q9: Do mobile devices prevent and contribute to your self-study ability? To what extent?

This question was raised in support of adding more confirmation on the contribution of mobile technology to English learners' autonomy. Even though there were some ideas saying that mobile devices caused distractions in learning because of a variety of entertaining activities, the result was rather positive when 23/33 participants admitted the positive effects. S1 agreed that the use of mobile devices helped promote her autonomy in learning English. This is because

she could search for information and learning materials and choose a suitable method by herself. S3 and S4 shared the same viewpoint and emphasized that the speed and quality of their learning were improved significantly. In addition, S14 revealed that a smartphone, tablet, or notebook with internet access enabled him to apply learning strategies suitable to his needs, interests, and learning goals.

It can be seen that Hazaea and Alzubi (2018) and Leis, Tohei, and Cooke (2015) shared the same points of view when revealing that participants of their research hold responsibility for selecting reading materials, choosing time to read, and making other decisions. These things implied that learner autonomy was promoted. The finding is also equivalent to teachers' perception that they applied mobile applications, including Quizlet, Grammarly, Padlet, Mentimeter, etc., to enhance English learner autonomy (Melvina, Lengkanawati & Wirza, 2020). Additionally, Wang and Gunaban (2023) supported this finding. They found that with mobile technology, students were allowed to learn with their preference at their convenience at any time and any place and to build up their independent learning habits. The research also proved that mobile-assisted language learning contributes to the development of learner autonomy.

Conclusions

The development of mobile technology has empowered students to overcome a lot of restrictions in connection with time and space in learning English. The research findings proved that thanks to mobile devices, VLU students can find and make their own decisions on learning materials and choose learning strategies and methods that suit their interests, needs, and learning goals. In addition, they also proactively contact teachers and classmates about study-related issues to determine the time and place of study flexibly without any difficulty. From all the above factors, it was proved that mobile devices play a significant role in promoting learner autonomy and creating independent learning habits among VLU students. It can be seen that VLU teachers may use mobile technology to support their teaching inside and outside English classrooms. However, this paper failed to discuss teachers' insights towards the contribution of mobile technology to the enhancement of English learners. Therefore, it is recommended that the drawbacks of mobile technology for learning be thoroughly examined from multiple perspectives.

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