



Language Learning App Using among IPC Students at University of York

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Abstract

Background: Long-distance foreign language learning has gradually started to come into the spotlight due to Covid-19. **Aim/Purpose of the study:** As teachers and students are willing to use language apps, this research considers language apps to facilitate foreign language learning and provides suggestions for students and teachers when selecting language apps. **Methods:** In order to answer the research questions, this study asked 53 international students at York University using a questionnaire in an attempt to find out the students' preferences for language apps. Data obtained by quantitative and qualitative analysis. **Summary of main findings:** In general, students in IPC maintain a positive attitude towards using language apps. Participants have different needs for the features of language apps, but most of them tend to prefer the video function more. The majority of participants were willing to use the language app for more than 10 minutes, but less than an hour. **Significance of results:** The results of this research could provide teachers and students at UK universities with new insight when choosing a foreign language app, and could provide app developers with suggestions for functional modules.

Keywords

Language App, university student, function, foreign language acquisition, York

1. Introduction

From 2019 to 2020, foreign language learning has gradually changed from face-to-face lectures to online classes due to the ravages of the coronavirus (Adedoyin, 2020). Berns (2016) and Chen (2016) have focused on the effectiveness of the language app, finding that language apps can help students promote foreign language acquisition. This study is aimed at IPC students because IPC students who are usually international students and have a high demand for foreign language apps. It is necessary to mention that the language in this report refers to English, because the English course is one of the main courses at IPC. The main purpose of this study was to investigate IPC students' preferences for foreign language applications. The research can help IPC teachers to select foreign language applications, which are more suitable for independent learning outside the classroom, to help students and help language application developers to better select the functional modules of the foreign language applications they will develop. Moreover, the promotion of online English language instruction is beneficial to the overall foreign language learning and study abroad environment, making study abroad and teaching appropriate. The study will survey 53 students to understand their perspectives on different foreign language apps.

Research question:

RQ1. How do students at the IPC use mobile apps to enhance their language learning? This is the main research question.

RQ2. Which foreign language app is the main app for IPC students to learn a foreign language?

RQ3. What functions of the Foreign Language app will increase the frequency of usage by IPC students?

2. Literature Review

Since language apps have been used for foreign language learning, many studies have focused on foreign language apps and motivation. These studies have maintained a positive attitude toward language apps. Berns (2016), Chen (2016), Pruta (2021) and Steel (2012) emphasized the positive aspects of language app. Althinty (2016), Bergmann (2018), Khajavy (2017), Pruta (2021), and Rosell (2018) put the focus on intrinsic motivation for learning a language. This report chooses the same topic as the above-mentioned study, language app, which is the reason for setting out RQ1.

Previous studies also found that foreign language learning can be made more efficient using interactive module. For example, Althinty (2016), Bergmann (2018), and Khajavy (2017) stated that when learning a foreign language, different students have different habitual preferences, and some students prefer an interactive method to learn vocabulary. Adding an interactive module in app can increase enthusiasm and word memorization rates. Chen (2016) and Rosell (2018) found that functional sections in APPs, which can directly influence learners' motivation, such as games, with highly interactive functionality, have a more significant impact on motivation for learning.

The study was relatively comprehensive in its selection of the sample, covering from elementary school students to college students and even adults. Althinty (2016), Bergmann (2018), and Khajavy (2017) selected elementary and middle school students. Berns (2016), Steel (2012), Rosell (2018) and Chen (2016) selected college students as their sample. The main methods used in these studies were observation, experimental methodology, questionnaires, and Meta-Analyses, and some of the studies used triangulation method. Due to the limitations of research funding and research time, this report was conducted using a questionnaire, and the sample selected was students from multiple countries around the world, which was able to provide supplement to the previous research sample.

The findings of previous research were generally similar, with Althinty (2016), Bergmann (2018), Khajavy (2017), Pruta (2021), and Rosell (2018) noting that foreign language apps have positive implications for student learning of foreign languages. But there were differences in the details, with Althinty (2016) and Rosell (2018) suggesting that different language skills affect learners' motivation. For example, listening and reading are more suitable for college students, while elementary school students prefer the interactive format to learn words. Further, Berns (2016), Chen (2016) and Rosell (2018) suggested that different features of language apps directly affect learners' efficiency, and Berns (2016) indicated that game features had a more obvious effect on learners' enthusiasm. Bergmann (2018) and Pruta (2021) suggest that the positive effect of a foreign language app on language learning is related to its functions, such as video and pronunciation.

However, while language apps have different features, only a few of the current studies have focused on student preferences. The findings can partially compensate for the research on APP functionality. Better advice could be given to IPC teachers and language developers.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data, because qualitative data can elaborate on people's tendency to use Apps in foreign language learning, while quantitative data collected by Likert question and ranking question can specify what specific features are needed in the research process.

Questionnaires were chosen as the main research method for this report because they are convenient to get direct answers and can collect more data in a short time. The questionnaire allows for a simple structure and facilitates effective comparison of data. Among them, the report conducted mean-sum analysis for ranking problems; Chi-square calculation for Likert questions (Klooster et al., 2008); and single-item calculation for matrix questions. These questions can help convert subjective opinions into numerical data for statistical analysis. Inferential statistics can be used to obtain the tendency of people in different age groups to use apps, and it can help to analyse how effective language apps actually are in teaching, rather than just downloading them onto a mobile phone without using them.

The questionnaire has collected 53 responses. IPC students are essentially international students, and IPC is an example of the link between UK higher education and overseas education (Manning, 2018). The students could be a representative sample of international students in the UK. The questionnaire was promoted to students through IPC-Support and students can get a link to via social media.

The questionnaires were anonymous, and the data were destroyed after the experiment was completed. Participants were also informed of the purpose of the experiment. In addition, York's IT department encrypts the data to further enhance data security.

4. Results

The preferences of 53 students at the University of York IPC for language apps (mainly English learning apps) were studied through 14 questions. Four of the participants answered only some of the questions and these four samples will be excluded here.

The Spearman rank function was calculated for the report on the attitudes of students going abroad to foreign language learning. Results of the Spearman correlation indicated that there was a moderate, positive correlation between response to Q4 and response to Q5, ($r_{s(49)} = 0.4, p < 0.05$). Further, the perspective of using apps when learning a foreign language can be seen in Figure 1.

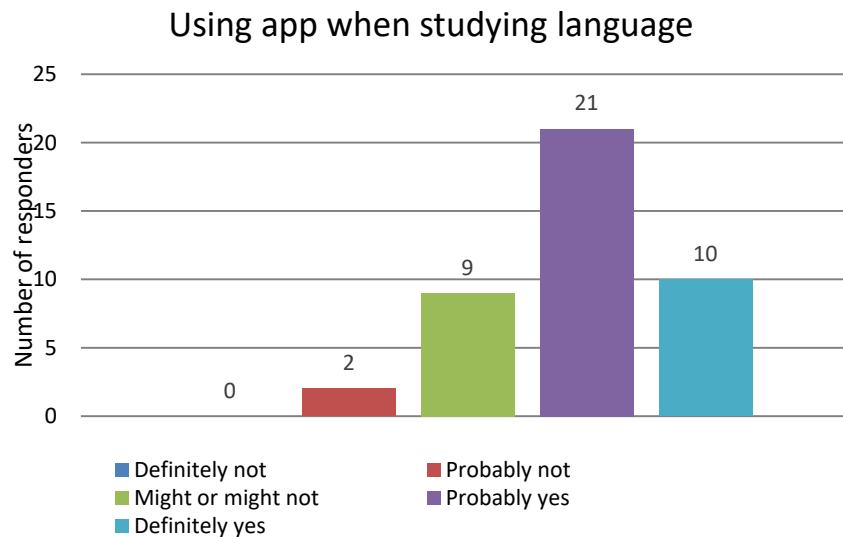


Figure 1. Using app when studying language.

In Figure 1, 21 respondents indicated that they would probably use the app. 10 respondents were definitely using the app. Only 2 people may not use it. Almost no one chooses not to use an app, so app usage is as high as 73% in the questionnaire.

The perception of the usage time on apps was assessed using Q10 in questionnaire. The chart below summarizes the specifics situation.

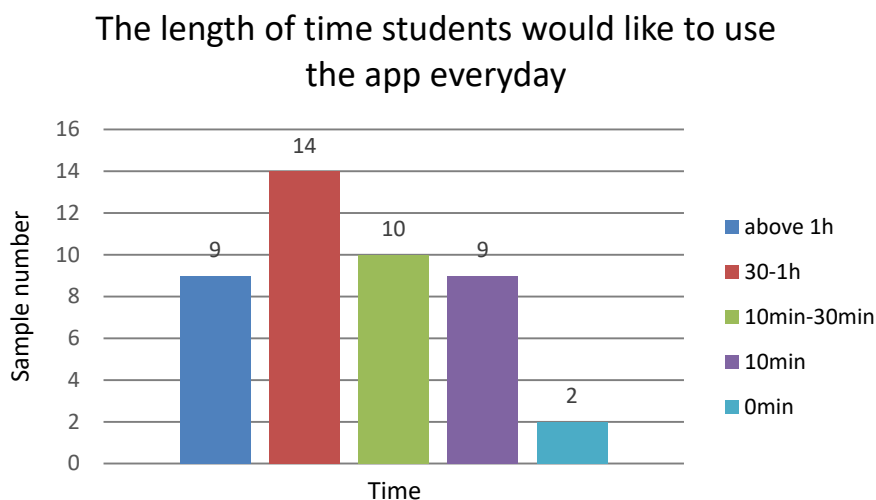


Figure 2. The length of time students would like to use the app every day.

Figure 2 shows that the majority of participants used the app for foreign language learning. There were 14 students who were willing to use the app from 30min to 1h. The number of students who did not apply the app and those who used the app for less than 10min was the same, both were 9. The number of students who used the app from 10min to 30min was 10. Interestingly, 2 students wanted to use the app for longer than 1 hour.

Overall, the majority of participants use the language app for between 30min and 1h. It is also obvious that the majority of participants use apps for foreign language learning. Next, the study further discovered differences in app functionality.

The favourite learning method in app

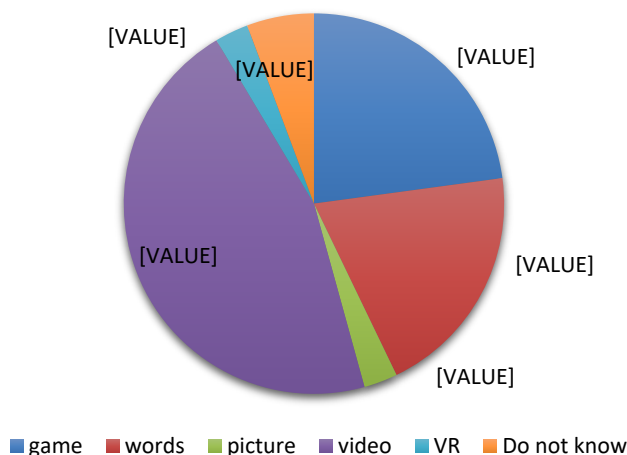


Figure 3. The favourite function in app.

As can be seen in Figure 3, the most popular app feature for most students was video, with a total of 46%. The smallest accounts for 3%, respectively, are the VR function and the picture function. And the percentage of game features was similar to that of vocabulary features. Overall, students' enjoyment of video in apps was the highest. This figure is calculated by averaging the rank questions. To examine the influence of age, the questionnaire was developed with a question on age Q2. A categorisation of ages leads to the figure below.

Difference between 25 years old below and above

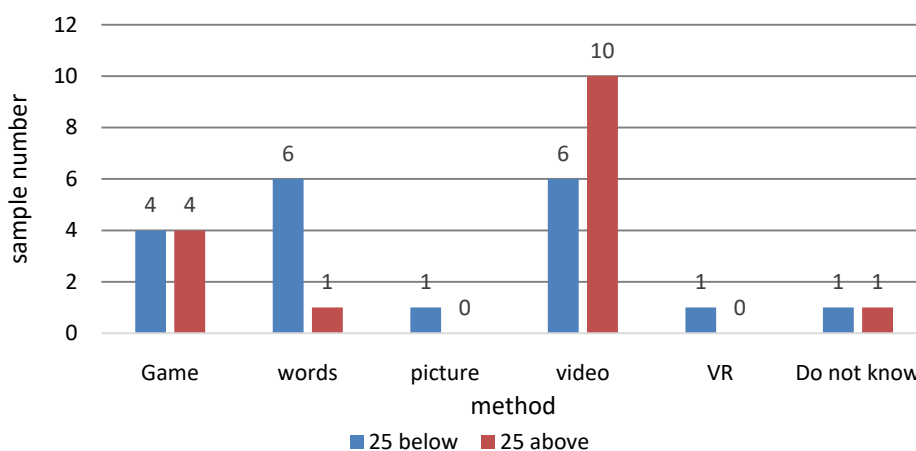


Figure 4. Difference between 25 years old below and above.

Figure 4 shows Sixteen students responded that their favourite app function was video. 2 students chose don't know. The rest of the students chose other different functions. When it came to the choice of game functions, the number of students older and younger than 25 was the same. In addition, the views on the word function and the video function were different. Students over the age of 25 preferred the video function, while those under the age of 25 preferred the word function. Finally, it is worth noting that the number of students who prefer the video function is significantly higher.

To further examine age on app usage, Duolingo's Likert table and age groups were next compared. To further examine age on app usage, the study used Duolingo as a typical app for the calculation analysis.

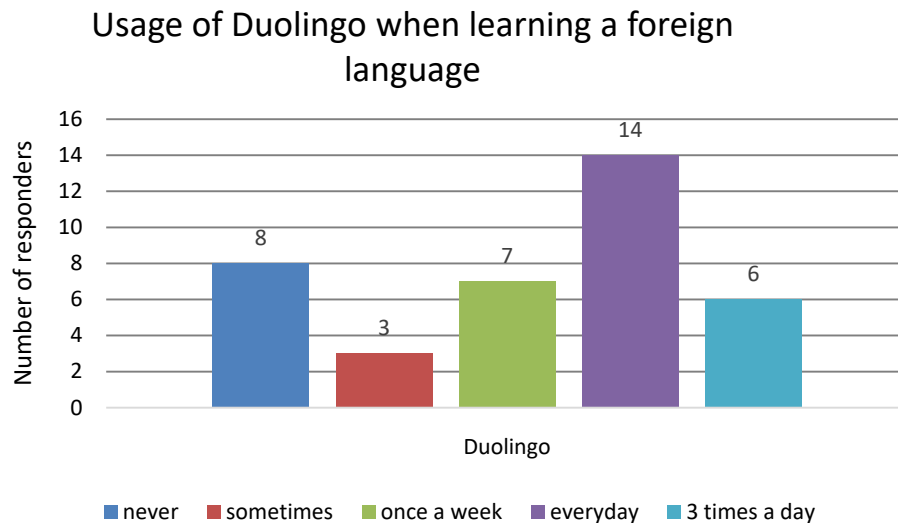


Figure 5. Usage of Duolingo when learning a foreign language.

Fourteen of the participants used Duolingo on a daily basis, while three of them using it occasionally. It is worth noting that about the same number of people use Duolingo three times a day as use it once a week. It is noticeable that the number of people using Duolingo three times a day is similar to the number using it once a week. The IPC Students' perspectives on apps were assessed through Q9 of the questionnaire. This question asked not only about the usage of Duolingo, but also about other apps such as Baicizhan, BBC learning English, Busuu. Since most students have chosen not to use these apps except Duolingo, the Duolingo was the most used app by students at the moment.

In Chi-square test, there is no significant association between “Age above 25 and below 25” and “Duolingo”, $X^2(2, 49) = 7.3219, p=0.91$. The same calculation was repeated for the rest of the app and the answers were similar.

5. Discussion

Using a questionnaire, this research surveyed 49 students in the IPC at York University in an attempt to find out students' preferences for foreign language apps and to analyze which foreign language apps are suitable for students. The results showed that 46% of the respondents learn foreign languages for educational purposes. As can be seen in figure 1, 16.46% of the students prefer apps with video function for the function of the app; students want to use the app for 10min-1h daily.

The results of the research are in agreement with Althinty (2016), Bergmann (2018), Khajavy (2017), Pruta (2021) and Rosell (2018), regarding language apps could promote foreign language acquisition. The respondent was not very interested in the function of showing picture. One possible factor is that students are given daily language classes that provide training in making power point.

The significant finding of this research is that IPC students are all international students with a strong demand for foreign language acquisition, and the most popular app used by the students is Duolingo. This finding is similar with the findings of Chen (2016). It could be explained that Duolingo, which currently has multiple functions of study, test and practice, is an app that matches the demand for students who need to study abroad. Rosell (2018) suggested that Busuu's examination function is one of the reasons why students use it, which is consistent with Duolingo's function.

It is worth mentioning that the preferred language app features are video and words. Although students use duolingo,

they would prefer an app with video capabilities. This finding is in parallel with Alhinty (2016), Bergmann (2018), Putra, (2021), Rosell (2018), Steel (2012) that the functionality of the app affects motivation. This answered RQ1, an app to assist in learning English.

While the specific features differ slightly from the above studies, which are not game (Rosell, 2018), reading (Alhinty, 2016), and interaction (Pruta, 2021). Video is an applicable function that combines interaction, reading, and gaming experiences. Based on this functionality, the recommended App for international students at IPC is Youtube. Bilibili is recommended as an English learning app for Chinese students in specific regions. This actually answers RQ2, RQ3.

This study has limitations in sample selection; although IPC students are international students, they basically use English as a foreign language and tests in other foreign languages could not be administered. The research time is not enough to make a returned interview. and language apps have regional area restrictions when downloading.

The findings of the inferential statistics show that IPC students have a strong demand for foreign language acquisition and a high rate of APP usage. This point could make the study of practical application, which is to give IPC tutors the appropriate app to assist with language courses. This also gives language developers advice on developing programs. The impact of different functions of language apps will need to be addressed in future research. Apps with games, videos, and word functions could be used to study motivation and learning outcomes of foreign language learning for a longer period of time and to make a return survey.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this report suggest the perspectives of IPC students at University of York on language apps. This study points out that most students have positive attitudes towards using language apps, and that different students have their own preferences regarding the functionality of apps. Overall, the sample selected for this report could expand the sample in previous studies. The method of questionnaire implemented makes a contribution to knowledge on the impact of language app (Zou, 2015; Zou, 2018).

However, there are some shortcomings in the study. The first is that there was not enough time for the study to interview participants in return. Secondly, because there were no interviews, the questionnaire study failed to obtain the effect of the language app's features on learning outcomes.

Although the study has limitations, the results provide information about the specific needs of university students for language apps. The results of the study show that using apps that match student preferences can enhance foreign language learning. Overall, this means that language apps can indeed be used in the actual teaching of IPC.

What needs to be considered for future studies is to extend the duration of the study as long as possible. Furthermore, when selecting the sample, larger sample parameters could be selected. If there is enough time, interviews with the sample students can be increased. This study will provide suggestions for the direction of language app updates.

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