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Research Article

Interactive Language Learning Apps: Enhancing student motivation and participation in EFL activities at the University

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Abstract

This article investigates if there are any changes in student motivation and participation in class when using interactive language learning apps to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) at the university level in Tirana, Albania. These applications which provide dynamic and engaging platforms, have become widespread due to the integration of technology in educational settings.

The study collected data through a questionnaire that was distributed to 30 university professors who teach English as a foreign language. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, with the last one being an open-ended question designed to gather more detailed answers regarding the professors' experience with language apps.

The findings indicate that interactive language learning apps help with students' motivation and encourage active participation, leading to better educational outcomes. Students who work with these apps demonstrate more willingness to participate in classroom activities. The article concludes by offering recommendations for further research in this area.

Keywords: interactive language learning apps, English as a foreign language, educational technology, EFL student motivation, student participation, University of Tirana.

1. Introduction

Language acquisition was a thing of textbooks, classroom lectures and language labs at times. However, digital technology has caused a shift in this trend. Technology integration has revolutionized education significantly. Today, technology is not just a tool but an inevitable need in our digital era. In environments such as English language class; it is important to integrate, tools or websites geared towards teaching and learning specifically apps into the system since it enhances interactivity and flexibility in terms of types of information that students can obtain from the professors. It is very crucial for educators to know how to get around and use educational technologies.

Educational technologies have the power to revolutionize the teaching and learning experience. They can assist educators in planning engaging and creative lessons that cater to diverse learning styles (Stasa and Dedej, 2023).

Students must also develop 21st-century such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy. Educational technologies can captivate students, spark their curiosity, and promote critical thinking, making learning more relevant and valuable for students.

Language learning apps like Duolingo, Quizlet, Memrise and so on have become immensely popular, offering students the convenience of learning anytime and anywhere. According to recent statistics, millions of users worldwide actively engage with these apps daily, illustrating their widespread appeal and effectiveness.

Technological devices and networks have transformed our classrooms. Significant investments in technology have been made across various faculties at the University of Tirana. Nowadays, at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, every classroom or laboratory is equipped with interactive whiteboards, computers, projectors and internet connection accessible to students, professors and staff. Therefore, this infrastructure has facilitated the incorporation of interactive language learning apps into teaching sessions, enhancing language instruction and engagement (Bara and Bara, 2023).

Learning a foreign language is a process and students always need motivation and encouragement during this period. In this case, learning a foreign language is a challenging process and students always need motivation and encouragement during this period (Genc Ilter, 2009). It also requires regular, repeated practice, and apps offer a convenient and affordable way for learners to learn it.

As Loewen (2020) stated: "If you teach people explicitly to memorize vocabulary and grammar rules, most people will learn that. But it's much harder to take that knowledge and translate it into the ability to use language — to speak it, understand what you're hearing, and respond appropriately."

It is crucial for educators to understand the basic causes of language acquisition so that they can motivate their students appropriately for them to achieve better results. The linguists recognize two types of motivation. There are some students who want to learn a language and this is because of their internal urge, which is known as intrinsic motivation. They may genuinely have interest in the language or they simply enjoy learning itself. Personal development might be another reason for it too. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation originates from other sources outside the individual. Learning a language can be done to ensure future career prospects, certificates or tourism. The level of motivation of people to learn differs naturally, just as their desire does, and at times it appears to vary from one class to another.

2. The benefits and drawbacks of using technology (language learning apps) in class

There has been much controversy and advances in the discussion of the benefits that

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the use of technology and online resources bring to foreign language teaching and learning (Guaqueta et al., 2018).

The apps are very convenient for both professors and students as they can access them anytime, anywhere on their smartphone, tablet or computer. Such platforms offer engaging lessons; hence it is possible to create quizzes as well as exercises without much difficulty due to the embedded AI mechanisms in them. In addition, game-like elements used in these systems make learning process fun and enjoyable.

The issue of cost has also been a notable factor here. In fact, many language apps offer free versions or cheap subscriptions thereby making them accessible to everyone. Immediate feedback is another positive feature. Apps instantly correct mistakes, and professors can use this feature to prevent those errors from becoming ingrained.

According to Kromidha and Toro (2015) from a didactic perspective, technology makes learning more personal, students follow their pace of learnings according to their cognitive style. The student is more motivated, more active and freer. Thus, it helps develop students' autonomy and motivation.

Nevertheless, there are still many challenges to face when it comes to using these tools in the classroom. The effectiveness of the apps varies significantly. Educators must study them, evaluate app content, and alignment with learning objectives before deciding to use them in class. Learning process, on the other hand, might be affected by unreliable internet connectivity which could be a problem for some schools, affecting both students and professors.

Furthermore, there is the issue of a lack of control. Conversely, language apps miss out on traditional teaching methods' authority over pacing and classroom dynamics (Gjuzi-Bushi and Kristo, 2023). The problem about keeping up a consistent learning schedule throughout an app is that educators have little say over pacing.

3. Research Focus

This research aims to provide an overview of the use of interactive language learning apps in teaching English as a foreign language. It investigates whether students' language skills improve through app usage and assesses the effectiveness of these apps in enhancing student motivation and participation in class activities. This will contribute to understanding how technology shapes language learning and teaching practices in EFL contexts.

4. Methodology

The data for this article was gathered through a questionnaire. A questionnaire is the basic method of quantitative research. It is one of the earliest methods of studying the phenomena of social life. The questionnaire was created in Google Forms and distributed online to professors affiliated with the Department of English at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tirana. Some of these professors teach English full-time or part-time at the faculty, while others teach English part-time at

the faculty of Economics and Social Sciences. The professors provided insights into the effectiveness of integrating apps into teaching strategies. They shared the benefits of these apps to students' motivation and enthusiasm, as well as the challenges they face.

The questionnaire was composed of 14 questions. 13 were close-ended questions and the last was open-ended, allowing the professors to share any additional comments related to the use of interactive learning apps in their EFL courses. It was filled out by 30 professors.

This questionnaire aimed to identify whether the learning apps positively impact students' motivation to participate in class discussions.

5. Questionnaire results and analysis

The majority of professors (46.7 %) have 3 to 5 years' experience of teaching EFL in the university. 3.3 % have 6 to 10 years' experience and the rest of the professors have more than 10 years or up to 2 years' experience teaching English as a foreign language.
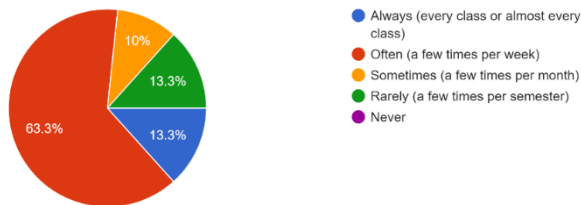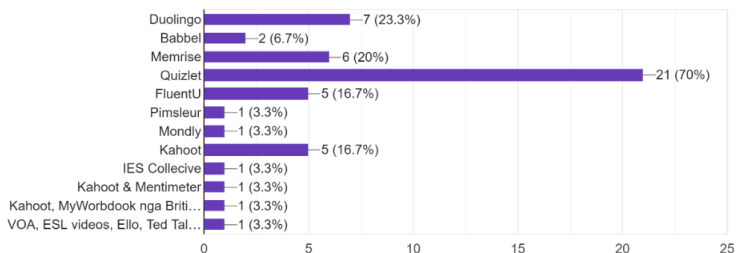

Figure 1: How often do you incorporate interactive language learning apps into your EFL curriculum?
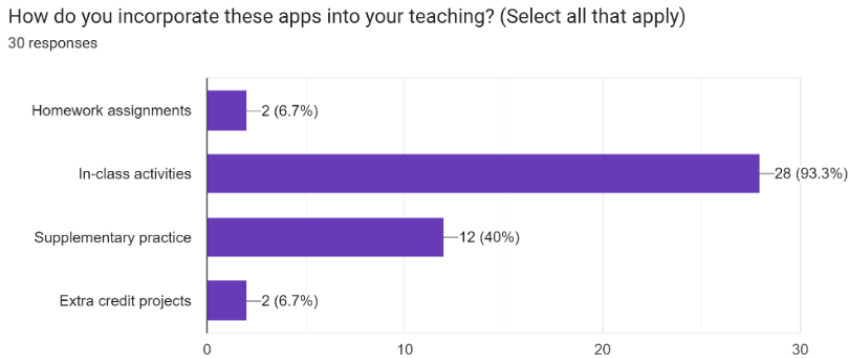
63.3% of the professors use the apps a few times per week while only 10% use them a few times per month. This high frequency of use indicates that language apps are a significant tool in the process of teaching English as a foreign language.

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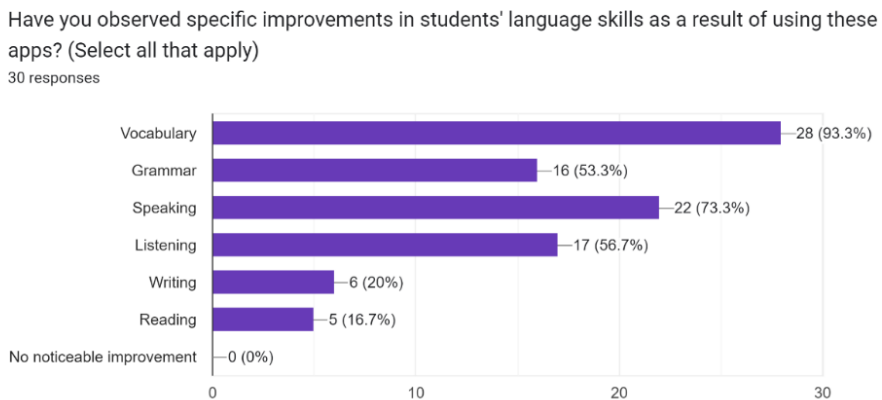Law and Social Sciences*

Vol. 10 No. 2
July, 2024

Figure 2: Which interactive language learning apps have you used in your EFL courses?

The app that was most frequently selected by professors is Quizlet (70%). Other apps such as Duolingo (23.3%), Memrise (20%) and Kahoot (16.7%) were also commonly used, though to a lesser extent. High usage of Quizlet indicates a preference for apps that facilitate vocabulary learning and practice. The varying level of usage reflects differences in app functionalities.

How do you incorporate these apps into your teaching? (Select all that apply)
30 responses

- Homework assignments — 2 (6.7%)
- In-class activities — 28 (93.3%)
- Supplementary practice — 12 (40%)
- Extra credit projects — 2 (6.7%)

Figure 3: How do you incorporate these apps into your teaching?

The most common methods include using the apps for in-class activities (93.3%) and supplementary practice (40%). Only 6.7% of the professors employ these apps for extra credit projects or assign them for homework. This shows that professors can integrate these apps into different aspect of teaching, in a variety of instructional contexts.

Have you observed specific improvements in students' language skills as a result of using these apps? (Select all that apply)
30 responses

- Vocabulary — 28 (93.3%)
- Grammar — 16 (53.3%)
- Speaking — 22 (73.3%)
- Listening — 17 (56.7%)
- Writing — 6 (20%)
- Reading — 5 (16.7%)
- No noticeable improvement — 0 (0%)

Figure 4: Have you observed specific improvements in students' language skills as a result of using these apps?
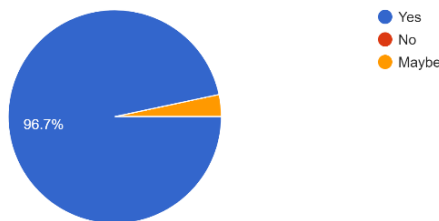
A significant number of professors (93.3% observed improvement in students' vocabulary. 73.3% noticed better speaking abilities. Listening skills (56.7%) showed notable improvement and 53.3% reported enhancement in grammar skills. Improvement in writing (20%) and reading (16.7%) skills were seen but to a lesser extent.
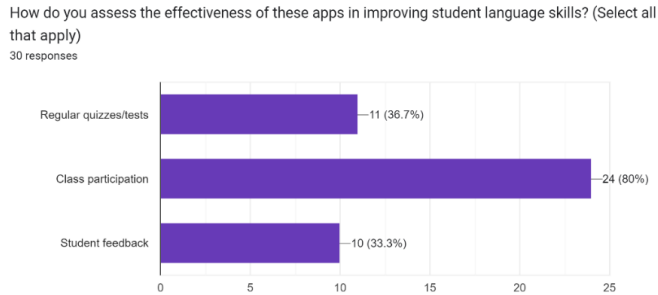
Figure 5: How do you assess the effectiveness of these apps in improving student language skills?

The most common method is through class participation, with 80% of the professors using this method. 36.7% of the professors rely on regular quizzes or tests to assess the effectiveness of the apps they use in class and 33.3% evaluate the impact of apps based on students' feedback. This data shows that direct observation is the most preferred way of evaluating the effectiveness of language apps. However traditional methods such as quizzes and tests also play a significant role.
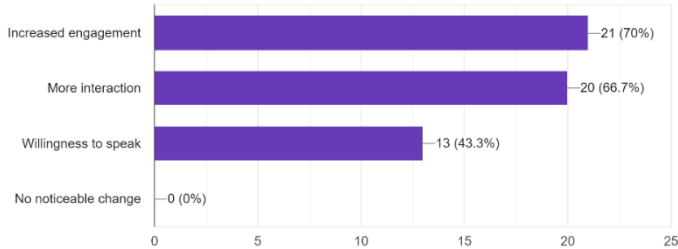

Figure 6: Have you noticed any changes in student motivation since introducing these apps?

A significant majority of professors (96.7%) observed changes in student motivation.

Only 3.3% were unsure of the changes.

In what ways have these apps influenced student participation in classroom activities? (Select all that apply)

30 responses

Increased engagement	21 (70%)
More interaction	20 (66.7%)
Willingness to speak	13 (43.3%)
No noticeable change	0 (0%)

Figure 7: In what ways have these apps influenced student participation in classroom activities?

The most common influence observed is increased engagement, reported by 70% of the professors. 66.7% noted more frequent interaction and 43.3% reported that students showed more willingness to speak during class discussions.

In your observation, how do these apps affect students' enthusiasm for participating in class activities?

30 responses

- Greatly increase
- Somewhat increase
- No effect
- Somewhat decrease
- Greatly decrease

33.3%

66.7%
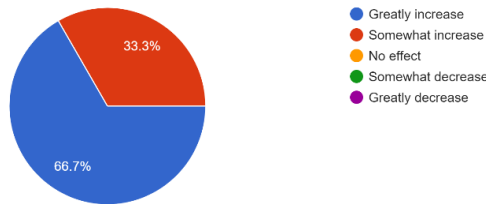
Figure 8: In your observation, how do these apps affect students' enthusiasm for participating in class activities?

A majority of professors (66.7%) observed a great increase in students' enthusiasm for class activities. 33.3% of professors reported a somewhat increase in students' enthusiasm. The increased enthusiasm stems from the interactive and engaging nature of these apps.

How do you rate the impact of interactive language learning apps on student motivation?
30 responses

Positive · **Neutral** · **Negative**
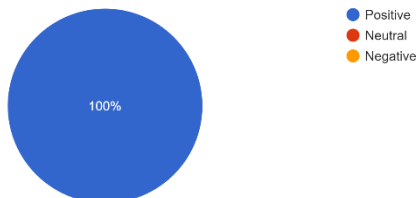
Figure 9: How do you rate the impact of interactive language learning apps on student motivation?

All the professors (100%) reported that the interactive apps have a positive impact on the student motivation in class.

How do you rate the effectiveness of these apps in encouraging students to participate in EFL activities?
30 responses

Very effective · **Effective** · **Neutral** · **Ineffective** · **Very ineffective**
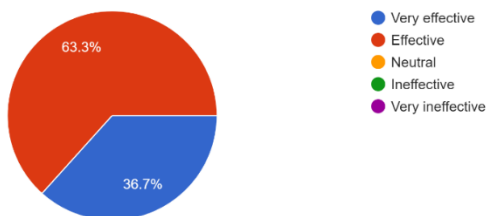
Figure 10: How do you rate the effectiveness of these apps in encouraging students to participate in EFL activities?

A majority of professors (63.3%) rated the apps as effective in encouraging students to participate in EFL activities in class. 36.7% rated the apps as very effective.

Overall, how satisfied are you with the use of interactive language learning apps in your EFL teaching?
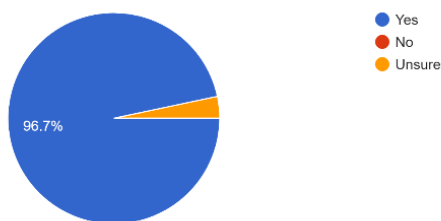30 responses

Very satisfied · **Satisfied** · **Neutral** · **Dissatisfied** · **Very dissatisfied**
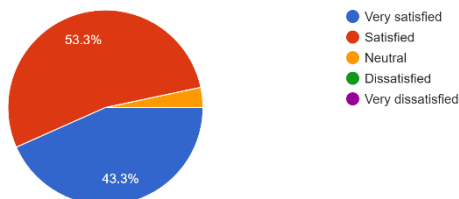
Figure 11: Overall, how satisfied are you with the use of interactive language learning

apps in your EFL teaching?

More than half of the professors (53.3%) reported being satisfied. 43.3% of professors were very satisfied. Only 3.3% were neutral. The positive satisfaction indicates that the apps are well-received and considered beneficial for the learning process.

Figure 12: Would you recommend the use of interactive language learning apps to other EFL educators?

29 out of 30 professors (96.7%) expressed a strong likelihood of recommending the use of interactive language learning apps to other EFL educators. 1 professor felt neutral about recommending the apps. This strong endorsement reflects a positive experience with the apps.

In response to the last question of the questionnaire "Please provide any additional comments or observations regarding the use of interactive language learning apps in your EFL courses.", the professors provided the following answers:

- These apps help me to motivate my students. These interactive apps are a great solution to make my lessons fun and enjoyable for my students. They are very effective and I recommend all the teachers to experiment and find the best apps for their students.
- I have been using Memrise for a while and it helped me learning a new language. This is why I use it with my students
- It makes a lot easier the planning process and even the assessment.
- So far it has been a great help not only for me as a teacher but also for the students.
- Technology can be helpful and have some immediate effectiveness, but I am not sure about its long-term effectiveness in learning.
- It is a very productive experience.
- Be sure to take into account students' interests and their English level as well.
- Students are interested.
- Since I started using apps such as Kahoot and others I've seen very positive results. My students are more eager to respond to questions and interact with others. They enjoy the tasks more.

- There are certain questions where students mostly answer briefly through key words, but later we can elaborate on them and this gives them the chance to interact with their peers while providing arguments for their answers.
- It's important to choose the apps based on the language level of the students. I have been using apps such TedTalk, VOA learning, and so on and it has helped my students with their listening and speaking skills a lot.
- I use Ello to help my students with their listening skills. It is great because the speakers have different accents. Also, there are some exercises to help with keeping the students active.
- One great benefit of using these apps is that it saves us a lot of time when planning lessons.
- These apps help me to motivate my students. These interactive apps are a great solution to make my lessons fun and enjoyable for my students. They are very effective and I recommend all the teachers to experiment and find the best apps for their students.
- I mainly use these apps to do quizzes with my students. They look forward to them.
- My students' participation has greatly increased since I started incorporating technology into my teaching.
- Great tools to help me motivate the students
- They are effective when used not too often.
- My students look forward to using these apps. They are entertaining and educational at the same time.
- These apps are effective because of elements such as quizzes and multimedia but we have to be careful not to overuse them so as not to reduce overall productivity.

6. Conclusions and further recommendations

The results above show a positive trend towards the integration of digital tools in language education. The frequent use of interactive learning apps by a majority of professors who took part in the questionnaire indicates their effectiveness and the professors' comfort with digital apps.

The data shows a growing trend toward integrating technology in for in class activities and supplementary practice, enhancing the learning experience by making it more engaging and efficient. On the other hand, the method of assigning apps as homework is not popular in Albanian context, although this offers flexibility to both students and teachers.

The data suggests that language apps are particularly effective in enhancing receptive skills such as vocabulary and listening. While all areas of language skills showed progress, productive skills like writing showed less improvement, indicating the need to experiment with apps that focus mainly on improving students' writing and reading skills. It is essential to focus on the part of assessing the effectiveness of these interactive language apps in improving the above-mentioned skills. The reliance on observation as a measure, noting how actively students engage with app-related activities indicates the importance of qualitative measures that capture student

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satisfaction and engagement. However, the preference for objective and measurable assessment, although to a lesser extent shows that professors value a comprehensive assessment that considers both performance metrics and student experiences.

To answer the main research question, the increase in student motivation observed by the majority of professors highlights the effectiveness of language apps in creating a more engaging and stimulating learning environment. The findings from the questionnaire suggest that incorporating these apps into EFL instruction can lead to a livelier and more enthusiastic classroom environment, thus supporting better learning outcomes.

Overall, the findings suggest that while interactive language apps are highly recommended by most as they help foster student participation in EFL activities, careful consideration of individual needs and effective implementation strategies is crucial. Furthermore, to maximize the benefits of these apps it is important to consider the students' language level and interests when planning to integrate the apps into the curriculum. The finding from the last question of the questionnaire asking the professors to provide any additional comments or observations regarding the use of interactive language learning apps in their EFL courses indicates that excessive reliance on these apps might have undesirable outcomes, such as demotivation and classroom boredom.

While the results of this study are promising, it is important to note that a larger and more diverse sample of professors might help to gain a more comprehensive understanding of interactive language learning apps in Albanian universities. Moreover, incorporating qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus groups with both professors and students could offer a better detailed perspective on the advantages and challenges of using these apps in EFL education.

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