Students' Prespectives of HelloTalk Application:
A Case Study

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Abstract

This study enlivens the discussions under the topic of MALL. Specifically, this focused on a mobile-based application called HelloTalk; a language learning application that promises language learning and acquisition by communicating to native speakers and other language learning enthusiasts. This study aimed to investigate students' perspectives on the use of HelloTalk, a mobile learning application that had not been widely used at the time being. In this case study, there were 41 English study program students, who were stuying in the third year of college, participating. The students were introduced to and given the opportunity to use the application in natural settings before responding the questionnaire from which the data were collected. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants to answer two main problems: 1) their knowledge of HelloTalk prior to the study and 2) their attitude towards the application. The data shows that most of the students, covering around two third of the total participants, did not know the, neither used, the application. Regarding students' attitude towards HelloTalk, the data collected from the questionnaire indicates that 36 out of 41 showed positive and very positive attitude towards the application.

Keywords: MALL, HelloTalk, Language Learning Applications

Introduction

Perpetual development of information and technology undoubtedly influences almost every aspect of life. Unsurprisingly, English language teaching and learning, with no exception, is an aspect affected by the development of IT. In fact, in recent decades, studies regarding the implantation of information and technology have become a global trend (Raine, 2018). The trend got even way more massive when the Covid-19 outbreak hit the world. The use of IT in ELT undeniably became dominant and ubiquitous due to the fact that conventional classroom activities were mostly restricted. Even more, IT seems to have its crucial role even in the post-pandemic era.

A topic that belongs to the trend stated above is the implementation of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). Recent studies do not only provide the insight into MALL as a new way of learning language, especially English, autonomously (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012; Saraswati et al., 2021) but, further, the potentials it has to help EFL/ESL teachers to bring the innovation into the classroom as well (Darmawati, 2018; Dyah Inggita et al., 2019). This trend seems to be far from decreasing due to the fact that there are more and more smartphone users.

According to the study reported by Indonesia Internet Service Provider Association (2020), in 2019 to 2020, the internet users in Indonesia reached the number

of over 196 million and 95.4% of them accessed the internet by using mobile phones on the daily basis. Besides, it is also reported that there is also increasing number of the development of mobile-based applications. Unsurprisingly, most of the users were between 20-34 years old, meaning that most of the cell phone users are those who are in school ages.

The data elaborated above clearly shows that, when used appropriately, smartphone really has the potentials to help language learners improve their knowledge and skills. As the part of the development of technology, the mobile devices surely provide the opportunities for the users to get connected to the world outside in order to communicate with other users and learn the language simultaneously (Shrestha, 2014). However, it is important to keep in mind that the use of MALL may not be appropriate for all levels of language learners. Children may not have the ability to make use of the potentials so that young learners may need to find other autonomous learning alternatives such as motivating them to develop home literacy habit as well as providing them supporting environment, where simple technological tools take place, for language learning (Rosalina & Sholihah, 2018).

Regarding the mobile-based language learning applications available both on App Store (iOS) and Google Play Store (Android), recent studies revealed that there are tons of options that smartphone users can choose. The applications can help language learners to focus on various learning targets including vocabulary, language skills, and entertainment (Chen, 2016). Besides, the applications can also accommodate different levels of proficiency including beginner, intermediate, and more advanced learners (Gangaiamaran & Pasupathi, 2017). Of course, the applications may have several aspects to criticize such as limited and less contextual vocabulary learning and limited number of applications with corrective feedbacks to the users (Heil et al., 2016). From the data shown above, it is safe to assume that the existence of MALL is not necessarily a threat that will substitute the traditional English language teaching and learning process. Instead, MALL should be utilized.

Recent data regarding the implementation of MALL on learners' attitude and perception tends to be positive. For instance, Cheng and Kim (2019)reported in their research on attitudes towards English language learning apps that their respondents, who were Korean and Chinese students, held positive attitudes towards the use of the applications. Similarly, Saraswati et al. (2021) also reported that the use of mobile-based language learning application, in this case Duolingo, could motivate a language learner more to study autonomously, meaning that the learner showed positive attitude towards the application. In addition, the parents were also reported to have positive perception. However, even though learners' attitudes and perceptions toward MALL seem commonly positive, it is also reported that this also has several problem in the implementation such as the internet connectivity (Nuraeni et al., 2020). From the point of view of the learners or users, it can be seen that mobile applications undoubtedly have the potentials to help language learners learn and develop their foreign language knowledge and skills even though there may also be problems they have to face.

One of the mobile-based applications that can be utilized by language learners to develop their foreign language proficiency is HelloTalk. Kuning (2020) stated that HelloTalk was one of media social-like language learning application that was designed

specifically for language learners to learn and improve their language proficiency. In line with the statement above, Nushi and Makiabadi (2018) HelloTalk was an appropriate language learning application which offered creative and joyful learning method with potentially larger bases of users who could communicate and share ideas in social atmosphere. HelloTalk was also reported as an application that could potentially help students improve their vocabulary due to the fact that the application offered various interesting features, convenience to use, time efficiency, and interesting learning experience (Nugroho et al., 2021). Those study show that the mobile application should be considered as a mobile-based language learning application to be discussed further in scientific works.

HelloTalk is a mobile-based language learning application, based in Hongkong, which is available for iOS and Android. The application is claimed to provide its users with language learning experiences mainly by talking to or chatting with native speakers of over 150 foreign languages around the world. At the time being, it is claimed that there has been more than 30 million members or users of the application. There are several features offered by the conversation-based language learning application. The features allow the users to learn foreign languages by chatting with the native speakers either individually or collaboratively through group chats. The application also promises the users to get connected to each other in real-time. Interestingly, HelloTalk also provides a "Moments" feature in which the users to share a content and/or ask questions about language, culture, or travel in a social media-like style. By updating into the "Moments", the members are able to take and give comments. In addition, it is also claimed that the application enables the users to make friends with people from different parts of the world. For sure, those are the ones who share the similar interest in learning foreign languages.

One of the most interesting parts of the application that might attract most of its users is the opportunity to have conversations with a lot of users from many parts of the world. The users are able to communicate in conversations in various modes including text, speech-to-text, recorded-voice message, voice calls both in individual and group activities, video calls, and doodles (Vollmer Rivera, 2017). The application is also equipped with various tools that can help the members learn the languages such as translation tool, spelling and grammar correction, transliteration on specific languages, and more.

Given the fact that the application offers a non-formal language learning experiences, it is the learners themselves who should take the chances to be active in exchanging information and stories in order to actively use the target languages. It simply means that the whether the learners are successful or not to make use of the application will depend much on themselves (Vollmer Rivera, 2017). As a consequence, only the ones who are active enough in building connections with others will get the biggest advantages from the application. Fortunately, knowing that the application is labeled under education and language categories, in Play Store, it is safe to assume that most of its users are the ones who are interested in learning foreign languages.

Even though HelloTalk has attracted scholars and researchers to conduct scientific works regarding the application, the insights into the application, in the scholarly discussions, seem to be insufficient. Therefore, the current topic is a relevant and interesting one to present in this study. In this case, this study focuses on presenting

two main objectives: 1) students' prior knowledge of HelloTalk and 2) students' attitude towards the application. By conducting the study, it was hoped that this could provide insights into HelloTalk as a potential application for language learning for language learners, teachers, and language enthusiast.

Method

This study was carried out qualitatively by implementing a case study. As explained by Ary et al. (2010), a case study focuses on a single unit, which can be individual, a group, a site, a class, a policy, a program, a process, an institution, or a community, to product a rich and holistic in-depth description. The 'case' being investigated in this study was the implementation of a mobile-based language learning application called HelloTalk by a group of students who were studying at an English study program.

Since a case study can be heuristic; focused on providing new insights (Ary et al., 2010), the initial stage of this study was not necessarily natural. This is due to the assumption that HelloTalk was a totally new application for most students. Therefore, to start the whole process of the study, prior to the data collection and analysis, the students needed to be introduced to the mobile application.

After completing the initial process, which was the introduction to the application, the students were given the opportunity to use HelloTalk for about a week. During the period of time, they explored the application by making use of the features offered. As a result, they got the experiences in using the application naturally.

As implied, the subject of this study was a group of English study program students. Totally, there were 41 students participating in this study. All of them were on their first year of the college. The participation was voluntary. It means that only those who were interested in taking part in the study followed the whole process.

In order to collect the data, a questionnaire was used. The questionnaire covered questions regarding students' prior knowledge on HelloTalk and their attitudes toward the application which included their attitudes towards intrinsic aspects of HelloTalk, the pedagogical aspects including language skills and components, and their willingness to keep using the application in the future. The questions that belonged to the first category were presented in form of yes/no questions while the rest was in form of favorable statements in Likert scale by giving score 1,(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for each statement The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms after the students got the experience in using HelloTalk. Finally, the data gathered from the questionnaire was analyzed in order to draw the conclusion.

Findings

As mentioned in the previous section, there were 41 students who filled out the questionnaire through the Google Forms. Each student or respondent filled in all the questions given. Based on the results of the analysis, it can be reported that most of the students of the respondents were unfamiliar with and had never used the application before this study was carried out. Regarding student attitudes toward the HelloTalk, it can be reported that the majority of students had a positive attitude towards the application. The details about the results of the data analysis are presented below.

Students' prior knowledge of HelloTalk

Based on students' answers to the questions related to their knowledge of HelloTalk before the study was conducted, it can be concluded that most of the students had never known and had never used the application. From a total of 41 students, only 11 (26.8%) respondents stated that they were familiar with HelloTalk before this reserch was carried out. Meanwhile, 30 (73.2%) students stated that they had never been familiar with the application.

Table 1. Students' prior knowledge of HelloTalk

Are you already familiar with HelloTalk?	Number of Students	in %
Yes	11	26.8
No	30	73.2

Regarding student experience in using HelloTalk before the research, out of 41 students, only 5 (12.2%) stated that they had used the application. This means that 36 (87.8%) students have never used the application before.

Table 2. Students' prior experience in using HelloTalk

Have you ever used HelloTalk?	Number of Students	in %
Yes	5	12.2
No	36	87.8

From the data above, it can be concluded that the HelloTalk application was a new thing for most participants. Most of the students had never used HelloTalk so that they had no idea about the application whatsoever. Thus, it was important to introduce the application to the students. Therefore, the introduction stage was relevant to be carried out. In this case, a tutorial video containing the steps of downloading and installing the application as well as the general description of HelloTalk covering its appearance and features was made. The students, then, were invited to watch the tutorial in order to get the basic insights into the app. In addition, the participants were also participating in group discussion through a mainstream messenger application.
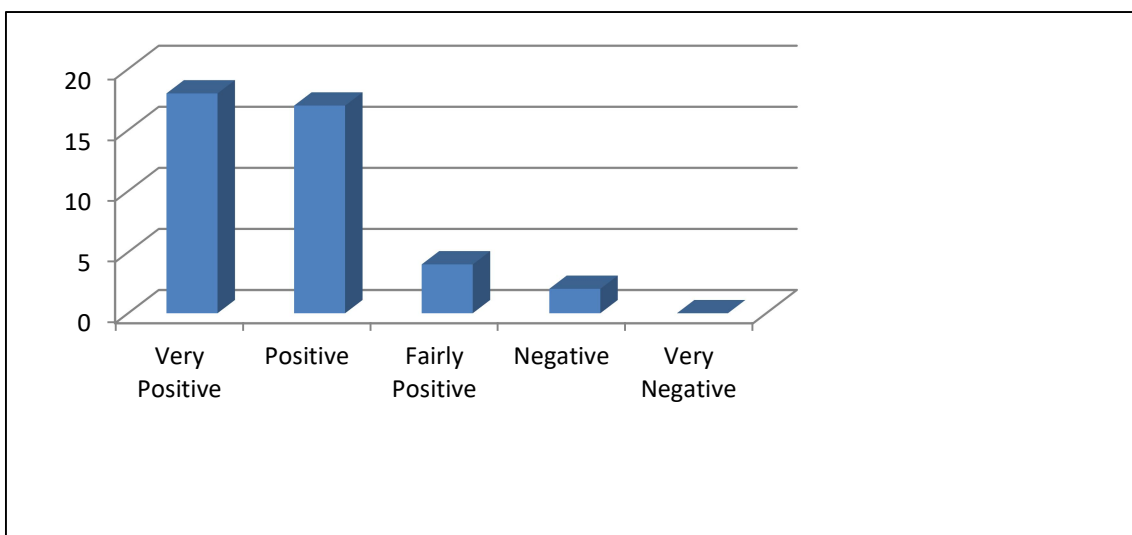
Students' attitude towards HelloTalk in general

Based on the results of the analysis of student responses to the 25 items of questionnaire, in general it can be reported that of 41 students, 20 (48.8%) students showed a very positive attitude towards the application while 16 (39%) students showed a positive attitude. The rest, 4 (9.8%) students showed a fairly positive attitude and only 1 (2.4%) student showed a negative attitude from the answers to the distributed questionnaire. None of the respondents showed a very negative attitude towards HelloTalk. The summary of the results of the analysis can be seen in the following figure.
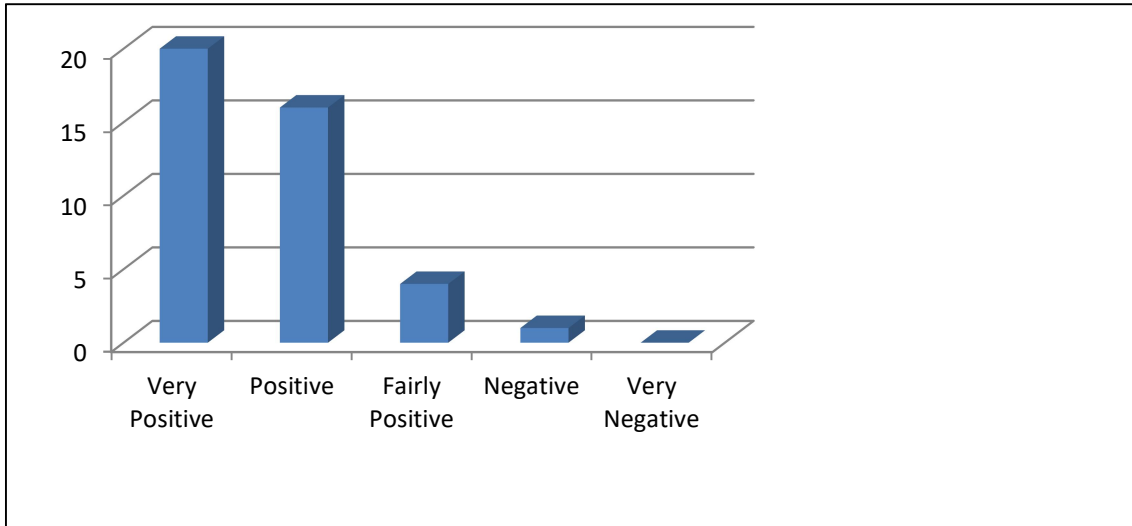
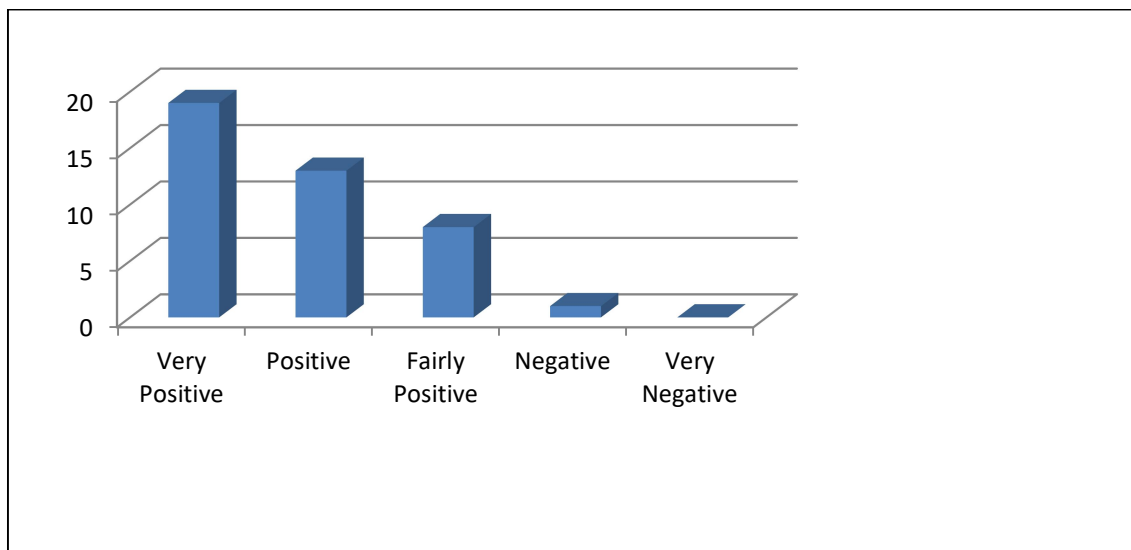*Figure 1. Students' attitude towards HelloTalk in general*

Regarding the intrinsic aspects of the HelloTalk including the installation, features offered, and appearance, students generally showed a positive attitude. Based on the results of the data analysis, 18 (43.9%) respondents showed a very positive attitude and 17 (41.5%) respondents showed a positive attitude towards the intrinsic aspects of the HelloTalk. 4 (9.8%) students showed a fairly positive attitude and there were only 2 (4.9%) students who showed a negative attitude towards the intrinsic aspects of the application.

Figure 2. Students' attitude towards intrinsic aspects of HelloTalk

Next, students' answers to questions related to their attitudes towards the language learning aspects of HelloTalk were also analyzed. The language learning aspects here were related to the potentials of the application in helping the students to develop their language proficiency, in this case English, covering the communication skills, the four skills of English, language components, and other related matters.

From 41 respondents, it can be seen that 19 (46.3%) respondents showed a very positive attitude and 13 (31.7%) showed a positive attitude towards HelloTalk in relation to the aspects described above. Students who showed a fairly positive attitude were 8 (19.5%). Meanwhile, there were 1 (2.4%) student who showed a negative attitude.
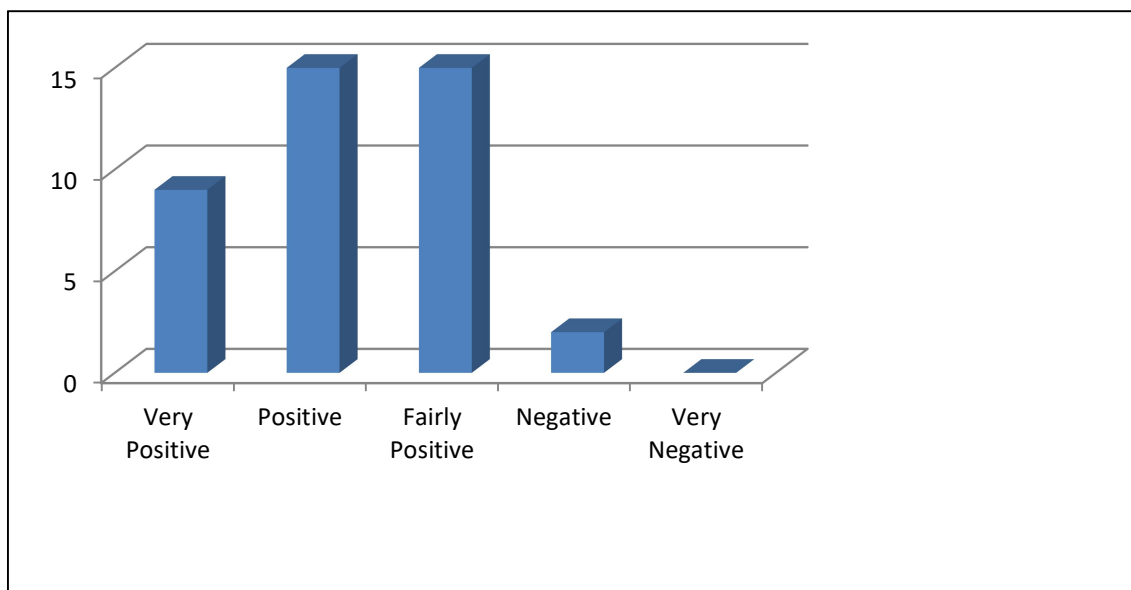

Figure 3. Students' attitude towards language learning aspects of HelloTalk

Based on the information above, HelloTalk was seen as language learning mobile application that can help the students develop English language skills, especially related to communication skills. In addition, HelloTalk application also provided an opportunity for them to make friends with other users from various countries. Those are relevant to the results of study reported by Nushi and Makiabadi (2018) who stated that the application enabled the users to communicate with users from different parts of the world in creative and fun way. Besides, Nugroho et al. (2021) also found that the application could help students develop their vocabulary. Considering the potentials that the application has, it is safe to say that this is certainly a positive value that is quite difficult to obtain without the use of advances in information technology such as the HelloTalk application.

Students' attitude towards their willingness to use HelloTalk in the future

The last thing that was analyzed was the student's attitude towards the HelloTalk application regarding their desire or interest in using the application in the future and their willingness to recommend the application to others. Based on the results of the analysis, from 41 students, there were 9 (22%) who showed a very positive attitude and 15 (36.6%) who showed a positive attitude. There were 15 students (36.6%) who showed a fairly positive attitude regarding this matter, while 2 (4.9%) showed a negative attitude. Thus, in general, students were interested in continuing to use the application to improve their English language skills, especially related to communication skills.

Figure 4. Students' Attitude towards Their Willingness to Use HelloTalk in the Future

To sum up, according to the data analysis on students' attitude towards HelloTalk that covers several aspects, the application is a language learning mobile application with potentials to help its users to learn and develop their language competence. Intrinsically, the results of the data analysis show that the app is convenience and well-developed with necessary features to support the users to use the application. Furthermore, the data also shows that HelloTalk is an application that the users can rely on when they want to learn and improve their English skills, especially in communication. The chances of getting connected to other language learners, not necessarily native speakers, to communicate and acquire language together make the app a promising one to consider. Finally, it can also be concluded that the application is interesting enough to attract the majority of the students to keep using it in the future. It means that they got positive experience during the period of using this app.

Discussion

The increasing number of mobile-based language learning applications seems to be a logical consequence of the unstoppable development of IT. HelloTalk is one of amongst alternatives available for smartphone users who are interested in making use of the gadgets in their hands to learn and develop their foreign language competence, especially the communication one. Of course, there were reports showing the data regarding several weaknesses and limitations of the applications related to several learning aspects including vocabulary, suitability to learners' skill sets, and corrective feedbacks to the learners (Heil et al., 2016). In addition, there are also several aspects that the applications need to be develop including the ease of the access, internet connection, and scarcity of interactivity (Ekoç, 2021).

An important issue that needs to be highlighted in this study is the information showing that most of the participants did not have any knowledge about HelloTalk prior to this study. Out of 41 students, only 11 stated that they had already known the application. Unfortunately, there were only 5 of those who had ever tried to use the

application. The data shows that the use of HelloTalk, or any other similar applications, should be promoted.

Another alternative to the assumption above is due to the lack of information about the application by the teachers. If so, it is also important to introduce and promote the application, along with the other similar apps, to the teachers because recent studies also showed teachers' positive attitude towards the utilization of mobile-based learning application in language learning (Hamidah et al., 2021; Kassim & Said, 2020). Therefore, further studies regarding the similar topic of the implementation of MALL should also focus on building teachers' awareness of the potentials of the language learning applications.

Regarding the students' attitude towards HelloTalk, the fact that most of them see the application in a positive way is undoubtedly good news. The result shows similarity with the data reported in other studies (See: Chen, 2016; Ekoç, 2021; Nugroho et al., 2021; Nuraeni et al., 2020). One of the reasons is, likely, because the students are individuals who actively use smartphones in daily life. This is in line with the data released by APJII (2020) stating that over there were 196 million smartphone users in 2019 to 2020; most of them were, unsurprisingly, individuals who were in school ages. Therefore, promoting the use of mobile-based language learning applications, not only the one being discussed in this research, is worthwhile since the students have been already holding the gadgets in their hands.

Conclusion

Discussions under the topic of implementation of MALL, specifically mobile-based language learning applications, are not new topics in scholarly works. However, since the development of the applications seems to be impossible from stopping, such topics are still worthy to present. More data regarding the utilization of mobile applications for language learning, especially English, seem to be interesting to be investigated including HelloTalk.

HelloTalk is an application with potentials to help learners to develop their skills especially regarding communication one. One of the impressive strengths of the application is that HelloTalk provides the users with opportunities to communicate to and learn foreign language from native speakers and other language enthusiasts from all over the globe. The natural settings that the users experience will be, to some extent, motivational to them in acquiring the foreign language. In addition, such experience will also lead their curiosity to try other similar applications for new things.

An important issue to keep in mind is that the students are not the only ones to be motivated in making use of mobile-based language learning apps. The teachers should also develop their awareness of the potentials of the applications. When integrated and managed well, the applications will likely contribute positively to students' achievement in formal context.

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