Original Article

Perceptual Differences towards Digitalizing EFL Learning among Rural Grade Two Learners in Chemba District, Tanzania: The Case of Vocabulary Mobile Application

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Abstract

Recent developments in digital technologies have necessitated the use of digital learning materials in education and EFL learning in particular. While previous studies affirm that digital technologies facilitate EFL learning, few studies in Tanzania have focused on this area. This study, therefore, was an attempt to shed light on this matter. The paper presents part of the findings of the design-based research in which the author was a team member. Participants were 20 grade 2 pupils (8 years old) and 7 teachers from Chemba district, Dodoma region, who were purposely sampled. The researcher used semi-structured interview sessions and observation methods to collect the data, and inductive thematic analysis was adopted for data analysis. The results revealed conflicting opinions regarding the use of the designed mobile application as a resource for EFL vocabulary learning. While the learners were positive about the use of the mobile application, teachers were divided on the matter. On the one hand, most of the young teachers in the sample recommended the use of the approach, while the old teachers and only one young teacher, on the other hand, and discouraged the application. This study regards such contestations as a battle between traditions and modernity in the field of EFL learning. The study therefore, recommends awareness training for teachers so that they can take advantage of such digital materials to enrich EFL learning and vocabulary learning in particular.

Key words: Digital learning materials, mobile application, vocabulary learning, learners' perception, teachers' perception

1. Introduction

In light of recent digital technological advancements, discussions in educational research have focused on how education practices can benefit from employing technologies (Colpaert, 2020). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, the changes experienced in digital technologies

have resulted in the emerging of new approaches to the teaching and learning of English in EFL contexts. These approaches include computer-assisted language learning, famously known as CALL (Levy, 1997), computer-enhanced language learning, famously known as CELL, technology-enhanced language learning, famously known as TELL (Patel, 2017), and mobile-assisted language learning, famously known as MALL (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Rodríguez-Arancón et al., 2013). Consequently, several studies have investigated the benefits of applying various forms of digital technologies to language learning (Zakian, 2022). These studies, therefore, have revealed significant findings in areas like mobile technology and EFL learning (Govindasamy et al., 2019; Ma, 2017), the usefulness of computer games in EFL learning (Butler, 2015; Klimova & Kacet, 2017), the use of e-books in EFL classrooms (Ghafar, 2024; Park & Lee, 2021), the role of film and television series in EFL learning (Ashcroft et al., 2018; Csajbok-Twerefou, 2010), digital stories in EFL classrooms (Fu et al., 2021; Karimova et al., 2023; Lim, et al., 2022), the use of YouTube videos in facilitating EFL learning (Seilstad, 2012; Terantino, 2011), and the use of blogs in EFL classrooms (Ahluwalia et al., 2011; Aydin, 2014).

Studies in digital technologies, therefore, report that despite the challenges associated with the use of the technologies, EFL learners gain a lot when applying different digital technologies in learning. Among others, researchers report on the interactive advantage that digital technologies provide (Ahluwalia et al., 2011; Aydin, 2014). For instance, Richards (2014) proclaims that digital learning materials provide social, multimodal, and interactive opportunities that allow learners to interact with people from different parts of the world. Such interactive forums allow learners to ask questions, answer questions, and participate in discussions and debates. For example, Ahluwalia et al. (2011) found that the use of blogs allowed their learners to interact with other people. This was possible as they had an opportunity to read other people's comments and write their own. Through this way, learners developed writing and reading skills, got exposure to autonomous language learning, and got acquainted with authentic use of the language. Thus, Richards (2014) considers that digital technologies provide learners with a more engaging environment for language learning than what they get when using textbooks.

Further research findings report that digital technologies facilitate an immediate learning environment, encourage self-directed learning, and motivate learners to learn. Regarding the immediate learning environment, Haleem et al. (2022) commend the role of digital technologies

in helping learners get prompt answers to questions they face in the course of learning. As far as encouraging self-directed learning, Morris & Rohs (2023) show that digital technologies have a potential effect on supporting learners' self-directed learning. This implies that technologies play a role in transforming education from the old perspective, which puts a teacher at the centre of learning, to a modern perspective that advocates for learners' autonomy (Beattie, 2020; Bocanegra & Haidl, 1999; Ishemo, 2017; Mpho, 2018; Tabulawa, 2006; Wohlfarth et al., 2008). In respect of motivating learners, Seilstad (2012) and Hafner et al. (2015) affirm that digital resources motivate learners to learn and practice the target language without fear. This is different from what happens in normal classrooms, where several learners are unwilling to practice some language skills because they feel shy in front of fellow students (MacIntyre, 2007).

Researchers have also investigated the impact of digital materials on developing EFL language skills. Maros and Saad (2016) reported that international students in their study developed English language skills through watching television programmes and movies. Govindasamy et al. (2019) and Ma (2019) show that learners developed their vocabulary knowledge through the use of mobile phones. In other studies, Pickard (1996) and Suh et al. (1999) found that learners developed receptive skills through listening to radio programs, watching TV, and watching films in English. These results therefore demonstrate that digital technologies provide opportunities for EFL learners to learn the language outside the school timetable. The technologies also allow learners to access native speakers' cultures so easily. However, Aydin (2014) suggests that well-planned tasks in digital materials have good results in language learning. Therefore, teachers should guide their learners in the selection of materials that are useful. To make this fruitful, Aydin (2014) and Hafner et al. (2015) advise curriculum designers to address matters of digital literacy in teacher training curricula so as to prepare teacher trainees who are theoretically and practically aware of the role of digital learning materials in language learning.

With particular attention to vocabulary learning through mobile applications, the literature provides some advantages associated with this approach. One of the most studied areas is the role of mobile applications in vocabulary learning. Examples of studies on the matter include Ma and Yodkamlue (2019) among EFL learners in China. This was a comparative study in which the researchers compared the impact of learning vocabulary through mobile applications versus paper-based word lists. The results showed that students who used the mobile application in the

experimental group performed better than their fellows in a control group who used a paper-based word list. In another comparative study, Govindasamy et al. (2019) compared the impact of mobile applications and a paper dictionary on promoting word meaning among fifty EFL learners in Malaysia. The results showed that the use of mobile applications promoted learners knowledge in learning and understanding the meaning of targeted vocabulary compared to a printed dictionary.

In Africa, few studies are available in the area of mobile applications in EFL/ESL learning. Among others, these studies report that mobile applications have a positive impact on EFL/ESL learning. For example, a study by Ngesi et al. (2018) in South Africa showed that using mobile SMS and Mxit texts improved learners' performance in writing full sentences, punctuation marks, correct spelling of words, and producing acceptable grammar. In Morocco, Benlaghrissi and Meriem (2023) examined the impact of mobile applications on Moroccan learners' EFL vocabulary development. In this study, the researcher used experimental and control groups. The results revealed that learners in the experimental group performed better than their fellows in the control group. In Libya, Alsied (2019) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of mobile phones among EFL Libya's learners. In this study, Alsied reports that the use of mobile phones was useful not only in vocabulary development but also in facilitating the learners' reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. The data also demonstrated that Libya's EFL learners revealed positive perceptions towards using mobile phones in learning English.

As far as Tanzania is concerned, the literature reviewed shows that there is hardly any study on mobile use in EFL learning. Nevertheless, there are some studies on mobile use in education. Among others are Kiwhele and Bali (2013), Kafyulilo (2014), and Gibbons et al. (2018). Besides not addressing the issue of mobile use in EFL learning, neither of the studies involved young learners as participants. However, the studies provide valuable information on the perception of Tanzanian teachers towards learners' use of mobile phones for learning. In general, these studies show that a significant number of teachers had a negative perception of learners' use of mobile phones as a medium for learning. The findings indicate that teachers believe that mobile phones harm learners' behavior as most learners use mobile phones for non-educational purposes.

Despite the valuable information obtained from reviewed literature, very little is known about the perception of EFL Tanzania young learners and their teachers towards the use of mobile

applications for vocabulary learning. The present study tries to shed light on this area. Specifically, this paper presents part of the data collected in the project that designed, developed, and assessed a mobile application for vocabulary learning. The aim of this study was to minimize one of the challenges in EFL learning, namely, inadequate contact time between learners and comprehensible English language input. Therefore, deploying a drill-practice mobile application sought to maximize the opportunity for learner-vocabulary contact in an out-of-school context. Tanzania was an appropriate area for the study considering its multilingualism, with more than 120 ethnic languages that are spoken along with Kiswahili and English. This situation hinders learners' frequent contact with English-language input outside the classrooms. The study therefore answered the following two questions: (1) What is the perception of young EFL Tanzanian learners towards using a mobile application for vocabulary learning? (2) What is the sampled teachers' perception towards learners' use of a mobile application as a vocabulary learning tool?

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The project employed the design-based research (hereafter DBR) paradigm and a qualitative approach to meet its objective. According to Wang and Hannafin (2005), DBR is "a systematic but flexible methodology aimed at improving educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation, based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real-world settings (p. 9)." Several models of DBR have appeared in the literature. The present project adopted a three-phase model by McKenney and Reeves (2013). Thus, the project was divided into a preliminary phase, a prototyping phase, and an assessment phase. Figure 1 below illustrates the three phases, key activities in each phase, and data collection methods that were used in each phase.

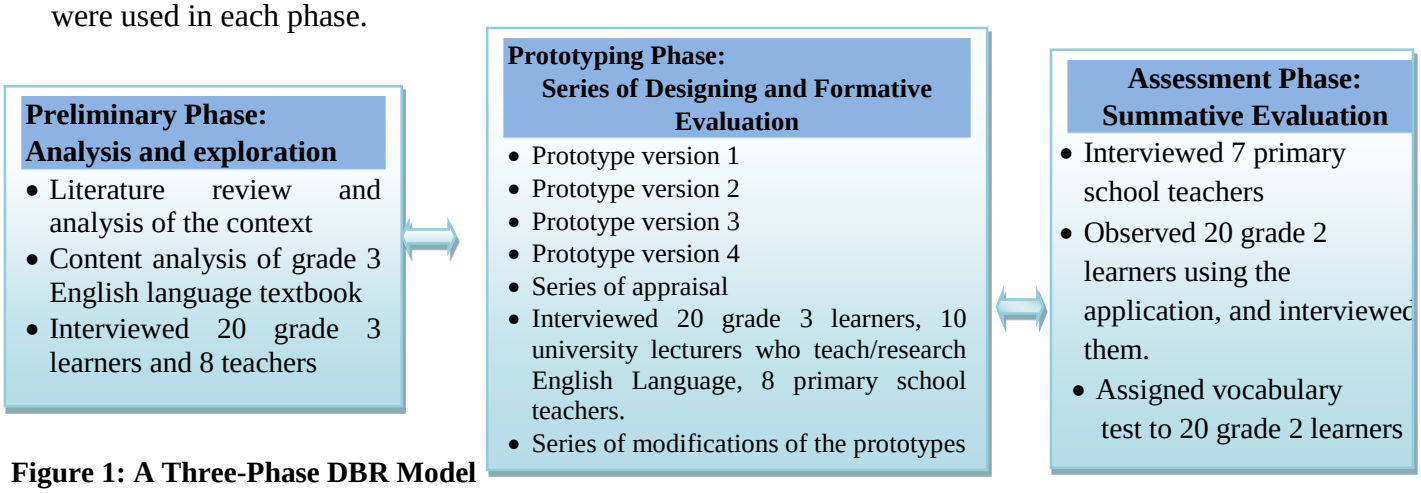


Figure 1: A Three-Phase DBR Model
Source: Adapted from McKenney and Reeves (2013)

The preliminary phase laid the foundation of the study. In this phase, the researcher performed four activities: carried out a literature review, conducted the context analysis, analyzed grade three textbook, and interviewed grade three learners and grade three teachers. This preliminary information was used to develop the first prototype.

Prototyping was the second phase of the project. In this phase, four prototypes were developed and appraised by different groups. The prototyping phase consisted of iterations of developing prototypes, appraising prototypes, and refining prototypes based on the appraisals provided in each version. Figure 2 below depicts the four prototypes and the process involved in getting them.

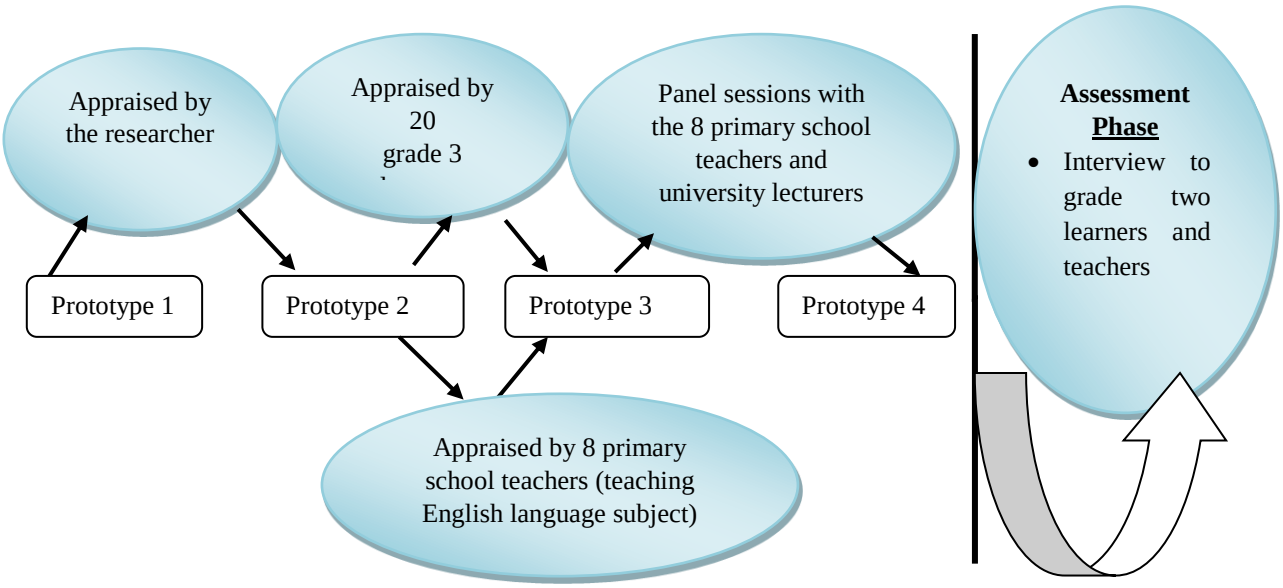
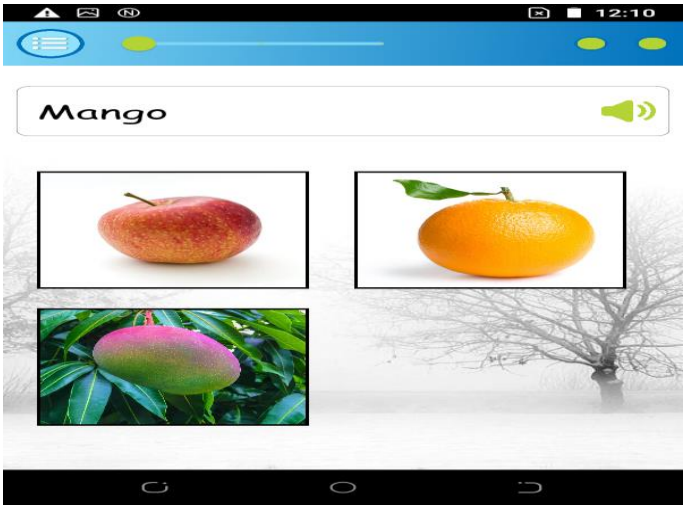


Figure 2: Stages for Developing Prototypes

Source: Adapted from Mafumiko (2006)

After accomplishing the prototyping phase, the product obtained was a drill-practice mobile application for out-of-school learner autonomy. The mobile application had 402 words from four word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and a few adverbs. These words were obtained after analyzing grade three English language pupils' textbook. The mobile application exposed learners to three types of vocabulary knowledge: vocabulary meaning, vocabulary spelling, and pronunciation. In this drill-practice mobile application, the learners' task was to match the word and the picture when working with the meaning of words. Feedback was always given to check if one's matching was correct or wrong. For each word, there was a pronunciation button, which

allowed the learners to listen to how the word should be pronounced. Picture 1 below shows one of the faces of the mobile application.



Picture 1: One of the Faces of the App

After the prototyping phase, the researcher took the fourth prototype into the assessment phase, and the data from this phase are what constitute the findings of the present paper.

3.2 Participants

The project involved teachers and learners in all phases. It is noteworthy that two groups of teachers and learners were involved in this project. The first group was involved in the preliminary and prototyping phases. These were important phases for designing and developing the vocabulary mobile application. Eight (8) grade three English language teachers from four (4) public primary schools were sampled for these two phases, which took place from May to November 2020. These teachers were intentionally selected based on their extensive experience in teaching grade three pupils for more than five consecutive years. As a result, they had amassed a wealth of knowledge and honed their individual teaching philosophies, which proved invaluable in the development of the mobile application. Besides, 20 grade three learners (about 9 years old) were also deliberately sampled based on the factors that: (1) grade three was a level where English as a subject began. (2) the learners were from the four schools where the sampled teachers came from, and (3) their parents had smart phones and volunteered to install all versions of the application and to provide their children with time to use the application. The data from this group of teachers and learners facilitated the development of the mobile application, and such data are not part of this paper.

Another group of teachers and learners were involved in the assessment phase of the project. These were seven (7) teachers from six schools, which were different from the previous ones. These teachers were also deliberately sampled based on the fact that they had taught English subject to grade three learners for five or more consecutive years. Learners in this phase were 20 (about 8 years old) pupils who had completed grade two and were on annual leave, expecting to begin grade three a month later. This sample was preferred for two reasons: (1) these grade 2 pupils had not started learning English. This is because the subject is introduced for the first time in grade 3. Therefore, it was their first exposure to language through the mobile application. (2) The use of this sample was preferred so as to minimize external influences that would occur if grade three learners were involved. This was possible based on the fact that the vocabulary content of the mobile application was taken from grade three pupils' textbook. Thus, it could be difficult to measure the effect of the mobile application on vocabulary learning among the learners who were using a textbook with the same vocabulary in classrooms. In addition, learners in this group were also deliberately sampled based on the fact that their parents were ready to install the mobile application on their smart phones and allow their learners to access the material. The data from this second group of teachers and learners are what constitute the results of the present paper.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

This study applied interview and observation as the key data collection methods. While interview was used to collect data from both learners and teachers, observation was used to collect data from learners only. The two methods were preferred based on their flexibility and effectiveness in collecting data from children. It is worth noting that the learners were allowed to use the fourth prototype (the mobile application) for four weeks after it had been installed on their parents' mobile phones. During this period, the researcher and teachers in the sample visited each learner once a week. During the visits, the researcher had time for informal conversations with the learners in the presence of their parents or relatives. This was purposely initiated for the sake of gaining trust from the learners. After the fourth week, the researcher had time to interview each learner. Interview sessions took place at the learners' home, and to make them comfortable, learners were allowed to choose some relatives to accompany them during the sessions. Open-ended questions were purposely used to allow the learners in the sample to express their views, and the researcher applied probing techniques to make the participants generate more responses to the questions in

focus. The interview method was also used to collect data from the seven teachers in the sample. Teachers were interviewed after they had visited the learners and observed them using the app for four weeks. All interview sessions were conducted in Kiswahili and were recorded by the voice recorder.

Non-participant observation was the second research method that was used to collect the required data from the learners. Like the interview, the observation method was also selected for this task based on the fact that it allowed data collection from children, particularly when the researcher had no intention to interrupt their behaviors. This method was used for four weeks. Each learner in the sample was observed four times in four different days while using the mobile application. During observation, the running record method was used to note down all spontaneously observed learners' behavior. A note book and a pen were the main tools that were used for collecting observation data.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively. First, interview data were transcribed in the same language. Thereafter, transcribed texts and audio materials were used to guide the inter-lingual translation of the texts (data) into the research language. Finally, the translated texts and observation data (that were in English) were coded and thematically analyzed using the inductive approach. The approach was preferred because it enabled the researcher to identify themes as they emerged in the data without the influence of any preconceived categories (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Bryman, 2016).

4. Results

4.1 Learners' Perceptions of Learning through a Mobile Application

The first research question sought to examine the perceptions of learners towards learning English vocabulary through the mobile application. The data collected from both interview and observation are used to describe learners' perceptions. However, for ethical purposes, special codes are used. These codes use three letters followed by numbers. The first letter stands for the word school, followed by a letter that identifies a specific school, for example, school A, B, C, D, E, and F.' The third letter is either 'L' for the word **learner** or 'T' for the word **teacher**. Thereafter, comes a

number, which stands for individual participant. Thus, SAL3 refers to **S**chool-**A**, **learner** number **3,** while SBT1 refers to **S**chool-**B**, **teacher** number **1**.

The data revealed that all learners in the sample had a positive perception of using the mobile application as a vocabulary learning tool. Three themes emerged from learners' data: learners enjoyed practicing learner autonomy; learners acknowledged that the mobile application assisted them in learning vocabulary; and learners showed readiness to use such medium for learning in the future. As far as enjoying learner autonomy is concerned, the data show that learners enjoyed independent learning and showed self-management in learning in terms of planning what to achieve and when to learn. More importantly, the data suggest that self-directed learning offered significant learning potential for students. Some of these data are presented below.

> *I use the mobile application every day because I want to understand all the words in the application. [SAL3]*
>
> *I enjoy learning the English language at home. The mobile application helps me learn English with my sister. [SCL5]*
>
> *I use the mobile application every evening when my father is at home. The mobile application is easy to use, and no one helps me to use it for learning. [SDL3]*
>
> *I like the mobile application because I can learn English independently. I learnt many words in a few days. This makes me happy. [SDL5]*
>
> *I like the mobile application because I have been able to learn many words on my own. [SFL1]*

The data above show that the mobile application had a significant potential to motivate learners' autonomous learning. As a result, learners were motivated to use the mobile application almost every day (as some of them claimed). This suggests that they had enough time to interact with the English vocabulary. The data also demonstrate that the mobile application was pedagogically relevant as it was an important driving force that motivated the learners to tirelessly undertake the activities in the mobile application, maintained learners' interest in the mobile application, and fostered learners' vocabulary learning and self-evaluation. Therefore, the data suggest that the main objective of the project, which was to provide more time for these learners to interact with English vocabulary was achieved. The interview data above are supported by observation data,

which show that the researcher noticed excited learners using the mobile application independently. The following data from the researcher's running records clearly describe the situation.

> *[SBL2] is using the app independently. She is using it enthusiastically, then she asks her sister, "Do you know what a fish is?" [notes taken in one of the observation sessions]*.
>
> *For the past hour that I have been observing, [SFL5] has been busy working with the mobile application. Thereafter, he goes to his mother and says, "Now I know banana, orange, and mango" [notes taken in one of the observation sessions]*.

The results of the interview questions asked to learners also showed that most of them were confident that the mobile application was useful for learning. The following below are some of the learners' answers in response to interview questions.

> *Yes, I like the mobile application because it has assisted me in learning the meaning of many words that I was not aware of before. [SAL1]*
>
> *The mobile application is interesting because it teaches me the meaning of words and pronunciation…but spelling is difficult. [SBL5]*
>
> *I am very happy to learn the pronunciation of words. [SDL3]*
>
> *I am happy to use the mobile application because it has helped me learn how to pronounce different words. [SFL3]*

The above data show that learners were happy with the use of the mobile application for vocabulary learning. The data further demonstrate that the mobile application had a significant effect on learning vocabulary knowledge, particularly the meaning and pronunciation of English words. However, each learner was able to learn a certain vocabulary knowledge of interest. The data show that while some learners reported to have taken advantage of learning word meaning, others reported to have learnt pronunciation. Nevertheless, interview responses from the learners show that some learners failed to learn some vocabulary knowledge, like vocabulary spelling. These findings therefore imply that while a certain mobile application can help learners develop a certain specific knowledge, it can fail to assist them in developing another knowledge. This is a lesson to

teachers that, to achieve the learning objectives, they are required to be careful enough when selecting mobile applications for their learners.

The last theme which emerged from learners' data was their readiness to use the mobile application as a medium of learning in future. The data below support this theme.

> *I am happy to learn English through a mobile application. I think I will get another opportunity to use it in the future. [SCL4]*
>
> *I am satisfied to learn vocabulary through this mobile app. I will be happy to see other apps for other topics. [SEL4]*
>
> *I request that you bring other mobile apps for other subjects. [SFL3]*

The data above indicate learners' positive response towards using the mobile application for learning, specifically to learn English vocabulary. The students expressed happiness and satisfaction with the experience they had, showing a readiness to engage with more mobile applications. The fact that it was the students' first time using such a technology and they still expressed comfort with it suggests that they found the application user-friendly and effective for their learning needs. This implies that the application was well-designed and easy to navigate, contributing to a successful learning experience. Furthermore, the students not only expressed a desire for more applications on different topics but also specifically requested additional applications for other subjects. This demonstrates a genuine interest in incorporating the technology into their learning across various subjects, indicating a willingness to engage with digital resources for their education in a broader sense.

4.2 Teachers' Perceptions towards Learning through a Mobile Application

Understanding teachers' perceptions of learning through the mobile application was the second research question that the present study examined. Teachers' responses to interview questions showed that they held two different perceptions regarding learning through mobile applications. On the one hand, three teachers had a positive perception and believed that the mobile application was useful for their learners. On the other hand, four teachers had a negative perception of using the mobile application and did not consider it to facilitate learning.

The three teachers who had a positive perception of the use of the mobile application for learning were all 'digital natives' in their early thirties. 'Digital natives' is the term coined by Prensky (2001),

referring to the generation of people who were born and raised in the technological era. These teachers claimed to have sound knowledge of the use of technological devices like desktops, laptops, and smartphones. The teachers claimed to have used digital materials in learning; nonetheless, no one declared to have used the same in teaching. These teachers considered that the mobile application was useful to learners. They were also confident that the application would eventually assist learners in developing knowledge of the target vocabulary. The data also show that these teachers had a belief that the mobile application was useful for motivating learners' self-directed learning, promoting edutainment among the learners, and providing learners with ample time to revise the target vocabulary whenever using the application. On top of that, the teachers also had a desire to see that more pupils would get the opportunity to use the application for learning. Teachers' voices in the quotes below reveal the belief they had in the mobile application.

> *I wish all learners in our school would get the opportunity to use the mobile application. [SAT1]*
>
> *Learning like this will encourage learners to learn without being pushed. As you can see, she is enjoying using the application and seems as if she is playing, but eventually, her knowledge of the vocabulary content will be tremendous. [SAT 1]*
>
> *It is very useful; it will assist learners in acquiring vocabulary. I congratulate the researcher for including the pronunciation of words in this mobile application. [SDT1]*
>
> *This mobile application will help learners develop vocabulary size, meaning, and pronunciation. They will learn many words because they encounter the same words whenever they use the application. [SDT1]*

In contrast, four teachers had a negative perception of learners' use of the mobile application for learning. It is, however, worth noting that among the four teachers, one was a 'digital native', ranging from 30 to 35, and three were 'digital immigrants'. Prensky (2001) describes that digital immigrants as people who were born before the digital age. However, these people had to adopt some technological use at later points in their lives. These three later teachers were in their late fifties. These four teachers had these comments in relation to learners' use of the mobile application for learning:

> *I propose to add the role of the teacher in this application because our learners can hardly learn on their own without being supervised. [SBT1]*
>
> *Our learners only participate in learning when a teacher is inside the classroom. When a teacher goes out of the classroom, each of them turns to playing. I am puzzled to hear that learners are given the mobile app so that they can learn independently. Surely, I believe they will use their time playing with the application. [SCT1]*
>
> *I am not supporting it because I know our learners. Even if you give them books, very few of them will learn at home.* If they can't use books, can they use the mobile application? [SCT1]
>
> *This mobile application can only make these learners boastful. They can develop an attitude that they can learn without teachers, and that can change their behavior towards school attendance and teachers. [SET1]*
>
> *Learners cannot be attentive to the content the way they do in classrooms but will only use their mobile application for playing and wondering about the voices and pictures. [SFT1]*

What can be inferred from the data above is that, regarding teachers' perspectives on the use of a mobile application for learning, there is a consensus among them that learners heavily rely on teacher supervision and traditional learning materials like textbooks. They express doubt in the effectiveness of digital tools for independent learning, citing concerns that learners may prioritize entertainment over educational content. Additionally, teachers fear that the mobile app could lead to negative attitudes towards school attendance and teacher authority, potentially fostering a sense of self-sufficiency that could impact their overall behavior and engagement in the classroom. These insights highlight the teachers' skepticism towards the application's ability to facilitate meaningful learning experiences and raise important considerations about the role of teachers in guiding and supporting students' learning journeys.

5. Discussion

The results of the present study show that there were mixed perceptions in relation to young learners' use of mobile applications as a medium for vocabulary learning. The results in Section 4 reveal existing but silent contestations between traditions and modernity in EFL learning. In particular, the present results depict conflicting opinions on the role of mobile applications in facilitating vocabulary learning among EFL learners. On the one hand, learners and some teachers in the sample have a positive perception of the use of the mobile application for learning, while on

the other hand, other teachers are suspicious of the usefulness of the mobile application as an appropriate learning resource. The present study therefore reveals that there are about three conflicting perspectives within the traditional-modernity dispute. These are: (1) the perspective that learning takes place when learners are under teachers' control versus learner autonomy (2) the perspective that learning takes place through reading books versus acquiring knowledge through digital materials; in this context, mobile applications (3) the perspective that mobile applications have a negative behavioral impact on learners versus the positive advantages of mobile applications in EFL learning.

The results show that some teachers, including SBT1 and SCT1, strongly emphasized that learners could not learn without teachers' supervision. Such teachers' views originate from the traditional perspective of learning. This perspective considers teachers' power to set standards and tight control over learners as important practices for learning to take place (Tabulawa, 2006; Wohlfarth et al., 2008). Tabulawa (2006) further clarifies that, under this approach, learners can neither express themselves nor control their learning. Instead, they always remain passive recipients of what teachers direct. In the literature, this approach has several labels, including the traditional style of teaching (Tabulawa, 2006; Wohlfarth et al., 2008), the old model of teaching (Ishemo, 2017; Mpho, 2018), and the outdated method (Beattie, 2020). The learning view of SBT1 and SCT1 is in contrast with modern views of learning, where learner autonomy is encouraged. Learner autonomy is a modern language learning approach that advocates for learners' activeness in learning. In this view, learner autonomy calls for responsible and independent learners (Wohlfarth et al., 2008). Synonymous terms for learner autonomy in the literature suggest that learner-centeredness is a key feature of autonomy. These synonyms are self-management, self-learning, self-directed learning, self-instruction, self-access learning, learner-centeredness, and learner independence (Bocanegra and Haidl, 1999).

In relation to the findings of the present study, conflicting perspectives between the views that learning takes place when learners are under teachers' control versus learner autonomy are evident when comparing the data provided by some learners versus those by teachers. In particular, the data from some learners, including [SAL2], [SAL3], [SCL5], [SDL3], [SDL5], and [SFL1], contrast with the data from some teachers, including [SBT1] and [SCT1]. In these data, learners express their enthusiasm for enjoying independent learning, while identified teachers maintain that

learners at this level cannot learn without teachers' supervision. This dispute shows that some teachers perceive the learning process using the traditional lens. Consequently, they discourage enthusiastic young learners from taking advantage of using technology for knowledge gain.

The findings also depict that learners comfortably used the mobile application and reported that they learnt vocabulary knowledge through the designed mobile application. Learners' reported learning experience challenges the four teachers' views about the usefulness of the mobile application in vocabulary learning. While [SAL1], [SBL5], [SDL3], and [SFL3], among others, declared that the mobile application helped them to learn vocabulary, teachers like *[SBT1]*, *[SCT1]*, *[SET1]*, and *[SFT1] remained suspicious that the mobile application would not assist learners in acquiring knowledge.* The experiences reported by learners support what Alsied (2019), Benlaghrissi and Meriem (2023), and Govindasamy et al. (2019) found in their empirical studies. However, the differences between the present and previous studies are in the areas of research approaches used, age, and socio-cultural background of the learners. Therefore, the present study extends the previously reported results by suggesting that mobile applications are also useful for vocabulary learning among young learners.

The finding that learners can benefit from digital materials brings hope to digital natives, especially in this era when the focus of language education has changed from grammar-based to functional-based learning. In support of this, Ahmadi and Reza (2018) argue that digital materials provide a lot that neither textbooks nor teachers can offer in traditional classrooms. In line with this, Dawson et al. (2008) believe that digital materials change language classes into active places where learners interact with meaningful tasks that facilitate communicative competencies.

The present study challenges the commonly reported research finding that EFL teachers have positive perceptions of the use of digital materials for EFL learning. Among others, such studies include Al-Said (2015), Anggeraini et al. (2019), Demiroz and Turker (2020), Ebadi and Bashiri (2018), and Mundy et al. (2012). In contrast, this study has revealed that there are conflicting perceptions between learners and teachers and among teachers regarding the use of mobile applications for learning. In light of this finding, it is apparent that such conflicting perceptions represent traditional versus modern views of learning. On the one hand, some teachers, particularly those in the group of 'digital immigrants', have a negative perception towards the use of

technologies in EFL learning and seem to glorify traditional learning practices, while learners, on the other hand, admire newly technological innovations in EFL learning.

The finding that teachers had a negative perception towards learners' use of mobile applications is partly a result of both the traditional perception they hold about the learning process and their unpreparedness to break the inherited old-fashioned teaching. This finding complements the findings by Gibbons et al. (2018), Kafyulilo (2014), and Kiwhele and Bali (2013) in Tanzania, Fried (2008) in South Africa, and Mafuraga and Moremi (2017) in Botswana, who reported that teachers had a negative perception towards learners' use of mobile phones for learning. The finding therefore reveals the need to train teachers so that they can be not only aware of the benefits of using mobile applications for learning but also motivated to take advantage of them.

Lastly, the results of this study dispute the findings by Mfaume (2019) that young teachers are always eager to use digital materials, while senior teachers are not. As far as this study is concerned, it is apparent that some young teachers are also reluctant to use digital materials, believing that they are not effective and facilitative for EFL learning. This finding is in line with that of Mahdi and Al-Dera (2013), who assert that teachers' experience and exposure rather than age affect one's consideration of digital materials in education. Therefore, the present findings suggest that exposure and experience are determinant factors for teachers to appreciate digital materials as genuine learning media.

6. Conclusion

Generally, the present study has revealed silent contestation over the use of mobile applications in EFL learning among young learners and teachers in primary schools in Tanzania. In particular, the findings show that learners acknowledged that the mobile application facilitated learning, while most of the teachers in the sample did not consider mobile phones as beneficial because they believed that learners could not learn without teachers' supervision. This study regards the present dispute between learners and teachers and among teachers as the battle between traditions and modernity. Therefore, this study recommends that curriculum designers should consider including topics about the use of digital materials in the EFL teachers' training curriculum. This will help EFL teachers acquire the right perspective on the materials and the skills to select useful materials to use in EFL learning.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares that no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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