Learning Arabic Communication Through the 'Takallam' Application: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

Advancements in technology and communication have had a great impact on language education, necessitating changes in the delivery method of the education system to compete with the demands of the 21st century. This qualitative research aims to design and develop a mobile application for Arabic language communication. The app focuses on improving oral communication skills, including various features such as conversation, vocabulary, grammar, reinforcement activities, and language-based tasks. The ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation) instructional design model was adopted for the development of the application, providing a systematic workflow. The findings of the study show the success of the developed mobile communication Arabic language application called 'Takallam'. Among others, this application is expected to benefit students and users in improving their mastery of Arabic language communication skills.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, technological advancements have continued to progress and impact many aspects of life. It is crucial, for instance, in the field of education, which has led to significant changes in teaching and learning (T&L). As a result, the Malaysian Ministry of Education introduced the Malaysian Education Development Plan (PPPM) 2013-2025, which emphasizes 21st-century learning. Based on this framework, the most important aspect is fostering 'creativity' among educators and encouraging them to include creative elements in teaching materials and classroom activities to stimulate students' creative thinking.

In order to meet the demands of the seventh shift, which involves the integration of technology in teaching and learning, creative elements can be absorbed effectively through the medium of technology. Among the most valuable platforms of technology for foreign language learning are mobile applications. This technology offers quick access to information, which greatly facilitates the learning process. The multimedia features of mobile devices that are now seamlessly integrated into our daily lives allow learning to happen anytime and anywhere (Liu, 2020). In addition, it can also be used as a teaching aid, which makes the task of educators easier, besides improving the effectiveness of learning. The use of technology as part of a teaching tool will boost students' motivation and improve their learning experience (Abdullah et al, 2019). However, the practice of using technology-based teaching aids has not yet been fully maximized in the teaching of Arabic and its use was found in past research to be at a moderate level (Yasim et al., 2016). Learning Arabic language communication without using technology-based teaching aids can cause students to become passive in their communication, thus causing the interaction between the two parties to be limited. Therefore, this study aims to design and develop an Arabic language communication mobile application that focuses on oral communication. The application will combine several components to improve Arabic language communication with focus on oral skills including conversation, vocabulary, grammar lessons, listening exercises, speaking exercises, and interactive activities. The development of the application is crucial in the effort to improve students' proficiency in Arabic oral communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mobile Learning in Language Learning

With the rapid advancement of information and communication technology, education has emerged as a prominent area of focus, particularly in transforming the way people learn. One of the outcomes of this development is the adoption of e-learning in educational institutions, which has paved the way for the emergence of mobile learning (otherwise called m-learning) as a new educational technology. M-learning, an extension of e-learning, aims to enhance the learning process by making learning more flexible and portable (Kumar Basak et al., 2018).

According to Behera (2013), m-learning involves the convergence of e-learning and mobile computing. While it builds upon the foundation of e-learning, the effectiveness of m-learning lies in acknowledging the

unique limitations and advantages of mobile devices. Sa´nchez-Prieto et al. (2016) emphasized that m-learning is a method that is directly connected to e-learning, yet belongs to an independent typology, creating an electronic context for the teaching and learning process.

Despite the widespread application of e-learning and m-learning in various settings, these two modes of learning differ in several aspects and criteria. The primary distinction lies in their respective purposes. E-learning aims to impart comprehensive knowledge and understanding of a subject, whereas m-learning serves the specific purpose of supporting ongoing learning by providing quick access to information when students need it (Nor Hana et al., 2017).

M-learning has gained widespread popularity due to these advancements and is rapidly evolving as a research field in universities. This growth is attributed to the widespread use of mobile devices and their advancing technological capabilities (Öz, 2013). Mobile learning is a unique approach that emerged from the convergence of mobile computing and e-learning, allowing learners to access desired content and interact with others without the constraints caused by geographical boundaries (Todoranova, et al., 2020).

Mobile learning enables language teaching both inside and outside the classroom to happen without the issue of time constraints. However, language learning applications need to be thoughtfully designed in order to be effective. Proficiency in speaking, listening, writing, and reading are essential abilities that empower individuals to comprehend, produce, and utilize a language effectively in interpersonal communication (Putra & Santosa, 2020).

2.2 The Importance of Arabic Communication

Communication is the act of transmitting information and fostering mutual understanding between individuals (Keyton, 2011). The term 'communication' originates from the Latin word 'communis', signifying "common". The definition emphasizes the crucial aspect that for communication to occur, there must be a shared comprehension resulting from the exchange of information. Communication has two forms, which are one-way communication and two-way communication that can happen in a formal or informal setting. Communication is divided into two, namely verbal communication (verbal) and non-verbal communication (non-verbal). One of the most important basic skills for anyone in the new world is the ability to communicate, and this includes communication in a foreign language. Oral communication is the foundation for interactions, whether between individuals or groups. It encompasses various components such as voice or sound, words, speech, and language. Skinner (1972), as cited by Zamri (2007), defined oral communication as a behavioral process in which specific sound patterns prompt individuals to take action. Non-verbal communication is a type of communication where the message is conveyed through body language and gestures, rather than using verbal or written means.

The effectiveness of communication skills plays a pivotal role. Among the four language skills, speaking stands out as the most crucial for effective communication in this globalized era (Srinivas, 2019). In essence, language itself is fundamentally rooted in speaking (Bahruddin, 2018). When individuals learn a language, they are essentially learning to speak. Al Faozan (1435H) emphasized that speaking skills should receive more significant emphasis compared to other language skills since effective communication serves as the primary goal of language learning. Dawud & Bahruddin (2018) stated that speaking skills breathe life into a language, including Arabic. If a language is not spoken by people orally, it could be considered an extinct language, regardless of its existence in written form. Therefore, when learning vocabulary, it is essential to master speaking skills which are crucial compared to other language skills, so that it can be practiced by users to build familiarity with the language and improve speaking abilities. Hence, various endeavors have been undertaken to enhance Arabic speaking skills.

3. Methodology

This qualitative study focuses on the development of the 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application. The systematic design model exhibits a structured framework to systematically develop application designs, including mobile applications. In the design and development phase, various models were employed and each phase had a specific purpose even though they share similar overarching principles. For the 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application development study, the ADDIE instructional design model was adopted as the workflow guide. This model consists of five interconnected phases: a) analysis, b) design, c) development, d) implementation, and e) evaluation, where the phases interact with each other.

The development process of the 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application study consisted of five phases, each with a specific purpose:

1) Analysis: In this initial phase, the target audience of students was identified, and the needs of the mobile application were thoroughly assessed.
2) Design: The second phase involved determining and designing the instructional methods to be utilized within the mobile application.
3) Development: In the third phase, the focus shifted to developing the designed mobile application,

bringing it to life.
4) Implementation: The fourth phase was to test the mobile application's suitability and usability for the target users and ensure it functioned as intended.
5) Evaluation: The fifth and final phase comprised two components: formative evaluation, which aims to enhance the effectiveness of the instructional materials, and summative evaluation, which provides an overall assessment of the produced instructional material.

Furthermore, in the development phase, some instruments as tools were employed in the development of the 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application. The primary software utilized was Adobe Flash Professional CS6, in addition to other applications such as Adobe Animate CC 2023, Adobe Illustrator CC 2023, Adobe Audition CC 2023, Canva, Clip Drop, and Microsoft 365. The application features a comprehensive set of menus to facilitate navigation and user exploration. The starting point comprises nine menus: a) introduction, b) topic selection, c) subtopic, d) conversation, e) vocabulary, f) grammar, g) listening exercise, h) speaking exercise, and i) activity. This arrangement empowers users to select their desired pathway through the 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application. All menus are interconnected through an intuitive interface, offering seamless navigation options to access the desired menu.

4. Results
4.1 Mobile Application Development
The following sub-sections provide an overview of the detailed menus available in the Arabic mobile application.
4.1.1 Introduction Menu Screen
The 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application starts with an introduction screen display. The screen displays the menus that can be found in the application, accompanied by audio in Arabic and English welcoming the users. There is a 'start' button for navigation, which is located in the middle. The display of the introduction menu screen is shown in Figure 1.
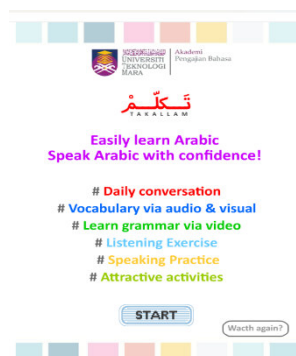

Figure 1. Display of the Introduction Menu Screen

4.1.2 Main menu screen
The main menu screen, as shown in Figure 2, contains five buttons representing five main topics: a) *ana maliziyy*, b) *usrati saidatt*, c) *bayti jamil*, d) *at-taam ladhidh*, d) and *huwa nashit*. Each topic has two subtopics displayed below them. Users can interact with the application by clicking on these buttons to select their desired main topic and subsequently choose the corresponding subtopic. The main topics and their subtopics are related to Arabic language communication, and each subtopic contains five menus which are available in each subtopic as follows: a) conversation menu, b) vocabulary, c) grammar, d) listening exercises, d) speaking exercises and e) activities. Users are encouraged to commence their exploration with the first topic, which is "Ana Maliziyy" to facilitate a better understanding of the subsequent topics.

Figure 2. Main Menu Screen

4.1.3   Conversation Menu Screen

The 'Conversation Menu' in the 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application is described as one of the most important menus. It serves as the main menu and displays conversations related to one of the subtopics. The purpose of this 'Conversation Menu' is to help users learn daily conversations in Arabic. Conversational content is presented in a simple and easy-to-understand format, making it user-friendly and accessible to students. To prevent the content from appearing too dense, the graphics and animations were carefully arranged so that the interaction with the menu is easy. Users can click on four consecutively numbered buttons, where each button represents a paragraph in the conversation. In addition, users can start the conversation by clicking the first button. Subsequently, they can continue clicking the next button to listen to the dialogue between two persons involved in the conversation. To enhance understanding, the user can click on a dictionary displayed at the bottom of the screen for reference, which allows them to look for unfamiliar words or phrases found in the conversation. In essence, the 'Conversation Menu' aims to provide an interesting and effective way for users to practice and improve their Arabic communication skills in real situations. Figure 3 shows the conversation menu.

Figure 3. Conversation Menu

4.1.4 Vocabulary Menu Screen

The 'Vocabulary Menu' is a part of the 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application. It is designed to help users improve their understanding of the topics learned and increase their Arabic vocabulary. It is recommended for users explore this menu after completing the 'Conversation Menu'. The 'Vocabulary Menu' employs a "show and say" approach to aid users in learning new words and their correct pronunciation. The following explains how it works:

1. Clicking the command text: When the user clicks on the command text of the 'Vocabulary Menu', the command will be heard in audio form. This helps users understand what is required of them.
2. Clicking vocabulary buttons: Users are then prompted to click on the vocabulary buttons corresponding to the numbers 1, 2, and 3. Clicking on these buttons will lead to the display of several pictures accompanied by Arabic words.
3. Audio pronunciation and translations: Each image displayed in the 'Vocabulary Menu' is accompanied by Arabic audio that enables users to learn the correct pronunciation of the word. Additionally, translations in text form are also provided, likely in a language familiar to the user (e.g., English) to help them understand the meaning of the Arabic word.

The 'Vocabulary Menu' is designed to be visually clear and user-friendly, making it easier for users to engage with and learn new words effectively. Figure 4 exhibits the vocabulary menu.

Figure 4. Vocabulary Menu

4.1.5 Grammar Menu Screen

This mobile application also provides a grammar menu screen as shown in Figure 5. This menu is provided to improve the user's understanding of Arabic grammar so that they can communicate Arabic correctly. Video elements are the main elements used in conveying Arabic grammar content in a simple and interesting manner. An explanation of Arabic grammar is delivered in Malay. In addition, instructions are also displayed on the screen. The button at the bottom of the screen is for video replay.

Figure 5. Grammar Menu Screen

4.1.6 Listening Exercises Menu Screen

The assessment of the understanding of learning content such as dialogue, vocabulary and grammar is presented through comprehension questions in the 'Listening Exercise Menu'. The questions are presented in audio format. Through the questions, students' achievement in the learning content that has been learned can be measured. This listening exercise menu screen displays the instructions that must be followed by the student before answering the questions presented. Once a question is answered, it will be reviewed immediately. If the question is correct, then a correct symbol will be displayed, but if it is incorrect, a cross symbol will be displayed. The overall score will be displayed once the student answers all the given questions. The listening exercise menu screen is shown

in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Listening Exercise Menu Screen

4.1.7 Speaking Exercises Menu Screen

The speaking exercise menu is important to train users to communicate well in Arabic. There are various forms of speaking exercises provided in this application. Among them is exercise by voice recording and listening back to the voice that has been recorded. The sentence that needs to be recorded is the sentence that has a red round symbol on it. The voice that has been recorded can be heard repeatedly and can be saved on the computer. The speaking training menu screen is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Speaking Exercise Menu

4.1.8 Activities Menu Screen

The 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application also provides an activity menu screen as shown in Figure 5. This menu is provided to further improve Arabic communication skills. There are various activities provided and among them is role-playing. This activity encourages users to act or speak interactively in Arabic as shown in the role-play display. Therefore, it can indirectly allow the user to simulate real life by communicating in Arabic. Once the display is exhibited, the instructions in Arabic will be heard, and the users will be asked to follow the instructions. For this view, the user is not required to click on any button except for the button on the bottom left if he/she wants to exit this view. The role-play menu display is shown in Figure 8.
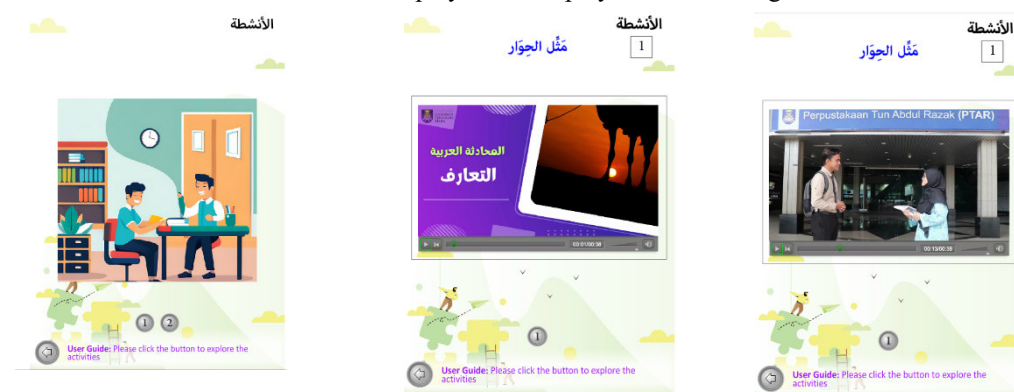

Figure 8. Role-Play Menu Display

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the 'Takallam' Arabic mobile application has been successfully developed and the purpose of this development is to help users who are interested in learning Arabic communication. Besides, it can be utilized as a technology-based teaching aid. The result of the combination of interactive multimedia elements has made this mobile application interesting and suitable for use as one of the mediums of teaching and learning Arabic communication. It is hoped that more innovative and interactive learning and teaching approaches can be improved in the future.

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