American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research

Vol. 7 Issue 2 | **pp.** 1-5 | **ISSN:** 2690-9626
Available online @ https://globalresearchnetwork.us/index.php/ajshr

Article

Mobile-Assisted Vocabulary Learning and its Influence on Learner Autonomy

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Abstract: Contemporary education opportunities has facilitated learning process. This trend can mainly be seen in language learning, especially English language acquisition. In this technology era, employing mobile technologies, online platforms and mobile applications has become prevalent and proven effective in language learning. Mobile-assisted learning has been used in the process of mastering various language skills such as speaking, reading and listening. This article studies the effect of mobile-assisted vocabulary learning on learner autonomy while learning and teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The study shows that Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and self-regulated learning (SRL) can be correlated and mobile applications improve learning independently by promoting self-control, personalized learning, and autonomous engagement with vocabulary. It also demonstrates the research results conducted to prove the efficacy of using mobile application to learn vocabulary and improve their learning autonomy of 9 grade students.

Keywords: Mobile-Assisted Learning, Vocabulary, EFL, Self-Regulated Learning, Learning Autonomy

Citation: Boxodir o'g'li, M. B. Mobile-Assisted Vocabulary Learning and its Influence on Learner Autonomy. American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research 2026, 7(2), 1-5.

Received: 28th Dec 2025
Revised: 15th Jan 2025
Accepted: 30th Jan 2026
Published: 15th Feb 2026

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1. Introduction

Mobile technologies have become prominent in language learning process, providing learners with educational tools that could not be found before in conventional classrooms. Vocabulary knowledge is an integral part of language proficiency according to Nation [1] is usually developed through mobile applications that enhance personalized and self-paced study.

Learner autonomy— is often regarded as the ability to regulate one's study—is considered essential for sustainable proficiency in EFL contexts. Many researches demonstrate that improving learning autonomy promotes better self-regulated behavior and other crucial learning skills. Even though a great many investigations have been conducted on mobile vocabulary learning thoroughly, there is still gap that should be studied deeply such as the effect of mobile assisted learning on developing learner autonomy.

Learner autonomy includes various elements that are essential characteristics in academic process. These can be regarded as competence of setting goals, distinguishing and selecting appropriate strategies, achieving and evaluating one's progress, and reflecting on learning results. Many researchers and pedagogues put their viewpoints forward on learning autonomy. For instance, Zimmerman [2], [3] defines self-regulated

learning (SRL) as learners' ability to stimulate and sustain cognitive, emotional, and behavioral actions toward learning objectives.

Mobile assisted learning is often correlated to the use of mobile devices to improve language learning in various educational settings. There are many features that mobile devices offer such as spaced repetition, multimedia opportunities, and immediate and personalized feedback on learners' performance improve and accelerate vocabulary acquisition and stimulate learner engagement in language learning process. Some studies suggest that MALL offer learner-friendly and engaging environment that can enhance self-regulated practices, including goal-oriented learning and choosing a relevant strategy [4,5].

Mobile applications and devices enable learners to the content and the ways of learning rather than limiting them into the content and the method chosen according to education standards or teacher's preference. To illustrate this, personalized learning opportunities in mobile assisted learning can foster internal motivation and a clear sense of independence among language learners. It is also reported that the use of mobile devices and applications in teaching languages promotes self-regulated behavior such as evaluation of progress and setting goals throughout the period.

Literature Review

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is the use of mobile devices in supporting language learning in flexible and context-independent environments. According to Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, MALL allows learners to learn at any time and at any place, which differentiates MALL from traditional learning methods[6]. The portability and versatility of mobile devices make MALL suitable for learning vocabulary.

Research on MALL shows that mobile devices can support vocabulary learning. Mobile applications can provide learners with repeated exposure to new words, which can improve vocabulary learning. According to Stockwell, repeated exposure to new words can improve vocabulary learning[7]. Mobile devices can provide learners with repeated exposure to new words. In addition, Stockwell asserts that repeated exposure can be done in short intervals, which can improve vocabulary learning[8].

According to Nation, effective vocabulary learning can be done through repeated exposure to new words. Research on MALL shows that learners who use mobile devices can learn new words better than those who do not use the devices. According to Burston, learners who use mobile devices can learn new words better than those who do not use the devices[9-10].

2. Methodology

The research was conducted with 9 grade students learning English as a foreign language. For this, the application called "9 grade vocabulary" was selected since this application was specifically created for 9 grade students in Uzbekistan schools based on the coursebook "Prepare" published by Cambridge assessment. Students were divided into 2 groups. Experiment group and monitor group. The first group were encouraged to use mobile app to learn vocabulary from the coursebook while the latter group studied in a conventional way. More than 300 students were involved in the experiment and their learning process was monitored meticulously over 6 months using pre, while and post testing.

There are a few indicators of learner autonomy that can be seen in language learners:

- **Self-regulated goal-oriented:** learners are able to determine their academic goals and plan their study sessions autonomously.
- **Personalized learning process:** mobile applications help learners select appropriate and desired materials according to their needs and preferences, that improves their independence.

- **Encouragement:** sense of motivation and positive attitudes towards mobile learning that pushes learners to get involved in the lessons more.

3. Results

The results demonstrate that using mobile apps in language learning, especially vocabulary not only is it effective, but also promotes learning autonomy.

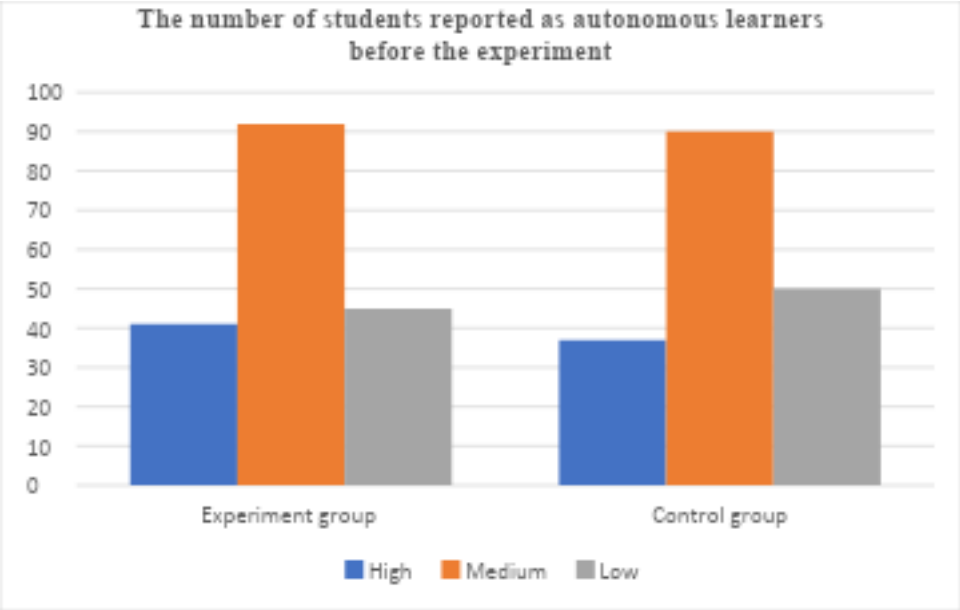

Figure 1. The number of students reported as autonomous learners before the experiment

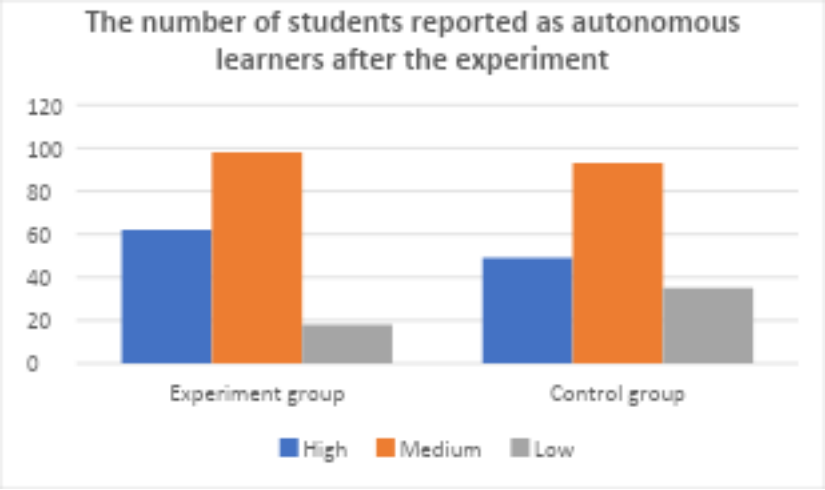

Figure 2. The number of students reported as autonomous learners after the experiment

Although some positive changes were also observed in the control group (177 students), they were not as considerable as in the experimental group. The number of high-level students who showed better vocabulary acquisition and practiced independently increased by 12 (7%), the number of medium-level students increased by 3 (1%), and the number of low-level students decreased by 15 (8%). These indicators show that although the natural development process continued in the control group, these changes were not as significant as in the experimental group[11].

From the analysis of the dynamic results, it can be seen that the training sessions conducted using the mobile application played a particularly important role in improving the performance of low-level students promoting their autonomy. In the experimental group, the number of those who advanced to a higher level with higher level of autonomy was almost twice as high as in the control group, and the number of those who dropped out of a low level was also significantly higher. This scientifically confirms the effectiveness of the mobile application used in the pilot study.

4. Discussion

In recent years, studies have demonstrated how mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has been influential in fostering learner autonomy. Learners are able to use mobile apps to have more flexibility or more choice in the way that they learn and to track their progress and receive immediate feedback for self-directed learning.

According to Kukulska-Hulme, by allowing learners to control their own learning, mobile learning environments tend to promote learner autonomy by transferring control of learning from the teacher to the learner[12,13].

Research suggests that MALL has not only aided in the development of vocabulary, but also in assisting learners in becoming self-regulated and independent. Because learners can access learning materials at any time, they are able to take responsibility for their progress and thus establish long-term habits for language acquisition[14]. Although there are large differences in the ways in which mobile technologies can be used across different contexts, a common theme emerges – that mobile technologies afford opportunities that are in line with principles of learner autonomy such as choice in what a learner wants to do, feedback, and control over one's own strategy.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, mobile-assisted language learning has become common, facilitated learning process and improved learning outcomes. Mobile-assisted vocabulary learning can have a greatly positive effect on learners promoting their independence, self-regulation on vocabulary learning and positive attitudes towards language learning process. The experiment mainly focused on 9 grade pupils in schools of Uzbekistan and conducted in 2 experiment and control groups.

As it was demonstrated with figures, the number of language learners who enhanced learning outcomes, motivation to learning vocabulary and autonomous learning has significantly risen. Overall, applying mobile applications in EFL classes has already been proven efficacious both academically and psychologically.

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