STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON LEXICAL BUNDLE MOBILE APPLICATION FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Muhamad Izzat Rahim*, Nur' Ain Binti Zuraimi

*Academy of Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Kuala Pilah, 72000 Kuala Pilah,
Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia*

*Corresponding author: izzatrahim@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

Group discussion is an important discourse for students in universities and colleges. It is used widely for pedagogical and assessment purposes especially in English language classes. Albeit the important status, some students are struggling with group discussion. It is suggested for the students to be equipped with relevant lexical bundles. As such this study aims to present the perceptions of sixteen undergraduate students on the usage of lexical bundle mobile application. They were instructed to complete a task using the application. Later, their perceptions towards the application were recorded. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the feedbacks. Three themes emerged from the analysis of feedbacks namely benefits, usage, and recommendations. It was found that majority of the students viewed the utilisation of the lexical bundle mobile application as beneficial. Similarly, many of them said that the application was easy to be used. Although there were negative feedbacks on the usage, it only represented a little percentage from the total number of the students. Additionally, the students provided constructive recommendations for future improvement. In brief, the findings of this study could be used as reference for the development and usage of lexical bundle mobile application as mobile application could be one of the instruments utilised in language classes.

Keywords: Lexical bundle, Group discussion, Mobile Application

Introduction

Rapid development of technology nowadays has brought tremendous changes in the world of education. For instance, language classes are now more interactive and flexible with the introduction of technology. The changes have enabled both language teachers and students to interact with each other almost anywhere and everywhere. One such technology is coined as Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL).

Rodríguez-Arancón et al. (2013) described MALL as learning and teaching language by using mobile devices such as smartphones, laptops and tablets. It is common to see both teachers and students utilise mobile devices in language classes nowadays. The devices are used as tools to deliver language learning materials to the students. This sub-area of mobile learning is getting much attention from many parties as it provides many advantages such as flexible learning, low cost as well as user friendly (Viberg & Grönlund, 2012).

As a result, MALL has been the focus of many studies by scholars. The studies view MALL from various perspective such as effectiveness of MALL (Gonulal, 2019; Al-Fahad, 2009; Evans, 2008), theory application in MALL (Viberg et al., 2020; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008) as well as students' perceptions on MALL (Ganapathy et al., 2014; Rahim et al., 2019). All these studies provide valuable insights on MALL and its usage for language learning.

Albeit the existence of many studies, MALL continues to be one of the focuses within the language learning spectrum. There is a common consensus among scholars that more studies from various perspective are needed to have a better understanding of MALL (Huang et al., 2012; Viberg & Grönlund, 2012, Rahim et al., 2019). Hence, this study aims to explore and report on students' perceptions towards a mobile application on lexical bundles. The mobile application was developed with the aim of assisting students in spoken discourse specifically in group discussion.

Group discussion can commonly be described as the process of exchanging views on a particular topic. It is considered as an important discourse especially in universities and colleges. It is well documented that group discussion is being used largely for pedagogical and testing purposes. Commonly, instructors use group discussion in teaching their students as it helped the students to improve academically (Fall et al., 2000; Costa et al., 2007; Lestari, 2019). In addition, group discussion exposed students to various skills such as speaking, collaborative, and communication skills. In term of testing, group discussion is an integral component for language competency testing such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

Similar situation can be observed in Malaysia as group discussion is used widely at tertiary level. Many higher learning institutions incorporate group discussion as teaching strategy or assessments. Additionally, similar to IETLS and TOEFL, Malaysian University English Test (MUET) also utilises group discussion in assessing students speaking skills. This shows group discussion is widely accepted locally and internationally. Hence, it is a significant discourse for students.

However, despite the ubiquitous status of group discussion in Malaysian universities and colleges, some students find group discussion challenging. There are many reasons for this problem and one of them is poor language proficiency. Osman and Jusoff (2009) explained that poor language proficiency among Malaysian students is the main reason for their poor performance especially in spoken discourse. The same view is shared by Nadesan and Md. Shah (2020) when they posited that incompetence in speaking skills has resulted in poor performance by Malaysian students in spoken discourse. They added that students are especially passive when they are put in a spoken interaction.

One way to remedy this is to expose students to lexical bundles. Bieber and Barbieri (2007) loosely defined lexical bundles as recurrent sequence of words used in specific context of discourse. They considered lexical bundles as important building blocks in a spoken or written discourse. Heng et al. (2014) clarified that the idea of lexical bundles is derived from the study of formulaic patterns of language. By studying the pattern of language, common patterns could be detected in a particular discourse. As a result, the language pattern could help language users to effectively function and interact in any particular spoken or written discourse.

The idea of equipping students with relevant lexical bundles has attracted many scholars to study it. In an investigative study by Osman and Jusoff (2009), it was found that non-native students were able to improve students' communicative ability after being exposed to prefabricated sequences or lexical phrases. Phrases such as "May I interrupt?", "I think you are right about that", and "Could you be more specific?" were given to students before a speaking test was conducted. The students were given three weeks to familiarise themselves with the phrases. It was found that students were able to communicate well during the test by utilising the given phrases. Osman and Jusoff (2009) concluded their study by suggesting students to be exposed to relevant lexical phrases to improve students' communicative ability.

Another relevant study on lexical bundle was conducted by Heng et al. (2014) where the structure, frequency, as well as the functions of lexical bundles within a corpus of group discussion of proficient nonnative university undergraduate students were studied. The study found that students normally employed lexical bundles during group discussion. A total of seventy-two lexical bundles were identified from the corpus. The lexical bundles ranged from three to five-word bundles. Such findings showed the importance of lexical bundles in group discussion. In the end, Heng et al. (2014) suggested

for lexical bundles to be included in the syllabus of courses to cater to the students' needs.

A more recent study on the effect of lexical bundles was conducted by Zipagan and Lee (2018). In this investigative study, they explored the usage of lexical bundles towards the development of English language among Korean students. Four-unit lexical bundles were used to teach the students before they sat for Oral Proficiency Interview by computer (OPIc). The findings suggested that there was a positive relationship between the usage of lexical bundles with the test results. Furthermore, they argued that second language learners of English language like the Korean students had limited vocabulary hence they tend to overuse certain phrases and words. Thus, they concluded their study by suggesting for second language students to be exposed to more lexical bundles which could help them to become more proficient.

The aforementioned studies show the significance of lexical bundles for students especially the non-native speakers of English. It could be suggested that lexical bundles can improve students' communicative ability in speaking as well as helping them to become proficient users of English language. Additionally, the findings of the studies support views by Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) and Porto (1998) where they reported that lexical bundle could help students in language learning. Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) explained that exposure to lexical bundle would allow fluency among students in using a language while Porto (1998) added that this could enhance students' motivation to learn. At this point, it could be suggested that exposing students to lexical bundles will benefits students tremendously.

Responding to the importance of lexical bundle for students especially in language learning, a mobile application was developed. The decision to develop the mobile application is based on studies by scholars like Thornton and Houser (2005) and Viberg and Grönlund (2012) when they suggested that mobile devices and application could help students to learn language better. As summarised by Thornton and Houser (2005), mobile devices are indeed an effective teaching and learning tool that delivering language learning materials to the language students.

The objective of the mobile application is providing students with relevant lexical bundles in the context of group discussion. The mobile application consists of lexical bundles that are grouped into several themes such as agreement, disagreement, discussion strategies, and idioms. All of these are useful lexical bundle in the context of group discussion. The lexical bundles were derived from major textbooks and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) word list.

Additionally, the application is built using a simple presentation platform. The platform is a common application that can be run in most devices such as laptop and smartphone. This would ensure many students could utilise the application without having too much requirement especially in term of hardware. Hence, the students can focus more on the lexical bundles rather than the technical requirement of the mobile application.

Since, the mobile application is in its early stage, it is important to listen to feedbacks from users especially the students. Afterall, collecting and analysing feedback from users are common practices by application developers. Studies like the ones from Azli et al. (2018), Rahim et al. (2019), and Nuraeni et al. (2020) studied the perceptions of students towards mobile application developed for students. The findings of such studies provide valuable insight from the perspective of students who are the main users of the application.

Therefore, this study aims to report on students' perceptions towards the lexical bundle mobile application. This exploratory study surveys the students' perceptions on the usage of lexical bundle mobile application after using it. The students' perceptions are significant towards the development of the application as well as the usage of lexical bundle for pedagogical purposes.

Methods

Study Design

This study adopted a qualitative method of data analysis. To be specific, the collected data was analysed using thematic analysis. This method is a systematic way to identify, organise, and recognising insight from a set of data (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Two researchers were involved with the thematic analysis. This was hoped to increase the validity of the data as cross check and discussion were done regularly by the two researchers.

Sixteen undergraduate students volunteered to be the respondents for this study. They belonged to the same cohort. Additionally, all students enrolled in the same undergraduate program. The students were introduced to the lexical bundle mobile application through a face-to-face meeting. It was a simple application that consisted of important lexical bundles for discussion. For example, there were lexical bundles from expressing agreement as well as disagreement. No specific skills or requirement were needed to use and run the application. Figure 1 illustrates the lexical bundle mobile application.

Figure 1. Lexical bundle mobile application

During the meeting, the students were first given instructions on how to utilise the mobile application. The briefing continued with hands-on training on how to use the mobile application to each student so that they understood how to utilise the application. After a few rounds of testing the mobile application, the researchers administered a non-graded task for the students. It was a speaking task where students were instructed to discuss a simple topic with a partner. They were allowed to use the mobile application while conducting the discussion. The task was administered to provide authentic experience for the students on using the mobile application before providing their feedbacks on the application.

Once the task was done, students were instructed to provide feedbacks on the lexical bundle mobile application. The feedback focused on the experience of the students in using the application. The feedback was collected using an online form. The students were given a week to provide feedbacks. In that time, students were allowed to use the application on their own in order for them to reflect and provide feedbacks.

Data Analysis

The collected feedbacks were first labelled for ease of analysis and reference. The labelling was done based on each feedback received. Later, they were analysed using thematic analysis by both researchers. In this process, the researchers decided on the coding of the theme by reading thoroughly the feedbacks from the students. Words and phrases were group in order to come up with the themes. Table 1 shows samples of words and phrases based on the themes found.

Table 1. Samples of words and phrases

Benefits	Ease of use	Recommendations
1. Word tiles **allow me to carry on a conversation or have a discussion** with someone without feeling uneasy.	1. **easily access the word** they want to use without searching one by one using Google.	1. add more **learning materials**
2. **Beneficial apps** to help student usually when communication	2. can use it **anytime**	2. **make it auto flip** to normal when the button home hit
3. **Great app** for students	3. it is **not complicated and easy to use**	3. **should add a sound** for who to pronounce the sentence correctly
4. **help many students** who stuck with words		4. put out a **section for conjunction**

The data analyses were separately done at first before results from both researchers were compared and discussed. Series of discussions were conducted to address any discrepancies. Analysis was done until point of saturation was reached. At this point no new theme emerged from the collected feedbacks. Later the findings from the analysis were tabulated and discussion was provided to clearly illustrate the findings.

Result and Discussion

Overall, three themes emerged from the thematic analysis of students' feedback. These themes represented the students' perceptions on the usage of the lexical bundle mobile application. The three themes were benefits, usage, and recommendations. The students described the benefits that they obtained or perceived from the mobile application while completing the speaking task. The second theme was usage where it represented students' perceptions on the usage of the mobile application. Lastly, few students left recommendations for future improvements of the lexical bundle mobile application.

The first theme found from the feedbacks was benefits. Here students described the benefits that they gained by using the mobile application. They explained how the mobile application helped them in doing the speaking task given to them earlier. A total of nine students were found to provide such feedbacks on the mobile application. The analysis reveal that all students responded positively in term of benefits of using the mobile application. Most students cited benefits in terms of their study especially on speaking skills.

One student wrote "super helpful for us that trying to be better in our English-speaking ability" while another student explained "beneficial apps to help student usually when communication great app for students". From the feedbacks, it can be argued that the students perceived the mobile application positively. This is particularly true when it comes to speaking skills.

Additionally, the students also agreed that the mobile application was a useful tool to help them whenever they have difficulty to speak in English. One student stated "very useful and very help many students who stuck with words" while another student mentioned "it can help students who are short of ideas". This goes to show that the lexical bundle in the mobile application may offer alternatives for students for when they are in need of guidance and assistance especially in a speaking task.

The findings for the first theme lend support to the suggestion made by scholars like by Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992), and Porto (1998) when they explained that lexical bundle able to help students in the mastery of language. The positive feedbacks reflected on the usefulness of lexical bundles in the mobile

66

application. Hence, it could be suggested that the mobile application can be used as teaching and learning instrument.

In contrast with the first theme the analysis showed that the students had mixed perceptions towards the usage of the lexical bundle mobile application. While all students provided positive feedbacks, there were also three students who listed out the challenges in using the mobile application. Hence, the three students had mixed perceptions when it comes to the usage of the application.

The majority of students used words like "easy" and "not complicated" to describe the experience in using the mobile application. For example, one student wrote "it is not complicated and easy to use" while another student responded, "easily access the word they want to use without searching one by one using Google". While the two challenges as listed out by the students were "However, I believe that the usage of design word tiles makes it slow and tough", for me the animation on the picture is more confusing than just using transitions on the slide", and "Besides, the card flipping also took some time for students to look at one by one, I think it will be not suitable when students want to use this apps while explaining on the spot".

Indeed, the findings provided valuable insight towards the mobile application and its usage. Although the positive feedbacks outweighed the negative ones, the researchers need to take the challenges into consideration for future improvement. After all, as stated by Viberg and Grönlund (2012), mobile application for language learning should be user friendly as to assist the students in learning.

The last theme emerged from the analysis was recommendations. Eleven students provided their recommendations for the betterment of the application. This represented the majority of the respondents for this study. Examples of recommendations found are "put out a section for conjunction", "organized according to the level of the phrases", and "add more learning materials".

The recommendations reflected the students' positive perceptions on the mobile application. They wanted more features and improvement to be added to the application. As such, the recommendations provided more ideas to further develop the mobile application in order to aid students' learning. In a way, the mobile application can be said to address students' passiveness in terms of spoken interaction as posited by Nadesan and Md. Shah (2020). This can be seen where students actively provided feedback on the lexical bundle mobile application.

Overall, the three themes suggested that the students perceived the lexical bundle mobile application positively. In terms of benefits, all students cited that the application might be beneficial for them academically. For the usage, although some challenges were highlighted, the majority of the students believed that the usage of the mobile application was easy. Lastly, some recommendations were provided by the students for future improvement. At the same time, the negative perceptions on the usage of the application could not be ignored as they were in fact a valuable insight from the students.

Pedagogically, the findings might shed some lights on the usage of lexical bundle and mobile application in teaching students. Generally, the majority of the students perceived the mobile application as useful for them. It can be suggested that mobile application is a suitable teaching and learning aid for language classes. Additionally, the findings also suggested that lexical bundle is a beneficial feature for students for their study especially towards the learning of speaking skills. As posited by Porto (1998), lexical bundles are highly memorable for learners hence it could assist them in using the language. The same view is shared by Mohammadi and Enayati (2018) when they explained that lexical bundle can definitely be beneficial to students in term of their proficiency as well as academic achievement. Hence language teachers might want to include lesson involving lexical bundles. The lexical bundle can be exposed to students earlier in the semester before they are expected to produce an output such as completing a task or sitting down for a test.

At the same time, the researchers can consider the recommendations from the findings to further improve the mobile application in the future. Afterall, the views from the users are especially valuable in the development of a mobile application.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of students in using lexical bundle mobile application. Three themes emerged from the analysis namely benefits, usage, and recommendations. Generally, the students perceive the lexical bundle mobile application as positive in terms of benefits and usage. Additionally, the students provided recommendations that could be used to develop the mobile application.

Although there were some negative views about the mobile application, it only represents a small number from the total respondents in this study. Thus, it can be said that the positive view weighed out the negative views. The negative views can be seen as opportunity to further enhance the mobile application.

This is a preliminary study on students' perceptions towards the lexical bundle mobile application. Thus, more studies are needed to understand the effect of the lexical bundle mobile application towards students especially on the learning of speaking skills in English language. Moving forward, future studies could study the effect by conducting experimental research involving two or more groups of students. This would provide more valuable insight on the usage of the lexical bundle mobile application.

Author Contribution
Muhamad Izzat Rahim – Supervision, conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft;
Nur' Ain Binti Zuraimi - Writing – review & editing, formal analysis

Conflict of Interest
Author declares no conflict of interest.

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