Aloud Reader Android App. for Self-directed Speech Training

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Abstract

Self-directed learners who are techie are usual with android mobile phone as device of foreign language learning. Several free android applications installed from *Google Play Store* are suitable for practising English to improve spoken English skills independently and inexpensively. Those applications with specific functionalities make easy oral fluency practice. Learner can trained himself speaking fluently and pronuncing words correctly as well using *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*., that is able converting written text into audio text. The training program on the android application usage to help students train themselves was carried out in one of senior high schools in Kabupaten Serang, namely SMAN 1 Pabuaran, whose students have already owned android mobile phone with lack of knowledge about functionality of android application for spoken English skill improvement. Using the application, students decide what text they want to hear and do mirroring the voice of native speaker during set. The students confidently performed their speech in English at speech performance session. It was found that the application has been suitable with the students needs to pronunce English words better.

Keywords*: Android mobile phone, @Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app., self-directed learning, spoken English skill.*

Introduction

Teaching English as foreign language related to speaking ability is a challenge for teachers mostly who teach high schools in Indonesia district villages. Some of the reasons come from the teachers' limited knowledge for teaching English pronunciation and the availability of teaching time. In fact, the time allocation of English as school subjects in the 2013 Curriculum is only 2 hours a week, with 45 minutes each. Whereas, the students have depended on the teachers as their main resource for learning English since it is impossible to take course in training center whose location is far from school and the students' residence. In addition, the cost factor for courses becomes other obstacle. The barriers may lessen when both teachers and students are users of android mobile phones because some researchers have studied that implementation of mobile technology promises development of teaching and learning method encompassing English as foreign language skills. Meanwhile, either teachers or students of high schools in Indonesia district villages utilize the mobile phone only for their entertainment needs, virtual socialization and tele-communication.

Especially in district village, high school students who are naturally techie as the users of android phone must be convinced that their android phones can alternate teachers as the source of learning to do practicing English after class hours and to be independent learners. On the other hand, teachers must continue to meet the students' needs about English competencies based on the school curriculum without ignoring information technology as learning aid for students.

This article addresses an alternative learning tool that is android application to help students train themselves correct pronunciations for delivering speech that one of objective cores in English subject for high school based on the 2013 Curriculum. The app. named *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*. is likely to be a personal trainer for student for practicing their pronunciation to improve their speech fluency by doing shadowing or mirroring what they hear from the *@Voice Aloud Reader* , which reads aloud the text displayed in an Android app, e.g. web pages, news articles, long emails, sms, PDF files and more.

Students' Problems in Delivering English Speech

One of English skills students learn during school course is delivering personal English speech. Student competency in composing oral texts to deliver presentations has become one of English basic competencies in the 2013 High School Curriculum in Indonesia. Oral presentation problem experienced by most of EFL students is pronunciation promoting speech fluency. Gilakjani (2017) gets along with what Richard and Rogers (2001) have stated that pronunciation is likely improved by reading aloud that exposes oral repetition activity. Gilakjani (2017) has convinced that teacher should be a pronunciation model as well as a feedback provider for students. Actually, practicing reading aloud must consume a lot of time while English teachers have limited duration of instructional tasks at class. Moreover, the teachers who worry about their L1 accent interrupting correctness of pronunciation may avoid demand of native alike pronunciation modeling. As the result, L2 students lack efficient listening exposures with pronunciation accuracies during oral reading practice.

M-Learning for Shelf-directed Speech Training

Recommending some methods of pronunciation practice, Gilakjani (2017) suggests teachers to use technology for example, Computer Assisted Pronunciation Teaching (CAPT) to lessen tension of teaching pronunciation with native-alike accent because students can practice pronunciation skill through repeating what the native speaker models say and receive instant feedbacks by Automatic Speech Recognition (SAR) so that they independently do correcting inaccuracies made. Thomson (2011) states "computer-mediated instruction uniquely affords the possibility for learners to access the type of training that can lead to significant improvement in L2 pronunciation". The use of technology for EFL teaching and learning has been developed through mobile learning. Cheung (2012, p. 90) and Huang et al.'s (2012,p. 11) convince that mobile learning offers flexibility of time and place for learning without losing opportunity of switch on collaborative mode in learning. Wu et al. (2012, p. 817) argues that m-learning through mobile device has been popular for its simplicity and cost.

Along the increasing number of language learning apps. that run on mobile operating system of android phone, students are easily browse, download and update apps published by Google and third-party developers in their mobile device. Nooriafshar (2012) notes that there is a lot of language learning apps. that are supporting students to apply mobile learning effectively based on personal needs of learning and to promote learning motivation and achievement. Steel (2012) studied that language learning apps. installed by students in their mobile device provide language exposures more than what they get during learning in the classroom, engage them intensely at their own pace of L2 learning.

***@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*. for Speech Training**

Mobile language learning apps. exploit various aspects of practicing. Sweeny et. al (2012) classifies types of learning apps. based on the functionality, features of practice and task mode.

Table 1. App Styles and Definitions

Utility apps.	-Look-up function -no practice mode
Productivity apps.	-offer sufficient practice -more fully featured (with a range of connected functionalities)
Immersive apps.	-used to play games, view media and perform specialised tasks -offer a full-screen, visually-rich environment which is focused on the content and the user's experience with that content.

Source: Sweney (2012, p.2)

Language learning apps. which are dedicated to aim EFL learning such as dictionaries, vocabulary enrichment, reading skill improvement, evaluating of grammar, listening , writing skills, course book apps and teacher resources may be formed as utility app., productivity app., or immersive app.

@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app., is categorized as productivity app. which reads text input in the software. The app. encompasses individualised learning approach and set Personal Learning Environment (PLE). According to Gu (2016) who is in line with Harmalen (2006), PLE is related to learning approach via technology to bring student language learners through their self-directed learning goals, manage their learning contents, implementing learning strategies, and in the same time communicating with others with the purpose of achieving learning goals. The users of *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*., likely set their PLE when using the app. to improve their pronunciation skill by imitating the sound of speech models who are native speakers. Further, when pronunciation training might be possible in limited classroom meeting, the app. alternates conventional pronunciation practice into independently mobile at low cost since it's free app. Foote and Kim (2017, p. 35) say that shadowing need no "explicit instruction", only combining listening and repeating aloud what is heard.

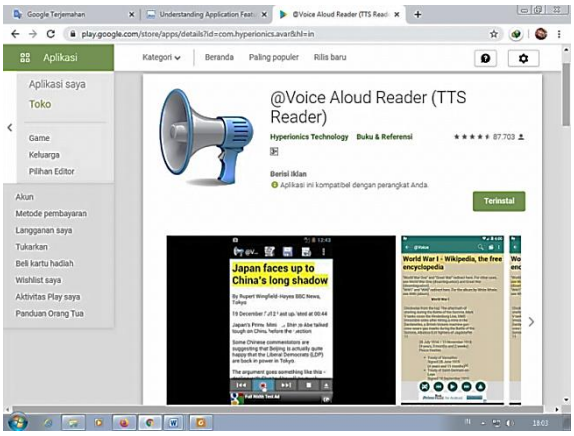

Figure 1. *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*.

Formulating shadowing mode as SE=L+M+S, Wang (2017) explains that SE means shadowing exercise, L symbolizes learner's ability of listening and analyzing, M is short term memory activited and S means learner's speaking ability. Therefore, everytime using *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*. for speech training, students practicing shadowing must comprehend what is heard so that the material should be schripted to be easily memorized and

to be fluently repeated in their speech. Some features of *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*. that support speech training by shadowing method are explained in the table below.

Table 2. Features of *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*. for Shadowing Experience

Features of App.	Mode	Experience
@Voice Aloud Reader reads aloud the text copied and displayed in the clipboard that is able to open text, PDF, doc, docx, RTF, OpenOffice documents or HTML files from Android file system for reading aloud.	L (listening & analysing)	Users can compose their own script of speech and train their listening
@Voice Aloud Reader save articles opened to its files for later listening.	L & M (listening, analysing & memorizing)	Users decide their own frequency of listening practice to revive memory anytime in offline mode
@Voice Aloud Reader facilitates translating by long-press word and/or select a longer phrase to view dictionaries, translations, Wikipedia, Web search and more .	L & M (listening, analysing & memorizing)	Users can easily understand the words or sentences they hear and repeat and memorize.
@Voice Aloud Reader provides some languages with some native voices to choose manually and use the selected ones with "Select language" menu item. The volume, pitch and rate of voice selected is easily controled manually.	L & S (listening, analysing & speaking)	Users are able to adjust the volume, pitch and rate of the speech they want to listen to and orally repeat based on personal needs.

Experimental Steps of PLE along Speech Training

Since the app. is used to set personal learning environment (PLE) along the speech training, students need to manage the content, the strategies of shadowing including how to effectively keep what they hear in memory during repeating words in correct pronunciation and revive their memory when delivery speech.

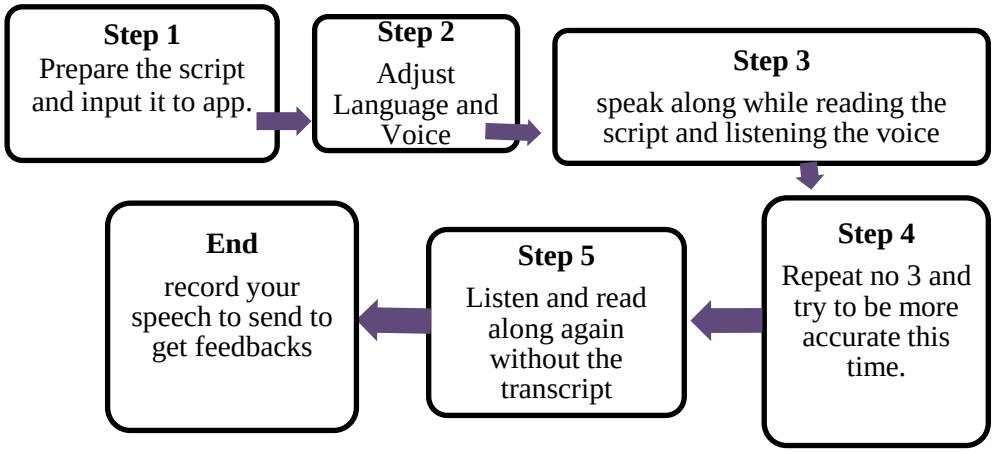

Figure 2. Steps of PLE in Shadowing using *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader)*

The speech training using *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*. was applied to 20 students of SMAN 1 Pabuaran, Kabupaten Serang. The experiment resulted shadowing experience using the android application to prepare oral presentation in English. The pronunciation practice was done by following the steps of PLE previously explained in Figure 2. When doing step 3, 4, and 5, students were asked to do at least 3 times for each or flexibly at their needs and allowed to do all of them outside the class with/without headset to hear the model's voice to understandd and repeat. The pronunciation and intonation heard through must be mirrored as accurately as possible.

Findings

Language learning applications to practice spoken English skill is still very new for students of SMAN 1 Pabuaran, Kabupaten Serang. The following table simply illustrates some applications available on Playstore they have already known and use in android mobile phones.

Table 3. Android Application Used by Students

Application Name	Students who use (% of total participants)
Social Media (WA, FB, IG, etc.)	100%
Entertainment (games, webtoon, spotify, etc.)	100%
Google Translate	70%
WPS office	20%
@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app.	0%

The following is a brief look at the table for improving the ability to recite words and intonation of sample texts before and after using the app. The script contained 38 words that were new for the students.

Table 4. Incorrectness of Pronunciation and intonation of words in The Speech Script

Volunteer	Errors before using the application	After using the application
A	5 of 38 words	2 of 38 words
B	12 out of 38 words	7 of 38 words
C	8 of 38 words	3 of 38 words
D	3 of 38 words	0 of 38 words

Conclusion

Pronunciation practice with mobile android app., must offer a valuable personal learning environment which actually promotes experience of shadowing involving listening and speaking skill and activating memory. The effectiveness of mobile android app., e.g *@Voice Aloud Reader (TTS Reader) app*. to improve pronunciation skill should be studied further.

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