THE PERCEPTION OF IRAQI EFL LEARNERS TOWARDS THE USE OF MALL APPLICATIONS FOR SPEAKING IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The current study is an attempt to understand the perceptions of Iraqi EFL learners about the use of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications for the purpose of speaking skills improvement. The respondents of the study are 51 EFL students enrolled in the Bachelor program in the department of English Language in the Faculty of Education for Humanities at Anbar University, Rammadi, Iraq. The respondents are chosen from different academic years. The data collection is carried out using a structured interview questions adopted form Son's (2016) study. However, the adopted interview survey is structured in the form of open questions rather than close questions (See Appendix A). The open interview questions give the respondents more freedom in clarifying their perceptions about the proposed MALL applications, whereby the researcher could collect rich information about the preferred characteristics of MALL applications for EFL students to improve their English speaking skills. The results of the study revealed that the respondents have a positive view and attitude towards using MALL applications for speaking improvement. The outcome of the study is advantageous for learners, teachers and language academies to highlight the importance of using MALL applications for language skills improvement and speaking skills in particular.

INTRODUCTION

The use of MALL applications is currently increasing with the growing use of smart phones and handheld devices. In the current time, the mobile technologies and smartphones are integrated with learning and teaching processes. Therefore, the wide use of smartphones and other portable devices has been significantly changing the ways of learning in many contexts, including language learning (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009). As far as speaking skills are concerned, they should be mastered by every language learner. This is for the importance of speaking in communicating in a good and professional way.

Previous studies have shown that Arab EFL learners, including Iraqi learners, are encountering serious problems in speaking (Al Hosni, 2016; Al-Jamal & Ghadeer, 2014). Al Hosni argued that speaking skill of Arab EFL students should be developed effectively due to its direct implementation in oral communication. However, the speaking skills of Arab EFL learners still below the expectations (Alrabai, 2016; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Fareh, 2010). That is why a new learning

style, other than the traditional classroom, should be adopted by EFL learners in order to improve speaking skills.

One of the significant learning styles that can be used to help learners to improve speaking skills is the use of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) Applications (Dehkordi & Taki, 2018) . The learning based on various and preferred styles would encourage the students to expend more efforts and time for speaking. This argument is supported by Picon's (2015) study in which the researcher investigated the use of mobile learning to enhance and improve speaking skills of 23 learners. The results of the research shown that mobile learning have a positive effect on English language skills among the participants.

According to Torky (2006) one of the practical ways to improve speaking skills is the use of technology that exists nowadays. Furthermore, Bamanger & Alhassan (2015) argued that one of the main skills to be greatly developed through the use of MALL applications is said to be speaking skills. MALL can play this effective role in developing speaking skills (Tuttle, 2013;

Rodrigues, 2015). Using MALL can make students feel more interested in learning English, especially during speaking because of the flexibility in time and place that is provided with the use of mobile applications, and the variety of learning styles to acquire the speaking knowledge.

The learners' engagement in the use of MALL applications is with a significant role to achieve better results. This engagement could be reflected by the perception shown by the learners towards using the applications in the learning and improving processes of English language speaking. This research examines the perceptions of Iraqi EFL learners to use MALL applications for speaking improvement in the informal context out of the classroom depending on self directed efforts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the area of mobile learning applications has been explored by several researchers, the exploring of using mobile applications to enhance English speaking skills still have left out various domains unexplored in the mobile learning environment (Mohsen Shahrokhi & Mina Kamyabi, 2016). Studies analyzing the mobile technology's use in the different aspects of language learning have supported the idea that mobile technology can enhance learners' foreign language learning. Learners' attitudes towards technologies, their intention to use it, and the various actual uses of mobile technology integrated in their foreign language learning is a dominating research focus (Chang & Hsu, 2011; Cheng et al., 2010 etc.)

Over few years, the mobile market has changed radically with the advent of smartphone devices with android system and Apple products with iOS system such as iPad and iPhone, and the number of people who own these kinds of devices is growing at a fast rate. With the mobile devices, a new market of application software called Mobile Apps has appeared and is growing at an incredible speed (Andersen, 2013). Apps are easily available online through many stores like play store, iTunes App store and Android Market. For example, ITunes App store offers over 700.000 apps available to consumers, while there are over 675.000 apps on Android Market.

Among this incredible number of mobile applications, there is a large number of apps related to English learning for EFL students (Bracke & Vandepitte, 2013; Liu & He, 2015; Quizhpi Picón, 2015; Al-Zahrani, 2015) These English learning applications can be easily and freely downloaded by students according to their own interests. Also, using applications on mobile devices to learn English also breaks the restriction of time and place (Huang et al., 2010; Miangah & Nezarat, 2012; Burston, 2014; AbuSa'aleek, 2014). It means that

students can learn English at any time and in any place. Hence, mobile devices are becoming a kind of important tools for students to learn English.

Several researches were conducted in the domain of the English speaking learning (ESL) by EFL students based on MALL applications (Xu & Peng, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2016; Hwang et al; 2014; HuiGuo, 2013; Alemi, 2012;Kim & Kwan, 2013; Al-Jarf, 2012; Brown, 2001; Demouy, V., Eardley, A., Shrestha, P., &Kukulska-Hulme, 2011). The significant result of these researches shown that EFL students are motivated to accomplish the learning tasks or events of the English speaking learning (ESL) through using MALL applications. MALL applications offer enjoyable learning environment such as learning through games, social chats, and informal calls.

On the other hand, MALL applications offer various learning styles to accomplish the learning events or tasks (video, audio, images, and texts). For examples repeating of voice records, learning the speech pattern by click on texts or images, learning the speaking skills from YouTube, and learning the spoken English concepts by playing the visual games. Therefore, EFL students can accomplish the learning activities based on their preferred style. Furthermore, MALL applications support the self-learning activities outside the classrooms through providing effective guidelines to accomplish the learning events of English speaking learning (ESL). There are wide number of MALL applications that are suitable for different purposes and levels of ESL. Also, the students will not feel shy from making mistakes while learning ESL based on MALL self-learning applications. Other researchers (Ma, 2017; Hsieh et al., 2016; Liu & He, 2014; Cavus&Ibrahim, 2009) argued that MALL is an effective environment for ESL learning by EFL students. MALL applications are flexible in handling the various learning stages and components of ESL.

In conclusion, there are large numbers of MALL applications that can be used by EFL students in language learning activities, and there are many MALL applications support the English speaking learning. EFL students would be motivated to use MALL application for English speaking learning due to many reasons such as enjoyable learning environment, various learning styles, and effective self-learning activities. There is flexibility in selecting the suitable MALL application(s) to support the several learning stages and components of ESL.

METHOD

The present study used a qualitative method to address the research objective. To do this, the researcher distributed a set of interview questions among the sample of the target

population of the study, the Iraqi EFL learners. The interview method is an effective method to identify the individual perception about real case based on his/her experience (Fernández-Peña, 2016). Usually, the perception is collected based on the negative/positive opinions. Thus, the structured interview using short answer is useful to address the research objective due to many reasons such as the nature of analyzing the perceptions about using MALL applications, collecting the data based on real experiences, and the structured processes to collect data. The main aim of the structured interview is to demonstrate the perception of the students about using MALL applications for speaking improvement. This will also help to identify the most suitable MALL applications based on the students' perceptions.

Participants

The sample population of the study consisted of Iraqi EFL learners who are studying a Bachelor degree of English Language in the faculty of Education for Humanities at Anbar University, in Rammadi, Iraq in the academic year 2019-2020. In order to assure the usefulness of the collected interview data, the respondents of the interview are 17 EFL students, which is considered as very good sample for interview data collection. Taking into account that each student will responds to three interviews (interview for each MALL application). Thus, the total collected interviews are 51 (17 students *3 interviews). For effective interview data collection, the interviews were collected form 4 students in each academic years (first, second, third year) and 5 students in the fourth academic years). The variety of learning levels based on the academic years would reflect the real perceptions about MALL applications for English speaking.

Procedure

The processes of interview data collection are as the following:

i.   There are three proposed MALL applications in this study; Cake-English learning, English Speaking Practices, and Listen and Speak English. MALL applications were selected carefully based on certain evaluation factors like the availability on applications stores, the popularity of the applications, the number of downloads by users, and the number and quality of feedbacks provided on the selected applications. (Appendix A) includes screenshots of the proposed MALL applications which will be used in the study.

ii.   The interview was designed based on open questions to give the

respondents free spaces to provide their perceptions.

iii. 17 EFL students are involved in the interview data collection with total of 51 interviews.

iv.   The characteristics and functions of each proposed applications was clarified practically for the students using online discussion and video tutorials. Due to the current situation of COVID-19 the researcher was not allowed to discuss the applications through face to face meeting.

v.   The students took 4 weeks (April 2020) to use the proposed MALL applications for speaking learning in order to assure their understanding of the characteristics and functions of the applications.

vi.   Each respondent responds to three interviews (interview for each proposed applications). In the interview the students provide their perceptions about 11 characteristics of the proposed MALL applications for English speaking; purpose, usefulness, flexibility, engagement, feedback, integration, support, reliability, material presentation, organization, and multimedia.

vii. The researcher keeps in contact with the respondents for more explanations about the MALL applications and the interview.

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the collected 51 interviews (3 interviews *17 respondents), the content analysis was conducted. Content analysis method can be defined as any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002). Using the content analysis method the researcher tries to analyze the total perceptions of the students about the proposed MALL applications. For effective data analysis, the researcher classifies the interviews based on the three proposed MALL applications based on the students' academic years; 17 interviews of Cake, 17 interviews of English Speaking Practices, and 17 interviews of Listen and Speak English. Hence, EFL students' perceptions about each application would be analyzed in a structured and a clear way.

Perceptions Analysis of Cake-learn English Application

The 17 respondents' perception about Cake-learn English application is analyzed based on 11 main characteristics; application purpose, usefulness, flexibility, engagement, feedback,

integration, support, reliability, material presentation, organization, and multimedia.

Cake-learn English application focuses on improving the speaking skills of EFL learners (respondent#5, #10, #11, #14, #16, and #17). The respondents #1, #6, and #9 describe the Cake-learn English as mobile application offers short vivid videos introduced in informal English language, each scene or video gives a new expression as a main material before allowing the learner to repeat the sentences, which helps to enhance the learner's speaking skill. Cake-Learn English is an enjoyable, practical application, which gives a daily practice and free opportunities for training without a limited time (respondent #5 and #13).

The learner can gain many benefits from the Cake application; "allows me to organize my time to meet my personal and professional commitments and responsibilities by staying at home and also will save money" (respondent #2), producing good and clear learning materials of speaking (respondent #3), "made me pronounce words greatly" (respondent #8), helps to motivate users speak fluently and freely without feeling shy of others (respondents #12 and #15), and this application is full of fun, exciting and updated information (respondent #4). Furthermore, the respondents mentioned that the Cake-learn English is free and available for download from the Play store. The size of this application is small, which is easy to download using low mobile internet facilities.

Regarding the students' perceptions about the purpose of Cake-learn English application, this application aims to improve the English speaking of EFL learners using video materials (respondents # 2, 3, 4, 10, 12 and 15). The "application is in line with the purpose of English speaking development. Its contents, materials, videos, audio, and visual aids were chosen well for the purposes of improving the speaking (respondent #17). The same results are confirmed by Fageeh's (2013) study which concluded that Mobile devices can induce increased language learning and enhanced motivation by encouraging ubiquitous learning via their portability and access to various activities. Cake "is created for the purpose of helping the nonnative speakers in developing their own skills" (respondent #8). Respondent #7 mentioned that Cake application "offering a new material performing by normal or real characters, it helps the learner to be in touch with native speaker" (respondent #7). The respondents see that the main purpose of Cake application is to improve the English speaking of EFL learners. Cake allows the learners to listen and watch video conversations before allowing them to repeat the sentences in a correct way. Cake offers the materials for different learning levels and situations, whereby the learners

can customize the learning activities based on their needs.

In the context to the usefulness of Cake application, all respondents mentioned that the application offers practical learning activities that are useful to improve speaking skills" (respondents #1-#17). Respondent #1 sees that this application is "useful throughout videos shown which help me to improve speaking skills" and "it provides me with videos and I can listen and speak". At first the learners listen to native speakers, and then they need to speak like them. So, it useful in improving these skills because we do more practice in speaking" (respondent #5, 6, 10, 11, and 14). "The application provides audios and videos by native speakers speaking about variety of subjects. Learners could listen and imitate; in such way I could speak fluently and correctly like a native speaker" (respondent #16).

Respondent #7 mentioned that Cake application " improves my speaking skill through different techniques such as , listen to the video, repeat it several times, and select any word I don't Know its meaning and give an immediate translation)." Cake "app has very funny videos to help easy way to learn English and it has a lot of information" (respondent #9). Cake could make any learner good in English speaking through "the use of conversations and the multi learning activities" (respondent #13).

The respondents confirm the usefulness of Cake-learn English application to improve the speaking skills of EFL learners. This application provides various learning activities and functions to improve the speaking skills through video and audio learning styles. As reported by Gafni, et al (2017) "Mobile devices have become an accessory that almost every person in the world uses. Its ubiquitous characteristics allow using it everywhere and anytime. This is a great opportunity to facilitate education to people all around the world".

According to the respondents' perceptions about Cake flexibility, all respondents confirm that this application is fixable to be used for English speaking due to large number of materials for different learning levels (i.e. learns age, and speaking levels). "Flexibility has been variously defined as mobilization, freedom to move, or technically, the range of motion (ROM) available in a joint or group of joints" (Alter, 1988). Respondents #5, #7, #8, and #10 argued that Cake allows adjusting the learning activities. For example, "when I watch a video contains learning some expressions I can make the speech slow or speedy, or even I can make it repeat the same sentence" (respondent # 14). On the other hand, respondent #1 mentioned that "I can choose the

level of conversations and I can use the library to save what I want". Also, the "conversation videos are updated every day; some of them are simple and some are intermediate while some of them are advance level" (respondents #2 and 4). In addition, the user can use the library of the application, for example, to save the important things and he/she can check them later on (respondent #3, and #11).

In total, the respondents mentioned many flexible functions of Cake applications such as learning levels, subjects, time of learning, postpone learning activity, and control the material displaying. However, Cake flexibility needs to be enhanced through functions such as online conversations.

Respondent # 1 sees that Cake engages the learning activities through "various videos and many life situations that I can record", "It encourages the learner to speak what appears on the screen and read them that help the learner to be more fluent and confident" and " it helps the learners to practice and record " (respondent #3). Cake engages the speaking improvement through providing variety activities and so that makes me motivated enough to improve speaking" (respondent #5). This is supported by Yusoff, Z. & Dahlan (2013) who conducted a study in which they concluded that Mobile based learning leads to an integrated framework to support learning engagement through Augmented Reality environment. Also, "It makes me excited to learn with daily updates as well as it shows short learning clips which I really prefer" (respondent #4), as well as use many important life situations that a learner needs to improve speaking skills such as conversations between people (respondent #6 and #12). So, "No more boring vocabularies or grammar exercises" (respondent #2).

Moreover, Cake application "making me feel like in an open class" (respondent #15) "With the daily conversation I can participate actively in the conversation by assessing my speaking skills" (respondent #14). "Being away from the traditional way of learning English like being inside a class and being asked to do daily homework, this application motivates us to learn English without being under pressure" (respondent #10).

Cake "contains many channels, lists, videos, people from around the globe with different ages, and highly appreciated contents" (respondent #17), which "provides an ideal environment for learning the language especially that it is free and free from annoying ads that appear in other educational programs that may affect the learner" (respondent #9). Also, "it offers a good opportunity to practice language without any restrictions" (respondent # 13).

The respondent see that Cake is interactive application and allow the learners to engage the learning activities of speaking through many techniques such as offers free practices, open learning sessions, availability of learning materials, assess the students based on home works, and learning based on various life situations.

For Cake integration, respondent #14 sees that by using Cake, "the user's course of study is about learning how to speak, and all the contents of the application are relevant to speaking skills". Integration could be defined as "not a property of a single tool, but of its relationships with other elements in the environment, chiefly other tools and a processes" (Thomas, 1992). Cake application offers video learning materials from different life situations to enhance the knowledge of speaking skills (respondents #1, 2, 3, 4, 6, ,7,12, and 15). This application focuses on English speaking skills that are given in the university classrooms, which gives powerful improvement in speaking skills (respondent #5, 8, and 9). Respondent #11 mentioned that the Cake "contains English videos for speaking which are relevant to my course of study". On the other hand, respondents #16 explains that "the application covers most of the basics of each course given. For example, when learner wants to know about "Phrasal Verbs", the application gives the students all examples where "Phrasal Verbs" is suitable to be used". Furthermore, respondent #17 says "the application integrates many materials and contents, even from the best well-known courses and universities". In total, the respondents confirmed that Cake provides many materials in different situation that integrate with the speaking skills that given in university classrooms.

For Cake support in speaking learning, student # 4 mentioned that "there is a motivation dialogue to the learner and take the learner to online videos". Also, "In the speaking area, the learner gets his speech graded. Furthermore, the notification (outside the application) – and the popup (inside the applications) shows some of the teaching assistance (respondent #9, and 17). In addition, "the application marked the wrong spelling with (X)" (respondent #3). Another support method is by using search option to find good online support while accomplishing the learning activities of this application (respondents #10, #12 and #13).

Although, respondents# 16 mentioned that "the application provides stimulus conversations with learner, beside that connecting students with teachers online, the entire respondents argued that there no extra supporting such as online contact with teachers or other students (respondents #1-#17 except respondent #16). In total, the respondent mentioned many teaching support using Cake

application such as notifications, pop-ups, online searching, and corrections dialogues. However, the majority of respondents argued that there are no online contacts with teachers or other students to support the learning activities.

The responds on the Cake reliability show that this application works fast and smoothly (respondents #2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15). "Since the application size is small, it downloaded and loaded quickly" (respondent #17). On the other hand, there are no crashes in using the Cake applications (respondents #1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16). However, respondent #12 mentioned that the speed of Cake application is "depending on the speed of net".

Furthermore, the responds on the materials presentation using Cake application shows that this application is nice and beautiful interfaces in present the materials (respondents #1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, and 15). "From the first lunching the app, I have found that layouts, user profile, and categories are really attractive" (respondent #17). "Actually, the thing that I find is attractive about this application is the practical quizzes on forms of videos, and these videos from our favorite series or songs, it is very attractive, beside it calculates time you spend on the application every day" (respondent #16). Also, the presentation of Cake interact with the learners (respondent #3, 5, 6, 10, 12, and 14), and "present the materials using simple

and interactive way" (respondent #4). "All the contents in this app are presented clearly and logically to the learners" (respondent #9).

Additionally, the organization of the speaking learning activities using Cake are organized and structured, which allows the learning in a smooth and easy way (All respondents). The "application is very organized and easy used, whereby you can learn English in a fun and enjoyable way" (respondent #2). Respondent #9 argued that the structure of Cake is "so simple, easy to use as well as the quality of contents is very good.

Lastly, The Cake application focuses on audio and video multimedia to conduct the learning activities of English speaking (All respondents). Also, Cake presents the learning materials using "transportation and animated films" (respondent #17). By using Cake "the learners can listen to conversations in the videos and repeat the sentences" (respondent #3). "The sounds and videos are very clear, for example, I watched more than 10 videos all of them are effective use of sound" (respondents #4). All respondents confirm that the sound and videos in Cake are very clear and effective. Table 1 summarizes the respondents' perception about Cake-learn English application to improve the speaking skills of EFL students.

Table 1: Summary of Respondents' Perception about Cake Application

Dimension	Strength	Weaknesses	Respondents #
Purpose	The main purpose of Cake application is to improve the English speaking of EFL learners.	-	All respondents
Usefulness	Provides various learning activities and functions to improve the speaking skills through video and audio learning styles.	-	All respondents
Flexibility	Many flexible functions such as learning levels, subjects, time of learning, postpone learning activity, and control the material displaying.	Flexibility needs to be enhanced through functions such as online conversations	Strength: respondents #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16
			Weaknesses: respondents #7, 9, 13, and 17
Engagement	Engage the learning activities of speaking through many techniques such as offers free practices, open learning sessions, availability of learning materials, assess the students based on home works, and learning based on various life situations.	-	All respondents

Feedback	Provide feedback (using quizzes and some corrections) to reflect the learners' improvements in English speaking	the feedback not details the students mistakes for further enhancements in the future	Strength: All respondents
			Weaknesses: respondents #15
Integration	Provides many materials in different situation that integrate with the speaking skills that given in university classrooms.	not schedules the learning materials as series of courses in match with specific learning goals.	Strength: respondents # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, and 17.
			Weaknesses: respondents #10 and 13
Support	Applies many supporting methods such as notifications, pop-ups, online searching, and corrections dialogues	no online contacts with teachers or other students to support the learning activities	Strength: All respondents
			Weaknesses: respondents #1-#17 except respondent #16
Reliability	Works fast and smoothly. - No crashes	The speed application is depending on the speed of net.	Strength: All respondents
			Weaknesses: respondent #12
Presentation	nice and beautiful interfaces in present the materials	-	All respondents
Organization	Structured and easy to use	-	All respondents
Multimedia	- Use Multimedia such as videos, animations, and audio. - The multimedia is clear and effective.	-	All respondents
Overall Ranking	**Excellent: 7 Respondents**		respondents #2, #3, #7, #8, #12, #16 and #17
	Good: 10 Respondents		respondents #1, #4, #5, #6, #9, #10, #11, #13, #14, and #15

Perceptions Analysis of English Speaking Practices Application

All respondents mentioned that English Speak Practices (ESP) application aims to enhance the speaking skills of EFL students through conversations between native speakers about various life topics. This application allows the self-learning without teachers supporting (respondents #1, #2, #3, #9, #17). ESP allows the learners to "listen and repeat after short conversations on different occasions related to daily lifestyle, which improve the speaking skills of the learners" (respondent #12). ESP "offers a lot of situations, expressions and conversations that develop the

student are speaking skills" (respondent #9). EPS "is suitable for English learners by approving many levels of conversations i.e. beginners and advanced" (respondents #5 and #15). ESP "functions well, it is very organized, simple and rich of speaking topics" (respondent # 7) and EPS tasks are "easy to use" (respondents #8 , #10, and #16).

In term of the respondents' perceptions about the purpose of (ESP) this application is working to improve speaking skills of EFL students through the use of conversations (All respondents). ESP "provides conversations about various life topics and situations" (respondent #1). Through

ESP App "I can listen to the pronunciation of the native speakers" (respondent #8). Thus, the learner can listen to the conversations and learn how to speak the words and sentences in a correct way (respondents #4, #5 #6, #7, #9, #15, and #17). ESP "provides the learner with everyday language in a form of conversation. The learner listens to it and he/she can test his understanding easily" (respondent #3). ESP app "produces various conversation contents for target learner (respondent #1) and "the contents are suitable for different speaking levels of the learners" (respondent #2, #9 and #10). Also, ESP "provides wide range of information related to our daily use of language, which help learners to practice what they learned every day" (respondent #6 and #11). In total, the respondents see that the main purpose of ESP application is to improve the English speaking of EFL learners through listen to conversations between native speakers about various life topics.

In the context to the usefulness of English Speak Practices (ESP) application, all respondents agreed that this application is useful to improve the speaking skills of EFL learners (respondents' #1- #17). ESP is "useful by the various conversations that allow the learners to select the conversation level according to their current speaking level" (respondent #1). On the other hand, ESP "helps to improve the speaking skills with native speakers and conversation as everyday situations which affluent application" (respondent #2). Respondent # 3 mentioned that ESP " is available with different speaking level and the learner can practice the level that he/she needs so he gets his speaking skill improved". Also, ESP is useful "because there are many conversations related to phrases or vocabularies we are using in our daily life" (respondent #5).

According to respondent #6, ESP is useful due to "the common conversations given here regarding what we need in our daily life, make us say that the application provides some useful materials to improve the speaking skill". ESP "offers lots of practical conversations including About Person's English, in this conversation two people are talking how to develop ones English" (respondent #7). Respondent #8 argued that ESP is "useful in a way that one could repeat what is on a text, then practice on speaking until learning becomes a success". ESP "makes the user experience one role of the conversation in order to make him speak as if he is inside the situation" (respondent #10). Furthermore, respondent #12 sees that ESP "provides useful materials especially those who related to the business field (Basic business conversations)". ESP "provides such materials to practice what we learn from this application, for example the conversations from daily life situations" (respondent #17). In total, the

respondents confirm the usefulness of ESP application to improve the speaking skills of EFL learners through listening and learning from the conversations between native speakers.

According to the respondents' perceptions about the flexibility of ESP application, some respondents see that ESP is flexible in some points such as providing conversations that are dealing with different learning levels (respondent #1, #3, #11, #13, and #16), select the topic of the conversation (respondent #2, #4, #6, #8, #12, and #14), and allowing the learner to stop and repeat the conversations (#7, #10, and #12).

For ESP engagement in learning activities of speaking, the respondent #1 #7 #9, and #11 see that ESP allows the learner engagement" by many subjects of conversation that I can participate in speaking". "I feel myself got learning everyday better and gets new knowledge by practices" (respondent #2). The ESP offers the students engagement by provides different types of daily language (respondent #3, and #4). "We use mobile most of the time, so to have an app on your mobile is something good (respondent #5, #14, and #17). Furthermore, "every learner would like to learn many terms of different fields. This application sets a good environment to learn English. For example, travelling topic, ESP offers you small written conversation about travelling, then a quiz about it, then listening and recording" (respondents' #6 #10, and #12).

In addition, respondent #8 mentioned that he engaged with ESP due to "feel cool when I find such topics and its used by the native speakers, this is really amazing". However, respondents # 13, #15, and #16 see that ESP has some engagement lacks such as the absence of interacting with the learners, absence of assessing the learners after the learning processes, and not allowing the conversations between the learners and other native speakers to assess the improvement of speaking skills of the learners.

In term of the respondents' perception about ESP application feedback, some respondents mentioned that ESP offer learning feedback such as "written quiz in the application" after the conversation (respondents #1, #2, #4, #6, #7, #8, #10, #11, #13, #14, #15, #16, #17). The quizzes after the conversation assess the learner understanding of the conversation between the native speakers. On the other side, respondents' #3, #5, #9, and #12 see the feedback based written quiz is not sufficient because it evaluates the listening skills rather than the speaking skills. Hence, the feedback of ESP is not effective to assess the improvement of the speaking skills of EFL learners.

According to the respondents' perceptions about ESP integration, respondents #1, #2, #3, #5, #7, #8, and #16 see that by using ESP, the learners can integrate the learning processes through selecting the likable conversation topic and the level of the conversations. Respondent #4, #6, and #10 mentioned that the integration of ESP applications due to "the content relevancy to the speaking courses in the university classrooms, ESP shows many topics to the learner in order to give more options to the learner to get a benefit". "All the contents of ESP application serve to make the user speak English language" (respondent #9, #13, #14, and #17). Furthermore, ESP contains conversations of many situations, topics, levels , and quizzes" (respondent #10) . However, respondent #11 mentioned that "the content of the application far away from my course of study and the contents offer materials in general topics". Also, respondent #15 explains that ESP "is suitable to improve the speaking skills in general but is not effective for special topics such as science and industry topics"

In total, the respondents stressed that ESP provides conversations about various topics and different speaking levels that integrate with the general speaking skills that given in university classrooms. However, ESP does not integrate with the speaking skills of special topics such as science and health fields.

In the context of ESP support in speaking learning, the respondents #6, #11, and #14 argued that "there is a website window where you can click on, and then it takes on an online tour to explain the ESP functions". On the other hand, there are some options in ESP that can offer some kind of teaching help such as using guideline (respondents # 2, #4, #10, #13, #16, and #17). However, respondents #1, #3, #5, #7, #8, #9, #12, and #15 see that ESP supporting is weak; ESP does not allow communication with teachers, does not allow effective online supporting, and does not allow communication with other learners. Hence, ESP requires further supporting features to help learners to improve their speaking skills effectively.

In term of ESP reliability, the respondents see that ESP is reliable due to many reasons such as works fast and smoothly (All respondents), there is no crash or problem during the use of the ESP application (All respondents), and the ESP application is simple to use (All respondents). Also, ESP application size is small and it is downloaded and loaded quickly (All respondents).

The responds on the materials presentation using ESP application design is attractive, which motivate the learners to go deeper and deeper for more learning processes (All respondents). On the other hand, ESP application interfaces are very nice and comfortable for use (All respondents). Furthermore, the materials are presented in smooth and structure manner (All respondents).

In the context of ESP organization, all respondents argued that ESP application is well arranged structure. On the other hand, the content is provided in a strong and nice way liked by students. Moreover, ESP conversations are organized depending on the expected learners levels. Additionally, ESP materials are classified based on the topics. In total, ESP organization is Simple and easy to follow (All respondents).

Lastly, ESP application focuses on audio and video multimedia to conduct the learning activities of English speaking (All respondents). Also, the ESP "contains graphics and each level contains graphics" (respondents #1, #4, #10, #14, #15, and #16). In ESP application the conversations sound is very good and high quality (respondent #2, #3, #5, #9, #11, #13 and #17). respondents #6, #7, #8, and #12 mentioned that ESP application is also applying images media to support the learning activities; "the learners click on "Daily Life", they find lots of suggestive graphics which help them knowing what they are about". Table 2 summarizes the respondents' perceptions about ESP application to improve the speaking skills of EFL students.

Table 2: Summary of Respondents' Perception about ESP Application

Dimension	Strength	Weaknesses	Respondents #
Purpose	The main purpose of ESP application is to improve the English speaking of EFL learners.	-	All respondents
Usefulness	Useful by the various conversations that allow the learners to select the conversation level according to their current speaking level	-	All respondents

Flexibility	flexible in some points such as provide conversations the deal different learning levels and topics	- Need to be more fixable in communicate with the learners to improve their speaking skills based on features such online conversations. - Not allows the learner to speak with other persons in order to assess the improvement in speaking skills	Strength: respondents #1, #2, #3, #4, #6, #8, #11, #12 #13, #14 and #16.
			Weaknesses: respondents #5, #7, #9, #10, #15, and #17.
Engagement	Allows the learner engagement by many subjects of conversation that they can participate in speaking	-	All respondents
Feedback	Provide feedback using written quizzes	The feedback is not sufficient to assess the speaking improvements.	Strength: #1, #2, #4, #6, #7, #8, #10, #11, #13, #14, #15, #16, #17.
			Weaknesses: respondents #3, #5, #9, and #12.
Integration	The learners can integrate the learning processes through select the likable conversation topic and the level of the conversations	The application is integrate with general topics rather than specific topics such as science and health.	Strength: respondents #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9, #10, #12, #13, #14, #16, and #17.
			Weaknesses: respondents #11 and #15
Support	There is online supporting.	No online contacts with teachers or other students to support the learning activities. `	Strength: #2, #4, #6, #10, #11, #13, #14, #16, and #17.
			Weaknesses: respondents #1, #3, #5, #7, #8, #9, #12, and #15.
Reliability	- Works fast and smoothly. - No crashes. - Small size to downl0ad.		Strength: All respondents
Presentation	Nice and interactive interfaces in present the materials	-	All respondents
Organization	Structured and easy to use	-	All respondents
Multimedia	- Use Multimedia such as videos, images, and audio. - The multimedia is clear and effective.	-	All respondents
Overall Ranking	**Excellent: 1 Respondents**		Respondent #4
	Good: 16 Respondents		All respondents

		except respondent #4

Perceptions Analysis of Listen and Speak English Application

The respondents' perception about "Listen and Speak English" (LaSE) application is analyzed based on 11 main features; application purpose, usefulness, flexibility, engagement, feedback, integration, support, reliability, material presentation, organization, and multimedia.

All respondents mentioned that LaSE application is effective to improve speaking skills of EFL students through "listen and repeat after short conversations on different occasions related to daily lifestyle" (all respondents). "While the learners listen to the audio conversations, the texts that represent the conversations are show on the screen" (respondent #3). This application "aim is to enhance their own ability in speaking just as native speakers" (respondent #13). LaSE "contains very rich topics and makes the learners free to choose what he is interested in" (respondents #3). LaSE is "very selective application with a wide range of options that allows the user to feel interested during the use of the app" (respondent #5, #10, and #16).

As any MALL application, the using of LaSE application offer many benefits for the learners such as free limit of learning time (all respondents), free learning costs (respondents #1, #4, #6, #10, #14, #15, and #17), structured self learning processes (respondents #2, #3, #8, #9, and #16), and accessibility and availability of learning materials in any time and from anywhere (all respondents).

In term of the respondents' perceptions about the purpose of LaSE application, all respondents see that this application is mainly focuses on the speaking skills. LaSE "offers many life topics that match with various learners' interests" (respondent #1, and #3). "Under each topic, there are many audio conversations of different speaking levels" (respondents #2, #3, #5, #9, #15, and #16). After listen to the conversations, the learners need to repeat many words and sentences in correct way (All respondents). LaSE "is appropriate because the target learner focuses on the material of how to speak, and how to use sounds, the application gives good results for one who seeks to learn in a good way" (respondent #8). Thus, LaSE "provides the learner with important components of English language such as grammar, and vocabulary that improve his speaking skill" (respondent #11 and #15).

In the context to the usefulness of LaSE application, all respondents agree that this application is useful to improve the speaking skills

of EFL learners. This app cares too much about improving the spoken language by listening to the all audio conversations and to repeat them. LaSE "offers recorded stories where learners can listen to, then they can record themselves. Thus, it increases the ability of speaking skills" (respondent #7). "LaSE "allows the learners to speak what they learn" (respondent #1 and #11). The "application helps to improve the speaking skills by listening to native speakers and conversation as everyday situations" (respondents #2, #5, and #6). "The learner can listen to different types of the daily conversation and the learner can imitate them easily in order to improve his speaking skill" (respondent #3). Also, "the written texts of the conversations on the screen simplify the learning processes of the English speaking" (respondent #10). Respondent #9 mentioned that LaSE " could be useful to improve speaking skills by manipulating the basics of English sounds, how to produce each sound, difference between vowels and consonants as well as the basic organs of speech". Furthermore, LaSE "is useful to improve the speaking skills through the existing of a very large number of different conversations-subjects" (respondent #12).

According to the respondents' perceptions about the flexibility of LaSE application, some respondents mentioned some flexible features of LaSE such as various learning levels of the audio conversations (respondents #1, #2, #3, #5, #10, and #17), offer conversations about many topics (respondents #4, #6, #7, #9, #12, and #14). However, All respondents are agreeing that LaSE application is not flexible in many points such as the collaboration with other students, interacting with the learners, and assessing the improvement of speaking skills based on the learning activities. Thus, the respondents see that LaSE flexibility weaknesses are more than the flexibility strengths.

In the context of the LaSE engagement by the learners, the majority of respondents are agreeing that they like the application environment. LaSE application "includes different learning facilities that drive the learner to learn" (respondent#3). The application "contains many interesting topics and many life situations" (respondent #1, #9, #14, and #15) and "it is easy to be used" (respondent #2, #16). Respondents #8 mentioned that "Listening to native speaker English is really a motivating thing to me". Listening and then speaking is an encouraging strategy to improve speaking skills of EFL students (respondents #4, #6, and #10). Furthermore, "the application layout is designed well and the speaking option is available everywhere that makes

us excited to continue learning" (respondent #7). Additionally, respondent #12 argued that "It motivates me by using very useful information and free use in time and cost" (respondent #17). However, respondent #13 sees that "since no videos are there. One is going to fell bored with audios", which decrease the engagement level of LaSE application.

According to the respondents' perception about the feedback of LaSE application, Most respondents see that there is no effective feedback are provided by LaSE application in order to assess the improvement of speaking skills of the learners (respondents #3, #5, #7, #9, #11, #12, #13, #15, #16, and #17). The other respondents see that LaSE application offers conversations of different speaking levels i.e. beginners and advanced. Thus, the learners can assess themselves based on the level of the conversations that they access.

In term of the respondents' perceptions about LaSE integration, all respondents angering that the provided conversations are integrated with their study topics in the traditional classrooms. LaSE application "contains many relevant materials to schools course study and focus on speaking learning skills" (respondent #5). LaSE application "is full and rich with so many topics that help learners to develop their speaking skills" (respondent #6). On the other hand, "once the person needs to learn different idioms about the native language, he gets too many information concerning what he wants to get" (respondent #13). Respondent #3 mentioned that "If the learner wants to learn something about the daily conversation, he/she can go easily to the large number of conversation topics and select any topic he/she wants". Furthermore, "all the contents of the application serve to make the user speak English language and this is the goal of the curricular" (respondents #9 and #14). LaSE application "has the grammar and also will let you know how to pronounce" (respondent #10, #12, and #17)

In the context of LaSE support in speaking learning, respondent #8 argued that LaSE application provides "instructions in the application take you online to explain the 5 steps to use the application in the best way". However, all respondents see that LaSE application does not offer effective support for the learners such as online communication with technical, teachers, and other learners.

In term of LaSE reliability, respondent #11 argued that LaSE application has some crashes due to weak connection level of the user internet. The Entire respondents see that LaSE application is works fast and smoothly, there is no crash or problem during the use of the application, the application is simple to use, and the application size is small and so it can be downloaded and loaded quickly.

The responds on the materials presentation using LaSE application sow that the application design is structured well and simple to be used (all respondents). On the other hand, the design and interfaces of LaSE application are attractive (all respondents). Moreover, the materials can be accesses in a smooth way (All respondents).

According to the respondents' perception about LaSE organization, all respondents see that the content is provided in a meaningful manner. LaSE contents are satisfied for the learners (all respondents). Also, LaSE application organization is simple and easy to be used (all respondents).

Lastly, the LaSE application focuses on audio and text multimedia to conduct the learning activities of English speaking (All respondents). Many respondents see that the used media in LaSE application are sufficient (respondents #1, #2, #3, #5, #7, #8, #9, #10, #14, #15, #17). The Audio and texts in LaSE application are very clear to support the speaking learning. However, other respondents see that the absence of videos and images multimedia make the use of LaSE less enjoyable (respondents #4, #6, #11, #12, #13, #16)

In Summary respondent #12 evaluate LaSE application as adequate (the application is acceptable with reservation) application for improving the speaking skills of EFL students, while the entire respondents evaluate LaSE as good application to improve the speaking skills. Table 3 summarizes the respondents' perceptions about LaSE application to improve the speaking skills of EFL students.

Table 3: Summary of Respondents' Perception about LaSE Application

Dimension	Strength	Weaknesses	Respondents #
Purpose	The main purpose of LaSE application is to improve the English speaking of EFL learners.	-	All respondents
Usefulness	Useful by the various audio conversations that allow the learners to select the conversation level according to their	-	All respondents

	current speaking level		
Flexibility	flexible in some points such as provide conversations the deal different learning levels and topics.	- Not interacting with the learners. - not allow the collaboration with other learners	Strength: respondents #1, #2, #3, #4 #5, #6, #7, #9 #10, #12, #14 and #17.
			Weaknesses: all respondents.
Engagement	contains many interesting topics and many life situations	- the audio conversation is bored.	Strengths: All respondents except respondent #13
			Weaknesses: respondents #13.
Feedback	The learners can assess themselves	The feedback is not sufficient to assess the speaking improvements.	Strength: #1, #2, #4, #6, #8, #10, and #14.
			Weaknesses: respondents #3, #5, #7, #9, #11, #12, #13, #15, #16, and #17.
Integration	The contents of the application serve to make the user speak English language and this is the goal of the curricular	-	All respondents
Support	instructions in the application take you online to explain the 5 steps to use the application in the best way	No online contacts with technical, teachers or other students to support the learning activities. `	Strength: respondent #8
			Weaknesses: All respondents.
Reliability	- Works fast and smoothly. - No crashes. - Small size to downl0ad.	Some crashes in case of weak connection of users internet	Strengths: All respondents
			Weaknesses: respondent #11
Presentation	Nice and interactive interfaces in present the materials	-	All respondents
Organization	Structured and easy to use	-	All respondents
Multimedia	- Use Multimedia such as audio and texts. - The multimedia is clear and effective.	the absence of videos and images multimedia make the using of LaSE less enjoyable	Strengths: respondents #1, #2, #3, #5, #7, #8, #9, #10, #14, #15, #17.
			Weaknesses: respondents #4, #6, #11, #12, #13, #16.
Overall Ranking	**Adequate: 1 Respondents**		Respondent #12
	Good: 16 Respondents		All respondents except respondent #12

CONCLUSION

In fact, the study aimed to shed light on the perception of Iraqi EFL learners on the use of MALL applications for speaking improvement. In addition, the study also attempted to determine which is the best among the selected MALL applications based on the respondents' experience of using them. Various characteristics are provided in the applications that would help the respondents to evaluate the applications and to reflect their perception on using MALL for speaking improvement.

As it was illuminated in the previous sections, the findings of the study revealed that the students' perceptions are significantly constructive and they have a positive attitude toward MALL applications as expressed in their answers. This is an indication of the positive perception of the role of MALL in enhancing English through providing them with the opportunity to access various useful materials, to carry out different activities, and to communicate and with others Soleimani, et. el (2014)

As explained in earlier, there are three MALL applications are selected to improve the speaking skills for EFL learners and these applications are; Cake-English learning, English Speaking Practices (ESP), and Listen and Speak English (LaSE). These three applications are selected among many MALL applications based on evaluation factors such as number of downloads, free of downloads, availability in play store, and number and rate of users feedbacks.

The three selected MALL applications are involved in the interview that conducted with 17 EFL students in the English department in Al-Anbar University in the faculty of Education for Humanities. The interview allows the respondents to provide their perceptions about the three proposed MALL applications based on 11 main characteristics; purpose of application, usefulness of application, flexibility of application functions, engagement of speaking learning activities, feedback of learning given by the application, integration with the goals of speaking learning, application, application reliability, material presentation, organization of the functions, and application multimedia (Son, 2016).

According to the interview analysis using content analysis, the three proposed applications are efficient in many characteristics such as learning purpose, usefulness, engagement, integration, reliability, presentation, and organizations. However, Cake application is better than the other two applications in some characteristics such as flexibility, feedback, supporting, and multimedia. The total evaluation of the 17 respondents shows that the Cake-English Learning (7 excellent and 10 good) is efficient more than ESP (1 excellent and 16 good) and LaSE (16 good and 1 adequate) applications to improve the speaking skills of EFL students.

According to the respondents, Cake application is flexible in providing various learning levels, various subjects, time of learning, postpone learning activity, and control the material displaying. The ESP and LaSE applications provide less flexibility features than Cake. On the other hand, Cake application provides real time tests to assess the improvement on speaking skills of the learners as well as ESP application but LaSE application has lack in providing the learning feedback for the learners.

Moreover, Cake application provides learning supporting for the learners such as the usage instructions, communicate with teachers, and collaboration with other learners. ESP and LaSE applications are not providing sufficient supporting features for learners. Lastly, Cake applications apply several multimedia in the learning processes such as video, audio, and images, while LaSE application presents the learning materials using audio and text multimedia. Thus, the respondents prefer Cake multimedia more than LaSE application.

Considering the effectiveness of the applications and considering the learners as the most important user of the applications, it could be perfect to integrate the process of language learning and improvement with the use of modern technology that is MALL applications. Smart phones use and their advances in the current years could be a real evidence of the fact that they can be used for the purpose of language skills improvement on both contexts, the formal and informal.

MALL applications are appropriate tool that allow language learners to learn and to improve their speaking skills effectively out of the classroom. Therefore, providing the students with more opportunities for learning like MALL using, since the mobile phones can be used anytime and anywhere, would be an effective strategy to help them improve their language proficiency.

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Appendix A

Interview with Iraqi EFL learners on the use of MALL applications for speaking improvement

Dear Students,

My name is Abdulla Althamir, a PhD student and a researcher. My research topic is *"Mobile Assisted Language Learning Applications To Enhance The English Speaking Skills Among EFL Learners"*. The aim of the study is to examine the use of mobile applications to enhance the speaking skills. These applications are designed specifically to develop speaking skills. In this part of the study, your participation is important and appreciated. You are kindly required to download the recommended mobile applications which will be described below, and to go through these applications in order to rate them in terms of their purpose, usefulness, flexibility, reliability, integration, presentation, organization, and multimedia components. Your perception on the applications and how they could be used will be built upon your assessment that will be carried out according to the above mentioned factors. Below is a brief description for each of the recommended applications:

1. **Cake-Learn English for Free**

The application is working to improve speaking through videos. It is produced by Playlist Corporation. It is rated as 4.9 out of 5, downloaded by more than 10 Million users, and got 190,050 feedbacks. It is available on Apple Store and Play Store. See the pictures below:
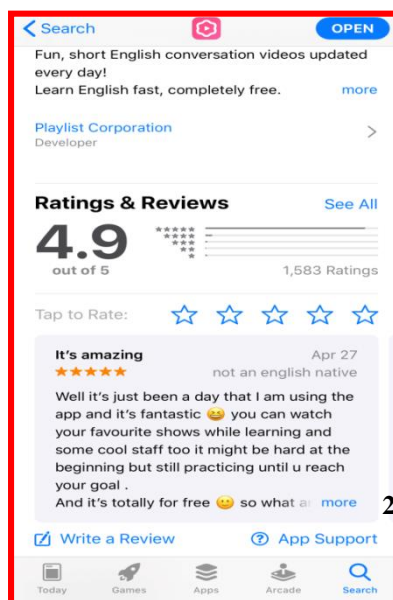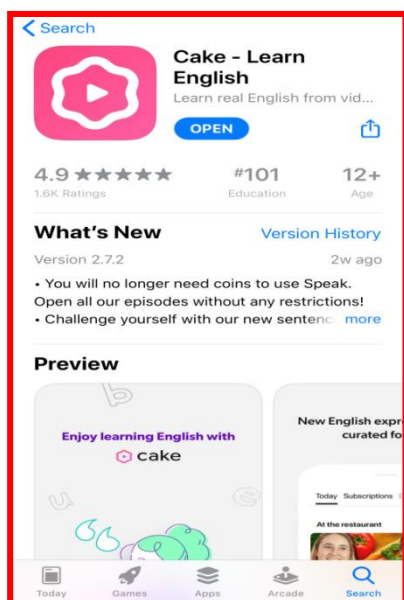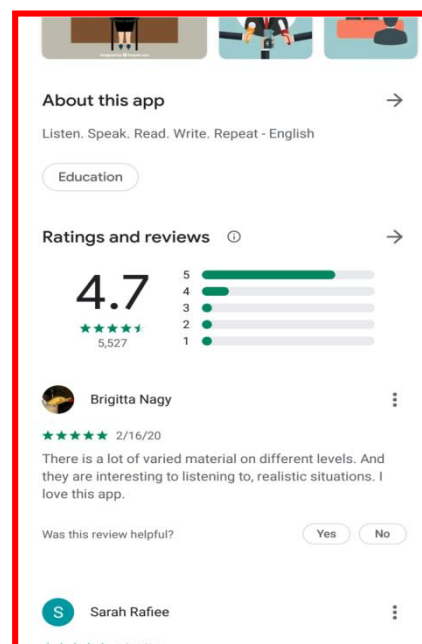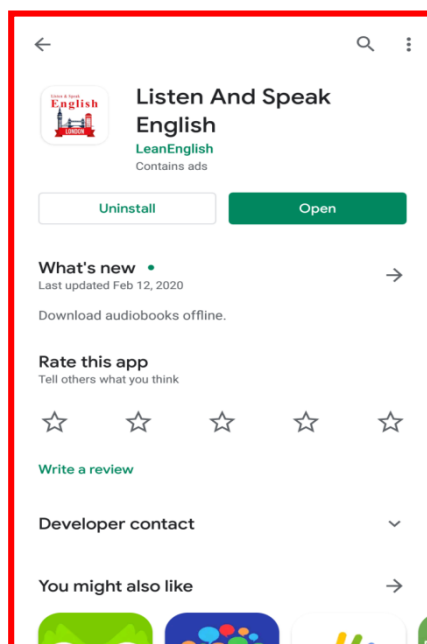

2. **English Speaking Practice**

The application is working to practice English speaking and listening with short conversations.   It is produced by Steve Kim, 2015. It is rated as 4.7/5 out of 5, downloaded by more than 5 Million users, and got 26,129 feedbacks. It is availble on Apple Store. See the pictures below:

3. Listen and Speak English
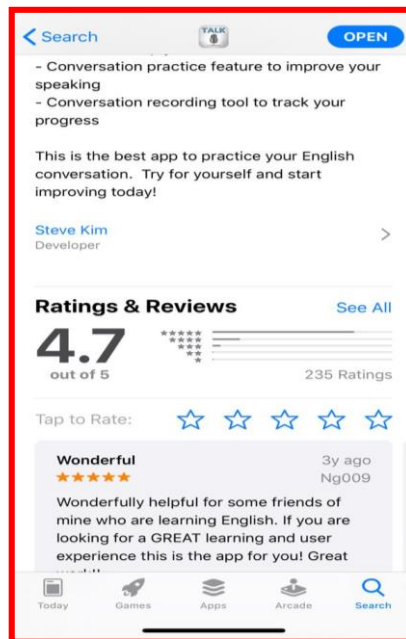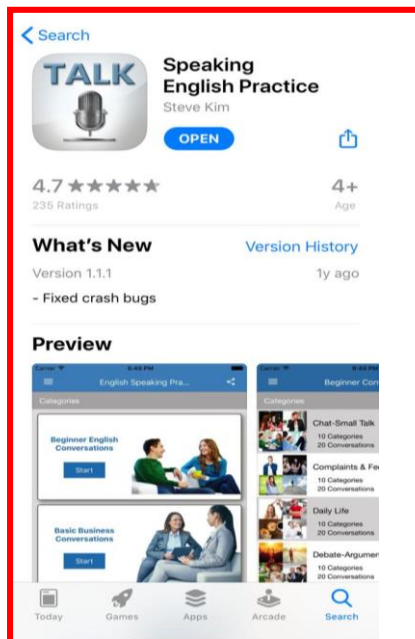
The application is working to listen, speak, write and repeat English. It is produced by LearnEnglish. It is rated as 4.7/5 out of 5, downloaded by more than 5 Million users, and got 5,526 feedbacks. It is availble on Apple Store and Play Store. See the pictures below:

INTERVIEW

Part A: Students Information

University:

Department:

Academic Year:

Age:

Part B: App Information

App Name:

Place to download:

Paid or Free?:

Part C: Applications Description

Please describe briefly the MALL functionality and your general feedback about the applications.

Part D: User perception about the Applications

1. Purpose:

- Are the Applications in line with the purpose of English speaking learning? How?

- Are the Applications appropriate for target learner? Describe.

2- Usefulness

- How the applications could be useful to improve your speaking skills?

- Are the learning activities of the applications practical? Are these activities useful to improve the speaking skills?

- Do the Applications provide useful materials to improve the speaking skills? Give examples.

3. Flexibility

- Do the applications allow you to adjust settings depending on your needs? How?

- Do the applications offer various levels of learning activities? Describe.

- Do the applications offer opportunities to collaborate with others? Give examples.

4. Engagement

- How the applications motivate you to engage the learning activities of speaking?

- Do the applications offer a meaningful and interactive learning environment? Describe.

5. Feedback

- Is the feedback on learner responses constructive and timely? How?

- Do the applications provide a summary of learner performance in learning activities?

6. Integration

- Is the content of the application relevant to the course of study undertaken by the user? Describe.

- Does the content of the application fit with curricular goals? How?

7. Support

- Is there teaching assistance while using the applications? Describe.

- Is there any online supporting while accomplish the learning activities of the applications? Describe

8. Reliability

- Are the applications downloaded and load quickly?

- Are the applications stable without crashes? Describe.

9. Presentation

- Are the content of the applications presented clearly and logically?

- give your opinion about the attractiveness of the applications interfaces?

10. Organization

- What is your perception about the applications organization?

- What is your perception about the structure of application contents?

11. Multimedia

- Do the applications make effective use of graphics? Give examples.

- Do the applications make effective use of sound? Give examples.

- Do the applications make effective use of Audio? Give examples.

12. Overall Rating

- Very poor (the applications are not recommended)

- Poor (the applications are not appropriate)

- Adequate (the applications are acceptable with reservation)

- Good (the applications are appropriate for use)

- Excellent (the applications are highly recommended)

13. Additional Comments: