Polytechnic Students' Perceptions Towards Learning Idioms Using Idiomania Mobile Application

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Abstract

The use of idioms is essential part of acquiring English language. The ability to comprehend and use them effectively can be considered as highly proficient in English. This study aims to identify users' perception towards using Idiomania application as well as to study the users' understanding towards using the Idiomania mobile application. This study used qualitative design by having semi-structured informal interview. There were five students of semester one from one polytechnic in Johor Bahru chosen as the sample. The analysis of this study indicated that this application shows successful implementation among the Polytechnic students and has high potential in becoming the latest teaching aid for English lecturer in polytechnic. It highlighted the main advantages of using this app in learning such as variety of activities, flexibility to learn and attractive design and layout. Nevertheless, some recommendations are suggested to improve weaknesses of this application.

Keywords: idioms, mobile application, flexibility.

1. INTRODUCTION

Being proficient in English can be acknowledged if the learner is capable to master idioms and apply those appropriately in writing and speaking discourse. The ability to use or understand idioms by the English as the Second Langauge (ESL) students accurately can be an indicator of mastery of the English language. Maha H. Alhaysony (2017) stated that some students are enthusiastic to learn more idioms because they have had much exposure to English and therefore, they have learnt to appreciate the value of idioms, as well as their richness and practicality in communicative tasks. Besides, Noraziah, Wan Syakira and Nor Azam (2014) maintained that many ESL (English as a Second Language) students always feel motivated to master the English idioms with the purpose of resembling the native speakers besides receiving respect and confidence in speaking English. Idioms are frequently used in everyday situations. Thus, they are an important part of any language and might be considered as the benchmark of a speaker's fluency in that language.

In addition, idioms help us to enrich our language. They are important as they apply spontaneity and freshness to both writing and speech (Umar Aliyu, 2016). In order to have an interesting essay, students need to include idioms or proverbs - combinations of words that have figurative meaning. Same goes when they want to consider using idioms in spoken language. Therefore, towards understanding idioms, students are compulsory to go beyond simple word-by-word comprehension and integrate figurative meaning. Lazar (1996) stated that it is the fact that figurative language is an area that have been overlooked in vocabulary teaching, nevertheless, it is of crucial importance and should be considered.

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1.1 Problem Statement

In teaching English as a second language, the teachers have been experiencing the students who have the difficulties to understand idioms. The students believe that it is hard to understand the meaning of idioms for several reasons. As pointed out by Pimenova (2011) there are some challenges in learning idioms, such as, cultural differences, no analogous idioms in English, unknown vocabulary and unfamiliar idioms, lack of experience dealing with idioms as well as lack of the broad context for a given idiom.

Saleh & Zakaria (2013) mentioned that one of the main challenges of idiom learning is that idioms are often unpredictable in terms of meaning. The students are not really familiar with the context due to cultural differences. Students find it is difficult to relate the idioms with the meaning as some idiomatic phrases do not literally mean based on the phrase itself. For example, the idiom of 'A bull in a China Shop' refers to someone who is very clumsy. However, some students they cannot see the link between the idiom and the meaning itself as they are confused with the connection of 'A Bull in a China Shop' related to being clumsy.

According to Hussein, Khanji, & Makhzoomy (2011), the difficulty of learning idioms lies on the fact that idioms are non-literal and arbitrary. Since there are no analogous idioms in English and most of them are random, this leads them to be confused based on the meaning of their components and therefore, they cannot be taught systematically. Buckingham (2006) also stated that idioms' arbitrary or randomness language-specific nature makes them difficult for the students to understand and acquire, comprehending the translation.

Next, Nur Riza (2017) stated idioms consist of different figurative meaning compared to literal meanings of each word or phrase. It leads to confusion by the students since they can hardly interpret the connotation/meaning of some idioms. In addition, they are unable to identify idiomatic phrases in a sentence and therefore, they would rather try to understand the individual words that form the phrases of the idioms compared to associating the idioms with the whole context. This is related to the recent English test done to students in one primary school in Pasir Gudang. Although students were able to notice the presence of idioms in a sentence, they still thought that it was difficult to understand the meaning of idioms as a whole. This is due to students' understanding the idioms literally (word-by-word) rather than figuratively. For example, the idiom of 'Do Not Count Your chickens before the eggs have hatched' simply refers to the meaning of one should not plan anything that might not happen. However, the students would rather choose to only understand the literal meaning of the idioms without connecting it to the context given.

On the other hand, less experience dealing with idioms due to lack of reading exposure can be a challenge to the second language students, thus, could contribute to limited vocabulary and unfamiliar idioms. These have always led to confusion to the non-native speakers especially the novice and those who possess minimum English vocabularies. They lack of the broad context for a given idiom since they are less familiar to them. All these limitations could, thus, lead to poor performance in writing and speaking for ESL (English as Second Language) students due to lack motivation to learn further. Apart from that, it might affect the English examination grade performance at the end of the day.

The Idiomania apps is introduced to assist students in learning English idioms. Based on the problem related to learning idioms, it is created as a new platform to engage students with class material and real life context (Cuauhtemoc LN & E. McGovern, 2018). Consisting of several informative notes and fun games, this app works as the alternative method that could help to enlighten students on understanding the idioms and the usage in the same way could learn. Moreover, students have the flexibility to learn from any place within any time at their own pace. Plus, the eye-catching layout design created in the apps is designed to trigger students' interest to read and learn more about the topic. The user-friendly interactive buttons and games according to the level of the students provided in the apps will indirectly help the students to enjoy their learning significantly.

1.2 Research Objective

The objective of this study in particular is:
1. To identify users' perception towards using Idiomania application
2. To study the users' understanding towards using the Idiomania mobile application

1.3 Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, two research question are proposed
1. What is the students' perception towards using Idiomania mobile application?

2.   How is students' understanding towards using Idiomania mobile application?

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Numbers of studies have focused on the use of mobile application in the classroom specifically on the use of mobile application in teaching and learning. Mobile learning which is described as ubiquitous, portable and interactive allows the students to experience their learning anywhere (Fezile and Nadire, 2011).   According to Botzer and Yerushalmy (2007), the use of mobile application in mobile learning environment improved the students' involvement in collaboration among them. They gain better understanding from learning interactively and cooperatively with their friends. The significant features such as flexibility and mobility has contributed to the effectiveness of using mobile application in learning. Mahmoud Amer (2014) highlighted in the student report that the use of mobile application in learning is convenient and students had the opportunities to learn on the go.

Chachil, Engkamat, Sarkawi, & Shuib, (2015) stated that using mobile application in language learning has given greater impact where they could access the content without worrying the constraints of time according to their needs. Learning through mobile application has given students the freedom of learning. In study done by Marwan, Madar & Fuad (2013), positive feedback was received by the students on the use of mobile application in teaching and learning. They agreed that it is an effective approach and relevant to current learning environment compared to the traditional way. In addition, the elements and contents in mobile application are more sophisticated and attractive for students to learn.

Alhaysony (2017) stated that idioms are important in effective communication – writing, speaking, reading and listening. It is regarded as the benchmark of proficiency in English where the greater number of idioms are recognised, the higher level of proficiency one could possess. However, study done by Al-Khawaldeh, Jaradat, Al-momani & Bani-Khair (2016) found that students had poor performance in idioms and lack of awareness in understanding the importance of idioms in English proficiency. It highlighted the lack of exposure to unfamiliar idioms as having limited English vocabularies. Apart from that, students were having inadequate exercises of idioms designed to them. This is also supported by Alrishan & Smadi (2015) who stated that most of the non-native students face difficulty specifically if it involves the figurative meaning due to different culture factor.

There were few appropriate strategies to assist them in learning idioms in target language, one of it suggested that the teachers should encourage the students to translate the idioms using translation strategies according to the word familiarity. However, there were limited studies focuses on using technology tools in teaching and learning idioms. Mahmoud Amer (2014) highlighted the use of technology tool in learning idiom was positively accepted by the students. It gives the insight that learning through technology is an alternative approach that is more interesting and effective.

Therefore, in this study, the use of mobile application 'Idiomania' will be highlighted in learning idioms among students.
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3.   METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used to explore the student's perception towards learning Idioms using Idiomania. Five (5) semester one students from one of the polytechnic in Johor Bahru was given a chance to use and test the applications. Semi-structured informal interviews were used as the main data collection for this study. The purpose of the interviews was to gain in-depth knowledge about students' perception about the use of Idiomania application in order to learn English. Each respondent was interviewed individually to get their view on the using of Idiomania application.

4.   FINDINGS

To find out the student's perception, a short interview was conducted with the respondents and the transcripts were analysed manually according to the themes. The themes use during coded and reducing data are " The Advantage of Using Idiomania Mobile Application" and " Challenges of Using Idiomania Mobile Application".

4.1   The Advantage of Using Idiomania Mobile Application

The result of the interview indicated that students have positive perception towards the use of Idiomania apps in order to learn English. As a result, it was revealed that the students able to provide the advantages of using

Idiomania apps include variety of activity according to level (Notes, Quiz and Games for beginner, intermediate and advance), flexibility to learn and motivate students to learn idiom because of attractive design and layout.

4.1.2 Variety of Activity according to Level

Idiomania Mobile Application was created for three different levels so that everybody can use this application to learn about idioms. Since it aims is to find the students' understanding about idioms when using Idiomania, the application is broken down into few stages and contains three levels. It starts with beginner, intermediate and advance level. In every stage, different notes are creatively explained in the application according to their level. Quiz is also given in which it is tailored according to their level and understanding. The purpose of breaking this into levels is to see students' understanding of idioms. If it is beginner level, the idiom used is simple and easy. So does the quiz. Once they move to the next level, the idioms used are getting harder ranging with some intermediate vocabularies. Same goes to the advance level, the vocabularies used are more advanced and the quiz provided is suitable to the level. The respondents agreed that they enjoyed different various activities in Idiomania and learn new vocabularies. This can be seen from the figure 1 below.
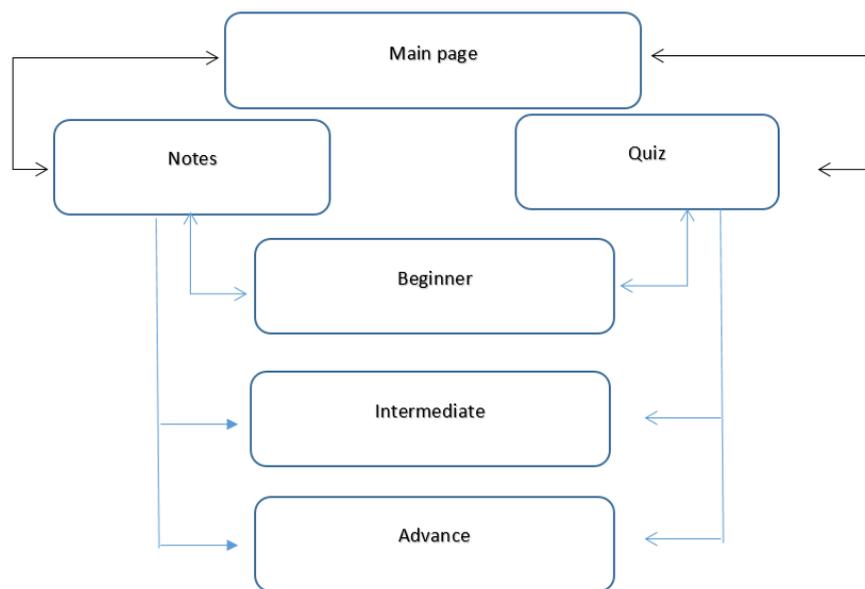

Fig. 1. Idiomania Content & Levels

These are some responses given by the respondents according to activity in Idiomania:

> *"I enjoyed the notes, exercises and quiz in Idiomania. I learned many new vocabularies, if I don't understand, I will try to make connection between the idioms and the meanings"*

[Student A]

> *"Idiomania helps me to learn idioms better according to my level."*

[Student B]

> *"I began with beginner level and there are quite a number of new idioms I have never heard before. So, this app attracts me to explore more until the advance level."*

[Student D]

> *"Every level of this app consists of different quiz that is designed according to students' comprehension. The quiz of every level is so interesting."*

[Student E]

4.1.3 Flexibility to Learn

The best part of application is it can be used anywhere and anytime. It brings convenience to the students where they can learn it according to their own time and space. Students can also use this application many times until they really understand the topic.

"We can use this application anywhere and anytime."

[Student A]

"I can also use this application many times until I really understand about it."

[Student B]

"Learning idioms through mobile application is so convenient to me. Plus, I have flexible time to adjust my time to learn. I have no worries to learn during night or even when I have free time at my room."

[Student C]

4.1.4 Attractive design and layout.

One of the great things about Idiomania mobile application is about its attractive design and layout. Interesting and attractive design can motivate students to use the application. Besides, the contents of the application are not wordy and they use simple and direct words as they want to avoid any confusion and misunderstanding among the users.

"I love to use this app because it is nice and attractive. It is suitable not only for the primary and secondary students, but also to the polytechnic students.

[Student A]

"The words used are fancy and the graphics are so catchy and cute. And the colour used are so colourful."

[Student C]

"Idiomania is suitable for the target users especially to the beginners. The contents are concise, the instructions are simple that can be understood by the students. And they are not wordy. so, we can understand more."

[Student D]

a)   b)

c)

Fig. 2. (a) Idiomania interface; (b) Beginner Content; (c) Beginner Quiz

4.2 The Challenges of Using Idiomania Mobile Application

The result of the interview also indicated two challenges faced by students while using this application which is unfamiliar idioms. Student faced difficulty in order to guess the meaning of the idioms due to limited vocabulary and they are less familiar to it. This is due to cultural differences that cause to confusion for some second language speakers (Pimenova, 2011). Besides, in certain circumstances, if the internet connection is poor, Idiomania application will lag and causes the learning to delay. Therefore, the students feel interuped while learning.

> *"There are some idioms that I have never heard before. I guess I am not familiar with the words maybe. Anyway, I learned new knowledge from this app."*

[Student B]

> *"I don't really understand why some idioms have certain meanings that are totally different with the original idioms. I guess it's because those are not from our culture in Malaysia. That's why we find it awkward and difficult to understand the connection between this idiom and its meaning."*

[Student C]

> *"So far, I have no problem with Idiomania. But there's a time when this app lagged for a while. I think it is due to slow internet connection. So, it is interrupted. I hope that this app could be improved where it can be run eventhough if it is offline."*

[Student D]

5. CONCLUSION

In general, it can be concluded that Idiomania App has been successfully implemented and has high potential to become as a teaching aids for English lecturer in polytechnic. Although overall of this research findings show that this Idiomania Apps approach is good and effective, there are a few recommendations for future researchers to conduct a research and improve the research weaknesses.

One of the proposed improvement is to provide the group's competitive element in the application. This element can enhance the motivation as well as participation of students during the classroom activities which conducted using Idiomania App. Some of respondents also suggested to increase the number of activities for this application in order to make it more interesting and engaging.

Besides that, providing a feedback channel also is another recommendation provided by the researcher. A readily accessible and intuitive customer service channel can significantly improve the user experience. It is important to

create a channel for communication, feedback, ratings and reviews. By allowing users to connect or get help, you can decrease the chances of a negative user experience and significantly boost app retention. Besides that, creating an easy to use feedback channel within the app encourages communication with the user and helps prevent public negative reviews. Another suggestion is that to improve the application by making this available to be run both online and offline so that it could avoid any distruption during learning session.

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