An Exploratory Research of Chinese Undergraduate Students' English Literature Informal Learning through Social Media APPs

Jiyao Zhang

Chu Hai College of Higher Education, Hong Kong, 80 Castle Peak Road, Castle Peak Bay, Tuen Mun, N.T. Hong Kong

181201203@student.chuhai.edu.hk

Keywords: English literature, informal learning, social media apps.

Abstract: Informal learning plays an important role in English learning for undergraduates, who are increasingly using social media software to study English literature. According to Himalaya, WeChat official account, Tiktok, this research survey students' use satisfaction with these software, thereby find more helpful format of social media apps for English learning of college students.

1. Introduction

With the advanced development of information communication technology, mobile phones have become inseparable from people's lives. According to Statistical Report on Internet Development in China, as of March 2020, the number of mobile phone internet users in China has reached 897 million, and the proportion of China's internet users accessing the internet via mobile phones has gained 99.3%. The popularization of mobile phones in human society has brought about a change in education, and it is gradually changing the way people learn English. The broad use of mobile phones and different transportable and Wi-Fi gadgets has converted the traditional teaching method and learning process (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009). The widespread use of mobile devices has brought about a plethora of mobile applications for teaching English. And a large number of apps are available in a variety of ways for people to learn English. However, in this situation, how do college students pick the applications to install to help them with their English learning? In this study, this research chooses college students as a research subject. And this research adopts the mixed method to see how college students choose apps to facilitate their English learning. To better move along with our study, apps are narrowed down to three popular apps in China, which are Himalaya, WeChat official account, and Tiktok. And this essay focus on solving two research problems: find out user's satisfaction with social media applications for learning English and definite more helpful form of social media apps for English learning of college students through research.

2. Research Design

As Exploratory research, this study chooses undergraduate students as the research object and tries to learn the situation of using social media apps, thereby realizing their feeling of professional English learning. The following is the specific teaching arrangement:

2.1 Semi-structured interview design

A semi-structured interview lasted for three weeks. Eight college students, including three male students and five female students, were interviewed. (Table 1) Through WeChat, we will send one and same English learning content to eight students from Monday to Saturday every week, in the order of Himalaya, WeChat official account, and TikTok. (Table 2) By phone, there were weekly interviews with each student, and in total have three discussions. (Table 3) The reason for choosing three weeks as the time span of the interview is that the interviewees can have a more comprehensive understanding of the three software and conduct in-depth research and discussion to make the results more stable and more credible.

Table.1. Basic information of eight college students

	sex	major	grade
A	female	Journalism and Communication	Third-year in university
B	female	Advertising	Third-year in university
C	female	Advertising	Fourth-year in university
D	female	law	Third-year in university
E	female	Journalism and Communication	Fourth-year in university
F	male	Journalism and Communication	Third-year in university
G	male	Financial management	Third-year in university
H	male	Financial management	Third-year in university

Table.2. Specific content on the three software

Software	Time	General Content	Link
Himalaya	Monday, First week	Read a poem《Windmill》	http://xima.tv/SZ4rEV?_sonic=0
Wechat official account	Tuesday, First week	Analysis of foreign media coverage of Chinese films《Hi, mom》	https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/QJkqbc0rOJPu6RkUNroG5A
Tiktok	Wednesday, First week	Read the sentences from《A tale of two cities》	https://v.douyin.com/eA2xt4X/
Himalaya	Thursday, First week	Read an article about coronavirus	https://m.ximalaya.com/share/sound/374442676?shrh5=weixin&shrdv=oZTIywAcF0YQONf-QsR13RFNYCHo&shrid=1753eb1164216952&shrdh=1&shrpid=KSJJA9HCOAYPON2H9OK
Wechat official account	Friday, First week	From U.S.TV drama *The big bang* learn the vocabulary and sentence	https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/_fkAqXES39le9i2wpOIC0Q
Tiktok	Saturday, First week	Know the vocabulary from the literature	https://v.douyin.com/epYU7Vv/
First Interview	Sunday, First week	No learning content	
Himalaya	Monday, Second week	Tell the story of Harry Potter	http://xima.tv/mrmDke?_sonic=0
Wechat official account	Tuesday, Second week	Analyze the problem of "surrogacy"	https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/v-f35bjidtBfJAGuE-wbig
Tiktok	Wednesday, Second week	A vocabulary explanation: twilight	https://v.douyin.com/eA2xt4X/
Himalaya	Thursday, Second week	Tell the story of "Little woman"	http://xima.tv/1_wHTRq2?_sonic=0
Wechat official account	Friday, Second week	Analyze British Financial times frequent words	https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/68tR0XHR5G0wFAKNsVx_Lw?from=singlemessage&isappinstalled=0&scene=1&clicktime=1620099706&enterid=1620099706
Tiktok	Saturday, Second week	The cultural extension of twilight	https://v.douyin.com/eA233kC/
Second Interview	Sunday, Second week	No learning content	
Himalaya	Monday, Third week	Analyze a economic articles and teach English knowledge	https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Ft0zuUPGD786pgthk2ydPQ
Wechat official account	Tuesday, Third week	Analyze how neurodiversity enable to workplace	https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/GNqReWGNItW3us5dxD4Mjg
Tiktok	Wednesday, Third week	Use one word "just" know other word	https://v.douyin.com/eAVUymn/
Himalaya	Thursday, Third week	Analyze art article and explain sentences	https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/8lkd6yy-hhlVjFg-n311lA
Tiktok	Saturday, Third week	The meaning of "flag"	https://v.douyin.com/eA2vWVh/
Third Interview	Sunday, Third week	No learning content	

Table.3. Interview Structure

Dimension	Question description	No. of the Question includes the interview
Factors influencing the selection of apps	Learning satisfaction, Effectiveness evaluation	First week: 1, 2 Second week: 1, 2, 3 Third week: 1, 2, 3
Methods of enhancing social media apps	Improvement of the diverse range of social media apps	First week: 3 Second week: 4 Third week: 4, 5
The motivation of English learning	Learning motivation	Third week: 6

2.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaires were made and distributed to college students. And use the questionnaire star to collect the data. The sample size of the questionnaire is about 150 college students. Table 4 is the questionnaire structure.

Table.4. Questionnaire Structure

Dimension	Question description	No. of the questions include the interviews
Personal information	Grade, Gender, Major	1-3
Frequency of utilization	Different kinds of software's operating frequency	4, 14, 18, 21
Factors influencing the selection of apps	Learning satisfaction	5, 8-13, 15, 19, 25
The function of social media apps	Factor election, Effectiveness evaluation	6, 7
Methods of enhancing social media apps	Improvement of the diverse range of social media apps	16, 20, 22

3. Results

Himalaya, WeChat official account, and TikTok have different forms of English learning. And this popular software is used as the target of research to user recognition of current mobile learning software. This section will analyze the data in the order of the research question, and the results of the analysis will be presented separately.

3.1 User recognition for the audio book format (Himalaya as an example)

Himalaya is the Chinese podcast version; it can increase students' listening abilities and improve their pronunciation accuracy. And the main form of learning English is "listen." It has many advantages, and firstly, it satisfies the need to practice pronunciation and listening.28% of college students think Himalaya can help improving pronunciation accuracy. And the audio format is novice and interesting. 21% of college students consider the audio format is very interesting. Secondly, the content is diverse, and from basic English to advanced English. 29% of college students think the Himalayas have interesting content. Thirdly, Himalayas has an exquisite design; 18% of college students think it has a beautiful interface. In addition, Himalaya also invites many famous teachers to give lectures and set standards for content publishing, so the professionalism of the content is guaranteed.

However, the Himalayas also has some shortcomings; first, the content is not interesting enough to meet the aesthetics of contemporary college students. For example, in the interview, after the first week of learning, Interviewee A and D mentioned that some of the content of the Himalayas was

boring. The reading of *Windmill* was boring due to the lack of explanation, and the anchor kept reading in the same tone of voice. Secondly, the pronunciation is not accurate as most of the content creators in the Himalayas are Chinese, and they are not native English speakers. According to interviewees B, C, and F, Himalaya's pronunciation is inaccurate and makes them feel awkward and funny. Therefore, this led to the content is not professional enough. Thirdly, although Himalaya is the No.1 audiobook software in China, many college students do not use Himalaya. 40.65% of college students seldom or never use the Himalayas.

3.2 Degree of recognition for online reading format (WeChat official account as an example)

WeChat official account is the subsidiary of WeChat. The main form of English learning is "read." It has some advantages. Firstly, the WeChat official account has an irreplaceable advantage compares to other software because the WeChat official account is a function of WeChat, while other software is an independent app. When you open WeChat and need to reply to a message, you will see the updated content of the WeChat official account simultaneously, which plays a role of supervision and can greatly improve the frequency of using the WeChat official account. 26% of college students think the WeChat official account often sends messages to remind them, which is one of the reasons why those students choose the WeChat official account to learn English. Secondly, the interface of the WeChat official account is exquisite. 23% of college students think the WeChat official account has a beautiful design. And their explanations and notes are very detailed. 27% of college students believe the WeChat official account has detailed notes. Thirdly, the content on WeChat is rich and interesting, and the range of them covers a variety of fields, such as finance, art, and so on. 23% of college students think the content on the WeChat official account is very interesting.

However, the disadvantage is that the content is lack of professionalism. WeChat Official Account, in which the professionalism and accuracy of the content are not regulated, is a platform without much certification and censorship, so those WeChat official accounts sometimes may contain inappropriate and result in its lack of professionalism. WeChat official account often appeared some amateur English content, which led to reduced frequency of the WeChat official account. (Interviewee G)

3.3 Degree of recognition for the short video format (Tiktok as an example)

Tiktok, as the current popular short video app in China, is characterized by its ability to capture the viewer's attention. The advantage of Tiktok is that its format is new, and its content is interesting, which makes that Tiktok becomes more fun to learn a word or a sentence quickly. 35% of college students think the content in Tiktok is exciting, and 18% think TikTok brings more joy. Secondly, the audio-visual format makes people more interested in learning English. 25% of college students think that the audio-visual form helps them learning English. Thirdly, TikTok has excellent graphics, with 17% of college students said that it has great graphics.

But Tiktok has some disadvantages. First, Tiktok is an entertainment-oriented software, and it is easy to distract people's attention. According to the interviewee A, B and F, other content in TikTok is easy to divert people's attention. When you enter Tiktok, you tend to be attracted to the other exciting content of Tiktok. Secondly, in the interview, interviewees A, B, E and G mentioned that the video was too short, so people could not learn much English knowledge. Thirdly, the English learning content in Tiktok tends to be excessively entertaining.

3.4 Effective method to enhance user's satisfaction for English learning in social media apps

The effective methods will be analyzed from the data obtained from questionnaires and interviews.

From the perspective of the questionnaire, most students choose "partially agree" in terms of the correct content, richness of form and whether to push the reminder message, and so on. It shows that helpful learning software should meet these basic conditions.

In the format of learning, the options are listening, reading, and a short video. There are 36.6% of college students to choose short video format of apps, 32.3% of students choose the online reading format of apps, and 31.2% students audiobook format of apps, so college students prefer to use audio-visual way to learn English. Helpful English software can be combined with audio-visual methods to increase students' learning effects.

From the perspective of interviews, college students' attitudes towards the three kinds of the software showed a trend during the three weeks. (Figure 1)

In the first week, college students generally believed that the WeChat official account was the most helpful in English learning. And Tiktok was partially beneficial to English learning, while Himalaya was partially unhelpful to English learning.

In combination with the suggestions of college students, the push content is adjusted and improved. In the second week, college students generally thought that the WeChat official account was very helpful to English learning. In contrast, the impression of college students in the Himalayas significantly changed, and they considered that the Himalayas was partially helpful to English learning. However, the favorability of TikTok decreased, and college students held a neutral stand toward TikTok.

Compared with the second week, the push in the third week was basically in the same form. Students thought Himalaya was very helpful to English learning. WeChat official account was also very helpful in their study, while TikTok was neutral to English learning.
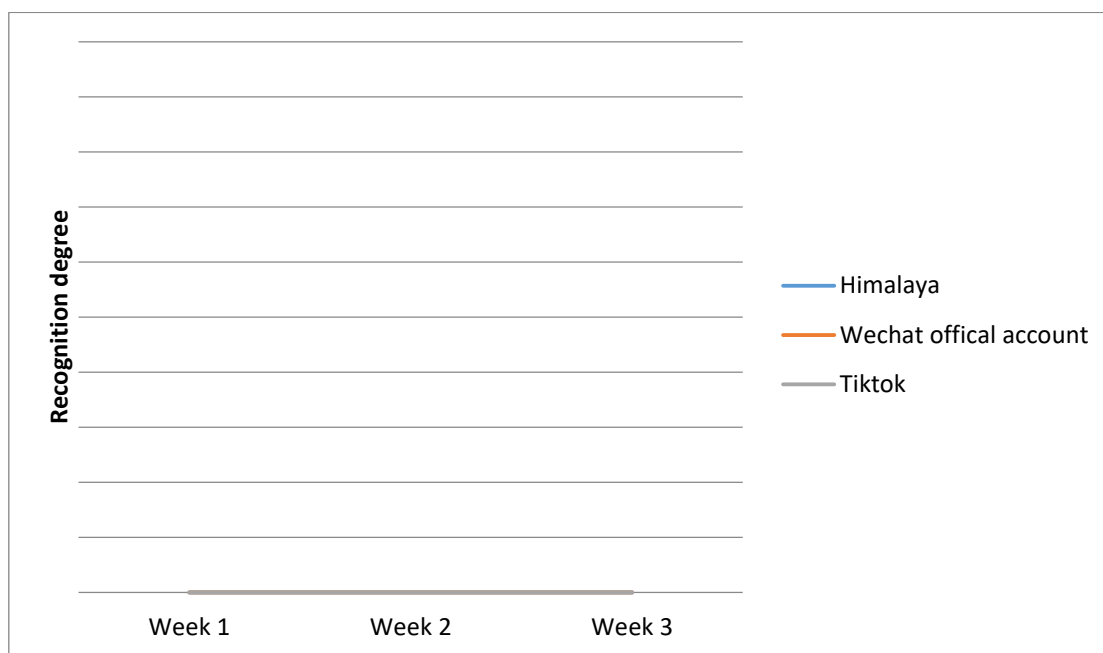

Figure 1. The trend chart of college students' attitudes towards three software

Combined with the interview content and trends, this research can better understand the most helpful forms of mobile phone software for college students. And the following analysis is about the most beneficial conditions, and according to the order of Himalaya- WeChat official account – Tiktok.

First of all, the audio format is the main form of the Himalayas. And it can be seen from the trend chart that the interviewees did not like the Himalayas at the beginning, and four of the eight interviewees had not used the Himalayas before, which indicates that college students lack a certain understanding of the Himalaya. However, after three weeks of learning, college students (As the interviewee B, G) generally have a favorable impression of the Himalayas and think the app is very helpful for English learning. Therefore, more valuable forms of learning software should include audio formats, which are more beneficial to help college students with pronunciation and listening.

For the format of the WeChat Official Account, the interviewees showed a great favor. Because of its comprehensive explanation and rich content, it has been considered by the interviewees as a very helpful form of learning software. In terms of usage, the number of people who use the WeChat official account is the largest and 85.16% of college students used it to learn English. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that much of the existing literature in the early stage is on the study of the WeChat official account, while there are few studies on the study of learning English by Himalaya and Tiktok, which provides us with a new idea: WeChat official account has higher recognition and maturity, and its form is worth learning by other software.

From the perspective of TikTok, in the questionnaire, the most significant number of students prefer to use short video format to learn English. However, it is worth noting that the number of customers who have never used Tiktok is also the largest and 48.39% of college students have not used it to learn English.

As the figure, in the first stage of the interview, interviewees generally showed a favorable impression of Tiktok. However, the favorability of TikTok declined in the second week, and Tiktok ranked third in the final week. Because TikTok is very interesting, but it is too easy to divert people's attention, which makes people unable to concentrate on study. As the interviewees said, TikTok is an entertainment-oriented software. In the early stage of learning, interesting videos can promote learning, but in the long process of study, entertainment can distract the user's attention and produce a negative influence on the study. Similar answers also appeared in the questionnaire. In the frequency of using Tiktok, the students who chose "never" gave corresponding answers. They generally believed that TikTok is an entertainment-oriented software, which is not suitable for study. So when thinking about effective methods for improving learning software, interest is a critical factor in promoting learning, but content creators need to avoid being overly entertaining.

Finally, in the third interview, the interviewees were asked about the most helpful English learning software. Most of the interviewees (interviewee A, B, E) generally liked the WeChat official account + Himalaya (reading + audio) and required detailed explanation in Chinese and accurate pronunciation.

4. Discussion

As for the variety of English learning software, this paper studies the advantages and disadvantages of three kinds of social media as the English informal learning software: shared personal radio stations APP, Messaging and Social Sharing Information APP, and short-form video App. It can be deep understood on how to improve the current problems of English learning software to clarify the more helpful English learning software forms for college students.

The research includes a survey of learning motivation. All the interviewees' answers included that they use English software because they need exams or courses. When asked about learning English literature, eight interviewees admit to learning English literature because they have exams or classes. Therefore, in the production of learning software, the creator should combine the needs of college students. The emergence of this utilitarian learning phenomenon is also worth thinking about by contemporary people.

But this research has some limitations and problems. The number of people in the questionnaire exists mismatch, and the questionnaire has 90 men and only 65 women. And there are a large number of English learning software. The research objects only contain Himalaya, WeChat official account, and Tiktok, and these are not comprehensive. In addition, this study pays more attention to the form rather than the content. In the interview, it was found that content is also an essential factor in determining whether mobile software is available or not. In the future, I hope to do more comprehensive research and provide more valuable academic literature for content creators.

References

[1] Andrews, R. (2003). Learn Welsh by txt msg. BBC News World Edition. Accessed October 3, 2021. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_news/wales/2798701.stm.

[2] CNNIC, Statistical Report on Internet Development in China (2020), retrieved from http://cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201611/P020161114573409551742.pdf.

[3] Chinnery, G. M. (2006). Emerging Technologies Going to the MALL: Mobile Assisted Language Learning; Language Learning & Technology, 10 (1), 9-16.

[4] Pęcherzewska, A., & Knot, S. (2007). Review of existing EU projects dedicated to dyslexia, gaming in education and m-learning. WR08 Report to CallDysc project.

[5] Kukulska-Hulme, A. (2009). Will mobile learning change language learning? ReCALL, 21 (2), 157-165.

[6] Luo Yong. (2013). Learn WeChat and find the time that has passed at the fingertips. Distance education in China, (12): 99-100.

[7] Peters, K. (2007). m-Learning: Positioning educators for a mobile, connected future. International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 8 (2).

[8] Rosell-Aguillar, A. (2007). Top of the pods: In search of a podcasting "pedagogy" for language learning. Computer Assisted Language Learning, 20 (5): 471-492.

[9] Sharples, M. (2007). Big issues in mobile learning: Report of a workshop by the Kaleidoscope Network of Excellence in Mobile Learning Initiative. Nottingham, U.K.: University of Nottingham, 2007.

[10] Thornton, P., & Houser, C. (2005). Using mobile phones in English education in Japan. Journal of computer assisted learning, 21 (3), 217-228.

[11] Traxler, J. (2005). Mobile Learning: It's here, but what is it? Interactions, 9 (1), University of Warwick. Accessed October 3, 2021. Retrieved from https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac /academic-development/resource-copy/interactions/issues/issue25/traxler/