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# The Impact of MALL on ESP Students' Grammar and Vocabulary Learning: An Empirical Study

## تأثير تعليم اللغة المدعومة بالجوال على تعلم قواعد اللغة والمفردات الانجليزية لطلبة اللغة الانجليزية لأغراض محددة : دراسة تجريبية

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### Abstract

Grammar and vocabulary instruction in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context are considered significant to help ESP learners do well in the language. These learners are weak in grammar and vocabulary due to some challenges they face in today's digital age. Accordingly, this paper aims at finding out the extent to which Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) impacts grammar and vocabulary instruction by looking at what outlooks third-year Finance of Banking and Insurance teachers and students have to using mobile devices in grammar and vocabulary instruction. Besides, the study attempts to demonstrate how Bloom's Digital Taxonomy helps these learners reach the target by designing a mobile application (app) to foster grammar and vocabulary learning for these learners. Data on teachers and students perspectives have been gathered by means of a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, respectively. The results reveal that both teachers and students are positive to mobile device use for grammar and vocabulary instruction, and that the researcher's mobile app based on Bloom's digital Taxonomy appears to be a smart endeavor that helps students satisfy their needs to digitalizing their learning practices according to their actual competences and affordances in particular.

### ملخص

يعتبر تعليم قواعد اللغة و المفردات في سياق تعليم اللغة الانجليزية لأغراض محددة ذات أهمية لمساعدة متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية لأغراض محددة على تحسين أدائهم في اللغة. فهؤلاء الطلاب ضعفاء في قواعد اللغة و المفردات نظرا لبعض التحديات التي يواجهونها في العصر الرقمي. بناء على ذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة مدى تأثير تعلم اللغة المدعومة بالجوال على تعليم القواعد اللغوية و المفردات من خلال النظر إلى ما يتطلع عليه الأساتذة و طلاب السنة الثالثة تخصص مالية البنوك و التأمينات من خلال استخدام الأجهزة المحمولة بهدف تعلم القواعد اللغوية و المفردات. كما تهدف الدراسة أيضا إلى معرفة كيف يساعد التصنيف الرقمي ل بلوم إلى الوصول للهدف. لهذا، تم جمع البيانات المتعلقة بأوجه النظر لدى الطلبة و الأساتذة بواسطة الاستبيان و المقابلة الشبه المنظمة على التوالي. كشفت النتائج أن الأساتذة و الطلبة يتمتعون بوجهات نظر ايجابية نحو استخدام الأجهزة المحمولة لغرض تعليم و تعلم قواعد اللغة الانجليزية و مفرداتها، و أن تطبيق الباحث على أوتار التصنيف الرقمي ل بلوم هو محاولة جديرة تساعد الطلاب على تلبية احتياجاتهم و رقمنة ممارساتهم التعليمية وفقا لكفاءاتهم الحالية على وجه الخصوص.

### الكلمات المفتاحية:

تعليم اللغة الانجليزية  
لأغراض محددة،  
قواعد اللغة/ المفردات،  
الأجهزة المحمولة،  
التصنيف الرقمي ل بلوم،

## 1. Introduction

The introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in foreign language teaching and learning is no more a trendy topic; rather it is a compulsory practice in that every language teacher and learner must consider. The rapid change in ICT tools ranging from laptops to handheld devices including Personal Digital Assistance (PDA), smartphones, among others proved to be vital devices when used to serve educational purposes. Such a shift in shape and functionality options gave birth to a new approach to language teaching and learning, namely Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The latter attempts to bring new insights to language teaching and learning not merely for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner, but also for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students. In this line of thought, it has been claimed that MALL is a safe approach both ESP and English as a Second Language (ESL) students may benefit from [1].

In fact, the ESP context, though is a sensitive or let mention a rigid field, has received handful of research papers in pronunciation, language skills, but mainly in grammar and vocabulary. However, those attempts were kept marginal to the curriculum and little voices were recorded to voice up these practices. More than that, a number of mobile applications (apps) are available to support learning [2]. With regard to what is mentioned, both teachers and learners are desperate to bridge the various benefits mobile

devices offer to them for grammar and vocabulary instruction. In this respect, there is no pretext for teachers to remain behind traditional means of instruction since today's information age does not appreciate those moves. What is more is the fact that students are aware enough about the vital advantages mobile devices present to promote learning. In this line of thought, researchers and educators need to understand how mobile technologies can be efficiently used to support various kinds of learning and develop effective methods and materials especially when mobile technologies are integrated into teaching and learning [3]. Therefore, the present paper sheds light

on the following points:

- 1-What attitudes do ESP teachers and students have on the use of mobile devices as tools to promote teaching and learning?
- 2-In what ways does Bloom's Digital Taxonomy help teachers and learners in the learning of grammar and vocabulary?

## 2. MALL Definition

The tremendous growth of mobile technologies like smartphones, tablet pcs, Personal Digital Assistances (PDAs) stimulate language learning in general and English language learning in particular more than ever. These devices are regarded friendly to their users due to their ubiquitous access, improved data storage and retrieval capacities [4]; [5]; [6]. This reality paved the way to new teaching learning mode called MALL. As the term implies, Mobile Assisted Language Learning deals with the use of mobile technology in language learning. In contrast to classroom learning, in MALL there is no need for the learners to sit in a classroom or at a computer to get learning materials. In fact, MALL can be considered valuable across time and place [6]. That is to say, it is not necessary to look at when and where learning takes place. In this regard, it has been stated that the emphasis in mobile learning is the learning of skills and knowledge using mobile devices with no or little prominence to time and place [7]. In another terms, mobile devices are tools to help learners receive knowledge and develop skills without taking into consideration when and where they are. Indeed, these two stated definitions reflect different suppositions as to the when and the where mobile devices can be used, yet the researcher goes with Geddes conception since the importance in mobile learning is to better learning practices among students without an ample consideration to the context it takes place. In this concern, mobile learning is the learning which takes place with the aid of mobile devices [8].

To this end, MALL is successful if learners, teachers, the environment, content, and assessment are well combined, especially for ESP learners. It has been pointed out that these five components lead to

MALL effectiveness [9]. Because learners are the first individuals their needs and requirements should be met, their role should be shifted from passive recipients to active participants with the assistance of mobile devices. Since their attitudes towards the use of mobile devices for English language learning are proved positive by many researchers, they are likely to perform well enough to learn the target language. As far as teachers are concerned, they need to inspire their students to think critically, design activities that call for students interaction, and more than that teachers are required to be qualified enough to explain how mobile tools are used for learning and making a full sense of the diverse advantages mobile devices offer. In this respect, MALL is said to be successful when the content fits students' expectations. In this vein, some key features have been provided so that the ESP course content aligns with mobile learning [10]. These components are: podcasts, short dialogues, reading excerpts on E-commerce, for example, while listening to the manuscript, quizzes, and interactive games. These practices, however, need to be implemented within a suitable environment to encourage learners to take action and enjoy their practices. They should be also equipped with the necessary tools and good access to network so as to reach the intended outcomes using mobile devices. As far as assessment is concerned, teachers are called to diagnose students' practices and design formative assessment assignments for their learners [11]. In doing so, students are subject, in one way or another, to assess themselves and judge the extent to which their understanding is feasible to certain extent. In this sense, mobile devices enable students to receive immediate answer and feedback to better their learning practices [9]. It is therefore safe to say that mobile devices and MALL practices in the ESP context is crucial not only to respond to today's digital age, but also to bring new insights to enhance teachers and students efforts in the teaching learning process. The following section is intended to review some empirical studies to which MALL improves grammar and vocabulary instruction along with how Bloom's Digital Taxonomy helps in reaching the target.

### **3. Grammar/Vocabulary Instruction and Bloom's Digital Taxonomy**

Countless of research papers have explained the massive benefits MALL brings to English language teaching and learning, especially in grammar and vocabulary instruction. There is no doubt to record how important grammar is among foreign language learners as they are expected to produce appropriate patterns to convey safe meanings. Indeed, former studies have highlighted the different grammar approaches and methods used in grammar teaching, yet with the requirements of today's digital age, these approaches are not taking much prominence. Put differently, these approaches and methods are still used in their traditional sense; teachers are still using traditional materials in grammar teaching and assessment. They are to certain extent silent and skeptical to 'modernize' grammar teaching in today's ever changing classrooms. What is commonly noticed is the fact that students are highly dependent on their mobile devices, more markedly smartphones. In this vein, it has been declared that educators are trying to find new ways to make grammar an interesting subject and a motivating task for learners [12] ; [13] ; [14] ; [15]. Based on this, MALL is worthy to assist and improve grammar learning [16]; [17]; [18]; [19]. Accordingly, it has been proved that mobile learning enhances grammar learning among students [20]. Studies have shown that MALL is not only restricted to grammar learning, but it can also be applied to other learning situations. In fact, the usefulness of mobile phone to vocabulary learning for Japanese students learning English has been investigated, and findings revealed that students were positive to learn vocabulary through mobile phones, and they assumed that vocabulary instruction via mobile phones is "a valuable teaching method" [21]. In another study, learners find it useful when using their mobile devices in vocabulary learning since they are able to study and retrieve vocabulary items at an indefinite time and place [22]. With mobile devices, learners are capable to revise their learnt vocabulary at their convenience [23]. In the same context, it has been reported that

mobile learning applications enhanced vocabulary learning up to 93% compared to other skills [24]. In this respect, teachers are required to be wised in their application selection in which seven steps have been suggested to help them better focus on their choices [25]. These steps are: identify learning objectives, select targeted applications, select standards to align with the application, identify limitations and essential features, choose an application, identify unique learning needs of students with disabilities, and iPad setup. These steps are time consuming, but they help instructors to come across the intended outcomes.

Hence, it is safe to record that mobile devices and mobile learning applications act well to better teaching and learning practices, as well as they motive and promote learning among English language learners. Actually, the handful learning applications being accessible and available on App Store and Play Store continuously encourage their use inside or outside the classroom setting. What is important is the fact that how instructors are going to align their practices and reach their defined objectives with digital tools. In hope to do so, Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy appears to be a good paradigm to define teaching and learning objectives. Indeed, Benjamin Bloom, who is an educational psychologist, developed his taxonomy in 1953 based on the rational to how learners learn and how learning takes place. Therefore, he identified six levels ranging from Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS); knowledge, comprehension, and application to Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS); analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. His taxonomy follows the idea that you cannot understand a concept if you do not first remember it. Similarly, you can not apply knowledge and concepts if you do not understand them [26]. However, the taxonomy was revised in 2001 by his former student David Karathwohl in which the original taxonomy was modified from nouns to verbs. Add to this, the phases of synthesis and evaluation were reversed to give evaluation and creation. In order for the revised taxonomy to go with today’s digital age, Andrew Churches in 2008 extended the revised taxonomy into the digital environment and

put forward some digital tools in respect to each level requirement. The following figures summarize the above said.

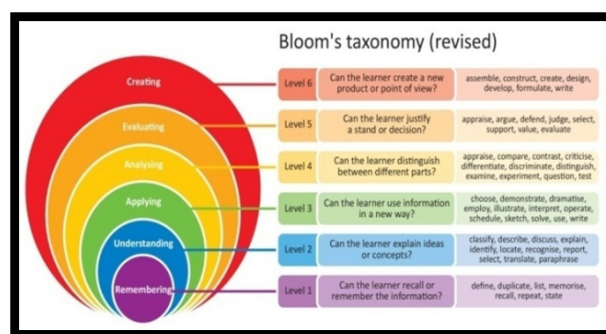


Figure 1. Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy

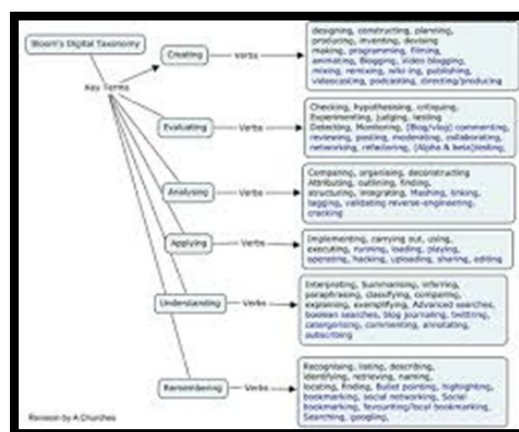


Figure 2. Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy by Andrew Churches

In this research paper, the researcher designed a mobile application based on Bloom’s digital Taxonomy to help Finance of Banking and Insurance students learn grammar and vocabulary along with their field of study. The following sections underline the methodology and data gathering tools, sampling and participants’ profile, data analysis, discussion of the main findings and the conclusion.

#### 4. Methodology

##### 4.1. Research Method and Data Gathering Tools

In this paper, the investigator opted for a descriptive research because its mainstream is to bring into light perceptions and attitudes regarding the studied issue. This is achieved by way of interviews,

surveys, observations and similar sources mainly for qualitative and quantitative data. For this purpose, the researcher used a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview as data gathering tools to collect data on students and teachers outlooks on the use mobile devices as tools for grammar and vocabulary instruction.

#### 4.2. Population and Participants' Profile

Indeed, the investigator selected the population of third-year students in the faculty of Economics department of Finance and Accountancy Management since these learners are about to have their licence degree and are subject to get hired. However, the participants were not randomly selected since third-year Finance of Banking and Insurance students at this department are short of syllabus and none has shown interest to design or teach these students. Therefore, these shortcomings are the main reasons that invite the investigator to take the initiative and help these learners do well and enhance their grammar and vocabulary learning as these skills help them to a great extent function effectively in their workplace. In this regard, the researcher delivered a questionnaire to 41 finance of banking and insurance students (N=41) whom their age range from 18 years to 35 years old, and interviewed 8 teachers (N=8) whom their degrees and work experience ranges from master degree to doctorate degree and from 3 years to 15 years, respectively.

### 5. Data Analysis

This section entails data analysis on students' questionnaire and teachers' semi-structured interview in which the researcher selected some questions that fit the objectives of the present research paper.

#### 5.1. Students' Questionnaire Analysis

The selected questions are five in number in which each one reveals specific data. The first question attempts to answer what kind of teaching material they prefer in grammar and vocabulary learning. The following table summarizes the respondents' answer.

**Table 1**

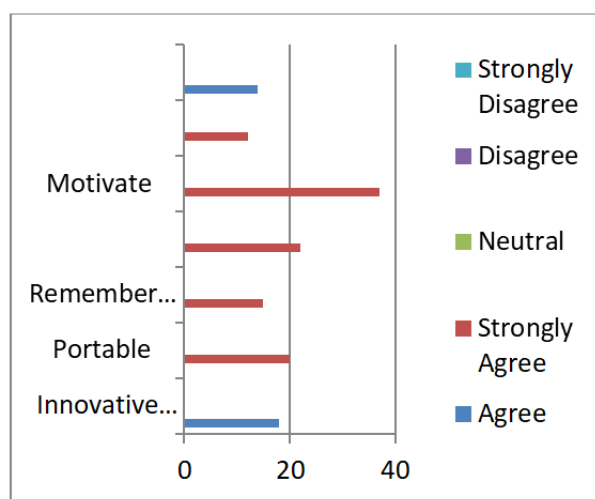
The Preferred Materials for Grammar and Vocabulary Learning

Teaching Materials	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
Handouts	8	19%
The black/ white board	00	00%
Videos	05	12%
Mobile applications	16	39%
Teaching platforms	10	24%
Power point	2	4%

The findings reflect that (39%) of the respondents are in favor of mobile applications as a learning material, while (24%) of them preferred teaching platforms. (19%), (12%), (4%) of the participants prefer handouts, videos, and power point, respectively. However, none of them opted for black/white board.

**Graph 1**

Scale for Grammar and Vocabulary Learning Through Mobile Devices

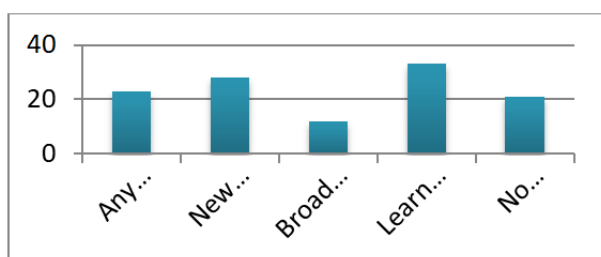


As far as the second question is concerned, the research informants were asked to opt for the appropriate box ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. As shown, the respondents show agreement on the fact that mobile devices are innovative ways (18%) to grammar and vocabulary learning and these devices

act well for lifelong learning (12%). Nevertheless, (38%) of the informants strongly agree on the fact that mobile devices motivate them to learn grammar and vocabulary. (22%) show strong agreement towards the idea that mobile device holders are dependent on their devices which make grammar and vocabulary practices possible. Besides, (20%) of the respondents strongly agree on the fact that because mobile devices are portable, they make grammar and vocabulary learning much more easy. They showed strong agreement on the idea that mobile devices help them (15%) remember and practice grammar and vocabulary.

### Graph2

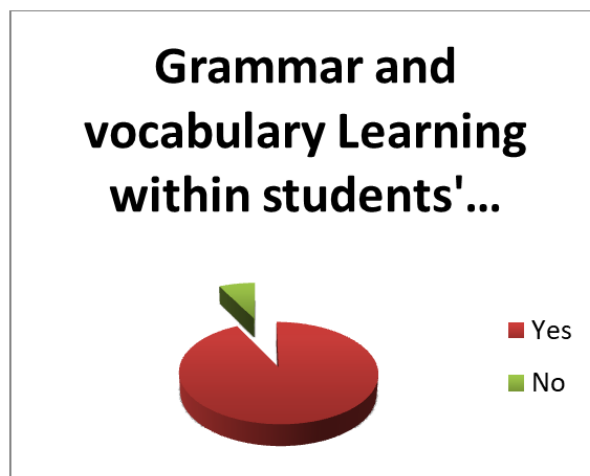
Mobile Learning Applications Improve Grammar and Vocabulary Learning



The above graph represents the collected data on the extent to which mobile applications improve the respondents' grammar and vocabulary learning. As reflected, (33) of the respondents believe that grammar and vocabulary applications are varied in which they are able to select the ones that align with their actual level of understanding. Others, (28) regard mobile applications as a new way knowledge is exposed to them, while (23) of them approach their use as a good way to learn anytime and anywhere with no restriction to time and place. However, other participants (21) regard their use helpful since there is no restriction to time spent and amount learnt, whereas (12) find them appropriate to broaden their knowledge about the language system.

### Pie Chart 1

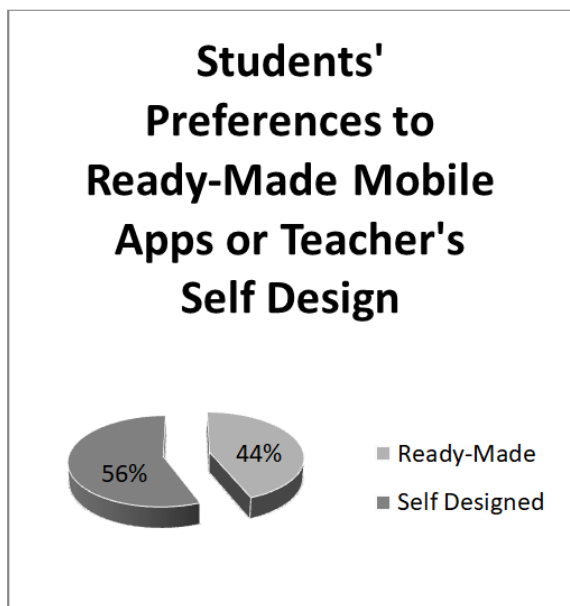
Grammar and Vocabulary Learning Within Students' Field of Study



When students were asked about their attitudes whether grammar and vocabulary are best learnt within their field of study, almost all the participants (38) answer with yes, yet only (3) respond with no. When they were asked about the reason why grammar and vocabulary are best learnt with their field of study, varied answers were given. Some of them mention that they are more motivated to learn them when these skills are taught within their field of study; they highlighted the idea that when grammar is learnt, providing examples and activities about banks and insurance, in their case, would be both motivating and challenging. Others go for the idea that when examples and activities are around their field of study, they can apply the learnt knowledge even in other situations, and claimed that it sounds irrelevant to them to learn grammar and vocabulary out of their field of study. In parallel, those who find it rational to learn grammar and vocabulary out of their field of study argued that when they learn grammar, they are able to apply the studied input and are convinced to provide safe output when needed in their field of study.

**Pie Chart 2**

Preferences to Ready-Made Mobile Apps or Teacher’s Self Design



As far as the last question in students’ questionnaire is concerned, the informants were required to mind their selection on their preferences as to mobile application use. As shown, (56%) preferred to use teacher’s mobile application design since the teacher is well informed about his/her students points of strength and weakness and is subject to meet students’ desires to ease learners’ grammar and vocabulary learning. Meanwhile, (44%) are in favor of ready-made mobile applications because they are many and easy to download. More than that, they have little training on the manner some of them operate and can suggest them to their instructor.

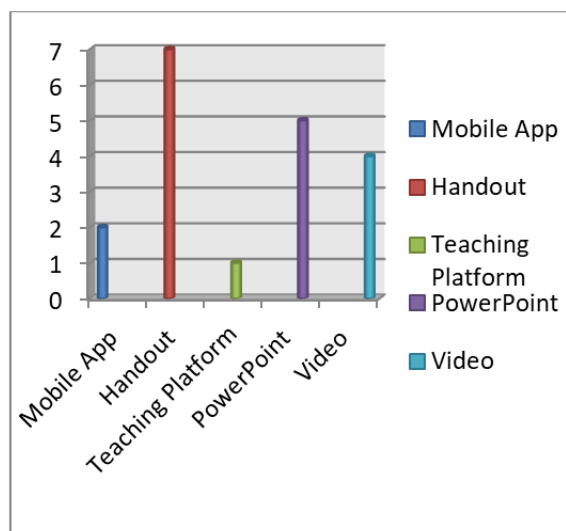
**5.2. Teachers Semi-Structured Interview Analysis**

It is widely understood that semi-structured interview opens doors for further inquiries the researcher may add or omit some questions depending on the respondent’s knowledge about the topic under investigation. Hence, the researcher has asked various questions but the ones used in this paper are carefully selected simply because the objective of this research paper is to account for their attitudes on the use of mobile devices as tools for grammar and vocabulary teaching. The following graph represents the findings about the teaching materials used for grammar and

vocabulary teaching.

**Graph 3**

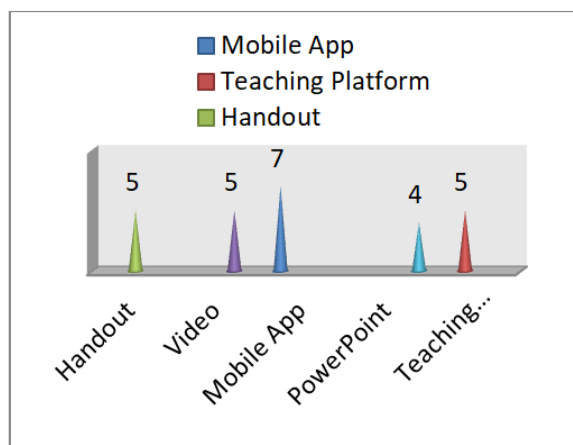
Grammar and Vocabulary Teaching Materials



The above data revealed that (07) teachers use handouts as their habitual practice to teaching grammar and vocabulary. (5) teachers employ PowerPoint to grammar and vocabulary teaching, while (4) make use of videos. Teaching these skills with mobile applications and teaching platforms are approached only by (2) and (1) teachers, respectively.

**Graph 4**

Best Teaching Materials for Grammar and Vocabulary



The above presentation clearly reflects that (07) teachers perceive mobile applications as the best teaching materials for grammar and vocabulary teaching. They add that current grammar and vocabulary applications are the best compared to traditional teaching for the reason that students are

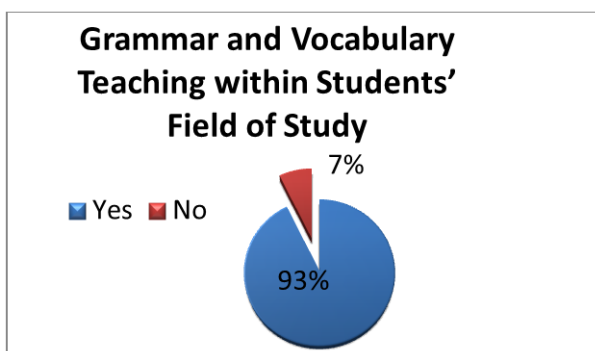
fed up with traditional teaching methods as those two highlighted skills along with mobile application use, they expose learners with the required knowledge in a simplified language. Some others (5) still find handouts appropriate to teaching grammar and vocabulary and they argued that traditional methods are the best teaching materials in teaching any language skill. Other teachers (4), (5), (5), claim that PowerPoint, teaching platform, and video are respectively the best teaching materials in grammar and vocabulary instruction.

**Question3**

When instructors were asked to account for the extent to which mobile devices serve grammar and vocabulary instruction, different answers were given. Actually, six teachers assumed that learning grammar and vocabulary constantly encourage students to take advantage of their mobile devices for educational purposes. They emphasized that if teachers stressed the use of mobile devices in their classrooms, students' would shift attention to use their mobile devices for learning purposes. The same participants believe that the portability of the devices and their light weight help in learning the two anytime and anywhere. Two others said that mobile devices motivate learners to learn grammar, vocabulary even if they are not motivated. Some of them believe that mobile devices are effective tools for students to memorize and retrieve since these devices accompany them very often.

**Pie Chart 3**

Grammar and Vocabulary Teaching within Students' Field of Study

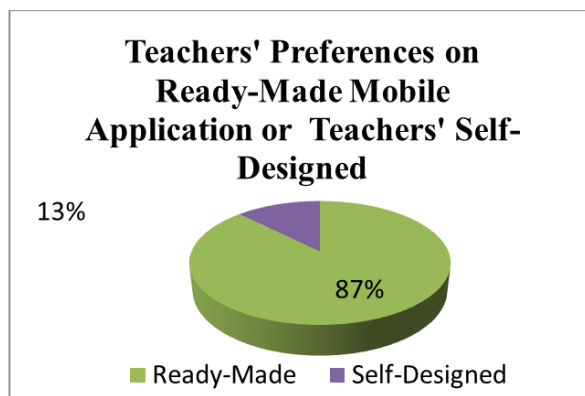


Data on teachers' believes on whether teaching

grammar and vocabulary are best taught within students' field of study, the findings clearly highlight that all most all teachers (7) prefer to teach grammar and vocabulary in respect to students' field of study as they asserted that when students are put in another context, they feel away from their field and poor enthusiasm is subject to occur. More than that, students fail to certain extent to apply the learnt knowledge into their current field and if they are reminded about a given aspect, they are more likely to dismiss. The remaining one, who claims that it not a good move, believes that learners prefer to learn grammar in a general context since rules are definite and no worry is going to happen to instruct it in their field of study later. As for vocabulary, the same scenario was repeated.

**Pie Chart 4**

Teachers' Preferences on Ready-Made Mobile Application or Teachers' Self-Design



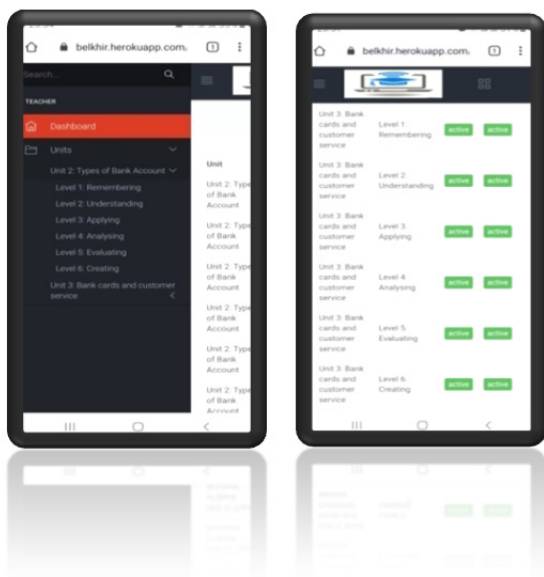
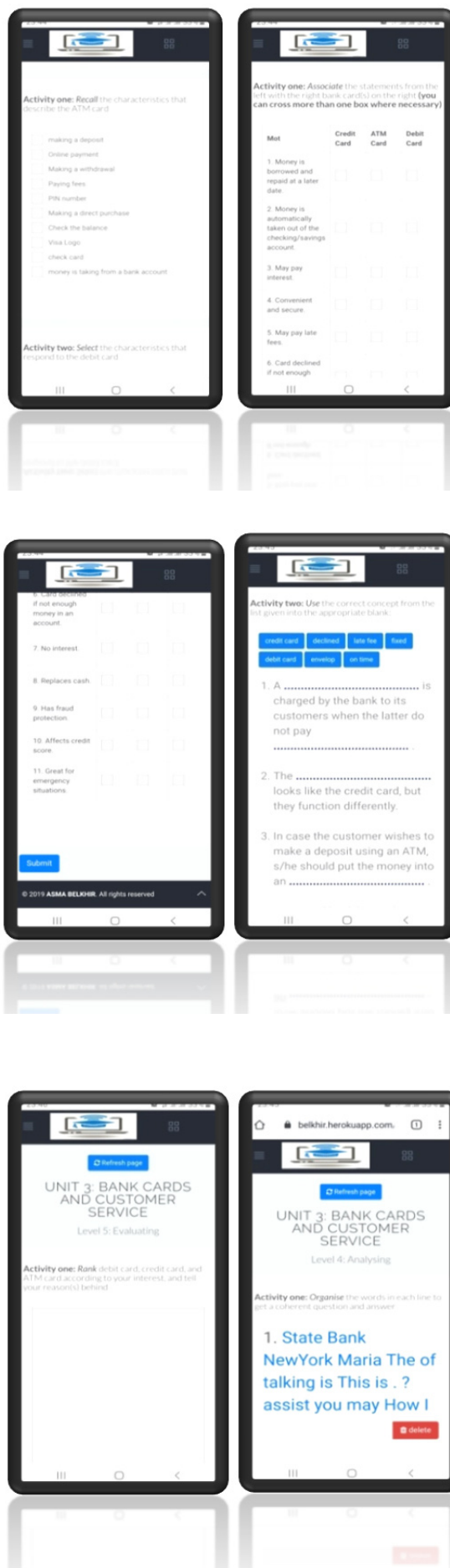
The above pie chart reflects teachers' preferences as to the use of ready-made mobile application or self-designed mobile application to grammar and vocabulary teaching. As reflected, seven teachers (87%) prefer to use ready-made mobile application since they are not professionals in designing mobile applications. They add that if a technology centre is provided by the university, such a move eases and lessens teachers' efforts and it will be both a challenging and an enjoying practice. The other one preferred to use his own designed mobile application since he has little training and has developed a game for his learners.

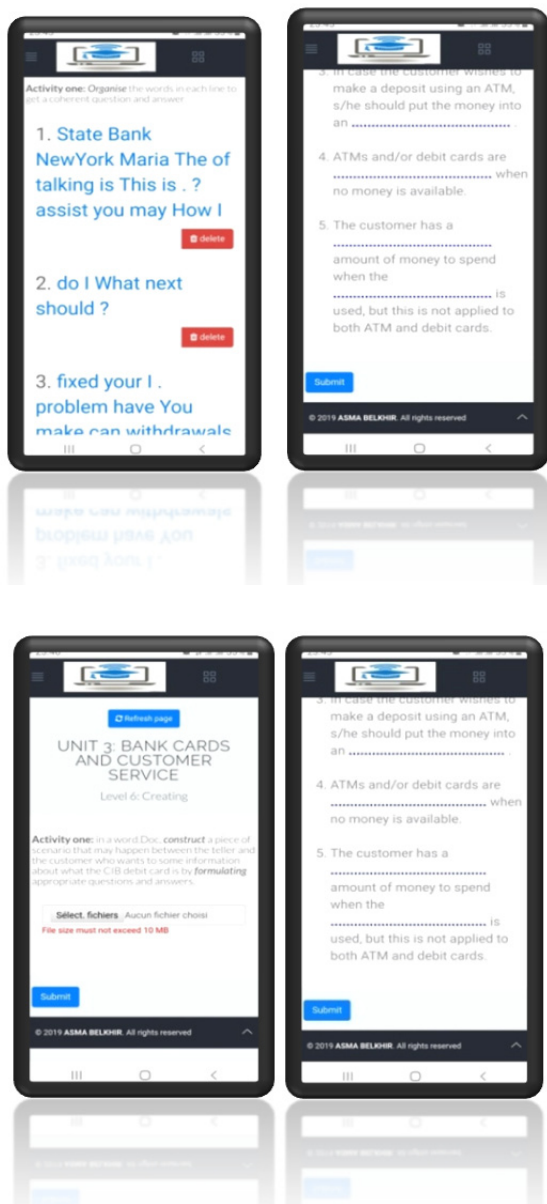


## 6. Discussion

Data analysis findings disclose that both teachers and students have positive attitudes to use mobile devices for learning purposes in general and for grammar and vocabulary instruction in particular. Both participants strongly believe that mobile devices and mobile learning applications motivate students to learn grammar and vocabulary. When students were asked to consider which material best suit their preferences as to grammar and vocabulary learning, most of them prefer using mobile applications. These findings do not align with teachers’ practices as they prefer and still prefer traditional paper-pencil and chalk and talk principle. Yet, some other teachers approach mobile devices and mobile applications as significant teaching and learning tools to cope with 21st century education and meet today’s digital natives needs and requirements.

The researcher has made an attempt and designed a mobile application to help learners practice their learnt grammar and vocabulary through selected mobile apps using Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy as a platform to practise, promote, and assess their overall learning in a digital way within their field of study as claimed by students and teachers . The researcher has used the suggested verbs of the revised taxonomy by Churches 2008 to meet the target. The following screenshots are illustrations to demonstrate how the application was designed and what procedures the researcher followed to meet the intended objectives.





## 7. Conclusion

In this research paper, the researcher undertook the issue of MALL in the ESP context to improve students' grammar and vocabulary learning. Because mobile devices are at the hands of the whole population and significantly for university learners, these devices have crucial role to play in fostering learning and improving learning practices, especially for grammar and vocabulary instruction. Because ESP learners are ill motivated to learning them, when learnt with these devices their motivation increases in parallel to meeting their urgent needs and requirements. A call for their attitudes along with instructors was needed. Findings on their perspectives are positive in which both participants regard their use vital and important

to align with today's digital age specificities. In order to bring satisfaction among them, Bloom's Digital Taxonomy is a safe paradigm to build their practices upon. Based on this, the researcher has designed a sample mobile learning application to foster grammar and vocabulary among students. To finish with, the saying teach I forget involve I learn is a wise saying each language instructor needs to consider.

## Conflict of Interest

We have no conflict of interest.

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