Emerging Mobile Apps to Improve English Listening Skills*

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The use of mobile technology has been going through a period of rapid growth. Although the potential for mobile learning is huge, few studies have been conducted on mobile usability. The purpose of this study, thus, is to demonstrate the effects of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in listening skills. The study aims to 1) investigate whether participants improve their listening skills after taking a one semester college English course, 2) examine whether there are any significant differences in listening skills between the control group without mobile apps and the experimental group with mobile apps, and 3) investigate learners’ perceptions towards mobile-based learning for developing listening abilities. The research data includes 1) the results of two sets of listening tests, and 2) learners’ reflections on their experience of mobile listening activities outside of the class. In this study, there were 24 participants in the control group and 20 in the experimental group. The results provide evidence suggesting that contextualizing MALL practice can improve listening skills and reveal the merits and drawbacks of the application of mobile phones in a foreign language class. Based on the findings, educational implications for this experimental study and future research are suggested.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language learning has been taking advantage of Information Technology. One of the most attractive technologies is mobile phones which represent a revolutionary approach in education.

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Unlike the traditional classroom, the mobile device is available to access the Internet, send or receive instant text messages, and run software and multimedia programs enhancing the quality of language learning. With this trend in foreign language learning, mobile phones with high capabilities are extending into all areas of human life, and it is expected to rather change the aspects of learning in many ways. Many teachers consider mobile devices as the next generation of learning (Sharples, 2000). According to Gay, Stefanone, Grace-Martin, and Hembrooke (2001), mobile devices are not a substitute for existing learning tools but extension for learning devices in the new environment which shows new capabilities. Some researchers mention that mobile devices can allow learners to access learning materials due to their portability and accessibility, and also to communicate with teachers and peers without time and space constraints (Chinnery, 2006; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007).

Moreover, some researchers found that mobile technologies support language learning in different areas such as vocabulary learning (Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009; Kim, 2011), pronunciation practice (Ducate & Lomicka, 2009), listening skills (Edirisingha, Rizzi, Nie, & Rothwell, 2007), English reading with personalized intelligent (Chen, Hsu, & Kinshuk, 2008), and several theme-based m-learning activities improving contextual language learning experiences (Tan & Liu, 2004). Other studies in MALL (Kim, 2011; Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Nash, 2007; Sharples, 2000) have explored the advantages of using mobile technologies in language learning. The advantages of the mobile devices feature personal, situated, authentic, spontaneous, informal, and continuous access (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009).

In this respect, the use of a mobile device in language learning can be supported based on a variety of learning theories and methodological approaches. In terms of the behaviorist and teacher-centered approaches, vocabulary and grammar tutorial programs have proven to be well suited for the mobile environment. Furthermore, constructive, collaborative, learner-centered approaches have inspired a range of MALL applications that include vocabulary learning, listening, speaking, and reading as well as collaborative learner-learner interactions. Thus, with the possibility and adaptability of mobile devices in language learning, MALL is bound to be increasingly called upon to provide useful tools in foreign language teaching and learning. This can be especially apply to learners who encounter shortage of time to be exposed in L2. Since mobile phones have capacities to be used as a learning tool, it needs to investigate the way of effective learning through mobile technologies, promoting a shift from teacher-led learning to student-led one.

Although research associated with teaching listening skills is increasingly comprehensive, few studies on the use of mobiles to enhance listening skills have been conducted. Furthermore,
many of the MALL studies (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Nash, 2007; Sharples, 2000) have focused on students’ perceptions rather than improvement of language skills. Many teachers often mention that in using advanced MALL, their designs and implementations can require too much technical knowledge and too many demands. Therefore, to apply MALL and investigate the effects on real pedagogic situations, the main purpose of this study was aimed to employ mobile apps for teaching listening skills, and to study the effects of mobile technology on listening with college students. The present study, thus, was designed to compare listening performance between two groups depending on treatment. Moreover, students’ attitudes towards mobile technology used in improving listening skills, and their thoughts on the experience after the course were investigated.

The research questions of the study were three folded: First, is there any significant difference in listening improvement between pre- and post-stages after one-semester course? Second, is there any significant difference in listening improvement between the traditional class and the mobile-based class? Third, what are the students’ perceptions toward mobile-based listening practice? The research data include 1) the scores of two sets of listening comprehension tests, and 2) the survey of students’ perspectives on their experience of smart phone listening activities out of the class. The intended outcome of the current study is to formulate the method for good practice in improving Korean college learners’ listening skills.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Listening Skill

Three approaches to teach listening skills, which are top-down, bottom-up, and interactive models, have been extensively used over the past decades. In the top-down processing, listeners get the gist and main ideas of the listening passage. In bottom-up processing, listeners focus on individual words and phrases, and achieve understanding by combining the details together to build up the whole content (Harmer, 2001). On the other hand, some researchers (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005) argue that it is proper to see the process of listening as interactions between the top-down and bottom-up processing. Flowerdew and Miller (2005) believe that interactive models try to introduce a pedagogical listening model that encompasses individual, cultural, social, contextualized, affective, strategic, and critical dimensions.

Although listening is a passive skill, it needs to be an active and demanding process of
interpreting information from sound and picture clues. Improving listening skills in a second language is not easy since students have to process both content knowledge and linguistic knowledge simultaneously while listening. Learners depend on the ongoing spoken language, and they have neither control over the speech rate nor a chance to review the message in real life. Moreover, students tend to be less efficient in L2 than in L1. In other words, L2 learners have cognitive constraints to process information in the second language with lack of language ability. According to Cook (1996), limitations on learner’s ability to understand a second language are caused both by difficulties of the language and by memory limits. That is, all comprehension depends on the processing and storing of information while listening.

Considering the difficulties and importance L2 listening comprehension, teachers have suggested instructional procedures that help students to effectively develop their listening competence. Rivers (1992) suggested that “listening involves active cognitive processing – the construction of a message from phonic material” (p. 18). Some researchers (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Kao, 2006) argued that teachers should provide materials that are familiar or relevant to students’ interests and give various listening inputs, including different types of speakers, speeches, modes of presentations, and situations. Students should be encouraged to seek out listening opportunities on their own outside of the classroom because successful listening skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice (Rivers, 1992).

According to Brown (2004), authenticity may be present in the following way: “the language is as natural as possible, items are contextualized rather than isolated topics making it meaningful (relevant and interesting for the learners), and tasks represent real-world tasks” (p. 28). In other words, authenticity implies real language, which is unlikely to be simplified or spoken slowly. For EFL learners who are not proficient in a target language, authenticity often means negative expectations since listening with authentic materials can not be easy. When learners listen to unfamiliar topics with the same speed that native speakers talk, they can barely catch the meaning from them, and only hear an almost continuous chain of sounds.

Nonetheless, one of the aim to teach English listening is to prepare students for understanding actual speech in real communication situations. According to Rost (2002), L2 learners need to improve their listening skills in order to understand natural English speech. To meet that challenge, teachers provide L2 listeners with strategy training (Mendelsohn, 1994). A listening lesson can be offered learners about how to cope with that situation, and be guided them similar, thematic listening in L2 outside the classroom.

In order to become proficient listeners, students need to be exposed to authentic and meaningful listening materials. From this point of view, mobile apps for listening can be an
effective tool for Korean college learners who do not have many opportunities to listen to authentic materials and to be exposed to a foreign language outside of the classroom.

2. Mobile–based Language Learning

The growing popularity and advancing functionality of using mobile technologies have raised their potential in teaching and learning languages. Their mobility and portability make ‘learning on the move’ and ‘anytime, anyplace learning’ a realization (Lee, 2005). Mobile learning has been more useful outside of the classroom with such activities that enable learning to be more directly connected with the real world experience. Moreover, learning through mobile phones leads students to use them on their free time and even develop their learning skills (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009).

Kukulska-Hulme (2009) described mobile devices as spontaneous, informal, contextual, portable, ubiquitous, and personal. Mobile technologies can support learning that is more experiential and contextualized within a certain environment. The promising capabilities of mobile devices in language learning have given rise to the abundant of instructional designs of m-learning. M-learning is defined as “any sort of learning that happens when the learner is not in a fixed, predetermined location, or learning that happens when the learner takes advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies” (O’Malley, Vavoula, Glew, Taylor, Sharples, & Lefrere, 2003). According to Nash (2007), MALL allowed learners to connect the various input content so that they are compelled to integrate the world outside with the material on the device and hence achieve better learning outcomes.

Using mobiles in English listening, students can use ‘podcasting’ for an authentic and meaningful learning opportunity. ‘Podcasting’ (defined as “a type of digital media consisting of an episodic series of audio radio, video, PDF, or ePub files subscribed to and downloaded through web syndication or streamed online to a computer or mobile device”, on Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcast) has recently become very popular. According to Thorne and Payne (2005), podcasts provide learners with authentic materials and samples of real speech. Stanley (2006) mentioned that podcasts could be used as both a source for authentic listening materials and a supplement to textbook materials. Thus, podcasts can be used to provide learners with a wide range of opportunities for listening practice both inside and outside of the classroom. Moreover, the podcast enables learners to practice listening in a self-directed manner and at their own pace. The smart phone apps including podcasts, therefore, bridge formal and informal learning environments and even force students learn to apply their in-class activities.
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and knowledge to real-life situations outside of the classroom.

Furuya, Kimura, and Ohta (2004) found improved learning outcomes in use of mobile phones for language practices. According to their study, the students showed the frequency of studying English from once a week to several times a week, and they also changed the places they studied English from inside the classroom to a variety of outdoor places. Constantine (2007) summarized the advantages of podcasts: First, students can benefit from global listening; second, learners will be exposed to the new expressions and new language; third, students need to listen to authentic materials and be exposed to various voices. In the study of Kang and Kim (2007), they introduced a model that focused on developing the mobile contents of teaching and learning English listening skills and vocabulary in blended learning, which refers to combine eLearning with a traditional instructor led training in the classroom, using mobile device. The model contained 5 steps to practice English listening and vocabulary using TV dramas to contribute to learning. The first step was related to a classroom activity with instruction on Monday and the consecutive five steps were done on the mobile device from Tuesday to Saturday based on learners’ own time and place. The study concluded that TV drama as a learning resource was useful to improve English listening skills and vocabulary since it was authentic learning materials. It also showed positive effects on students’ attitudes towards mobile use (Kim, 2011).

Huang and Sun (2010) designed a system to use mobile devices for listening. They constructed a website which uploaded learning materials including video, and a set of listening exercise on the mobile phone to practice English listening. They studied the capability of mobile technology on English listening skills and concluded that mobile English listening exercise system made students develop English listening abilities to a higher degree.

Through various smart phone apps similar to websites, a great amount of authentic materials can be used for language learning. Teachers and students can access online authentic listening material from radio or TV programs for listening teaching and practice (Mosquera, 2001). In other words, students can even use mobile phones to download the applications for listening, which create more chances to be exposed to a target language, and encourage them to actively participate in learning.

Although mobile learning can be beneficial to learners, limitations need to be taken into account. For example, the mobile phone has a small screen, which means that little information can be presented at once, and the size of the screen makes people’s eyes become tired (Bryan, 2004). Since mobile phones will mainly be used for communications with other people, students who are most likely to use mobile phones everyday seldom use their phones for educational
purposes (Thornton & Houser, 2005).

Overall, in accordance with those findings of the empirical studies, mobile technology is useful and effective as it provides a means for EFL students to get access to ‘authentic’ listening materials. Although mobile learning is a teaching and learning strategy with a great potential, attention needs to be paid in applying it in an EFL Korean setting.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

The participants in the study were 44 students majoring in Korean Literature, English Literature, management, economics, educational psychology, and physical education at a women’s university. They were divided into two different classrooms, and all participants were enrolled in a TOEIC course which focused on listening and reading during the fall semester of 2012. Originally, the number of enrolled participants was 49, but due to the late drop, the data of 44 students were analyzed in the study. The control group was composed of 24 students while the experimental group was 20. All participants were instructed to improve listening and reading skills to prepare for TOEIC tests. The students in the experimental group were assigned to English listening using their smart phone apps two times a week while those in the control group were not. Later, the participants took the same listening comprehension test extracted from a practical TOEIC book as well as a certified TOEIC test before- and after-the course.

2. Instrument

TOEIC, the Test of English for International Communication, has been used a certified English test around the world. To diagnose students’ listening proficiency and to compare test scores within the groups and between the groups, two certified TOEIC test scores were submitted before the course started and later after it was completed. In order to minimize the potential factors of difficulty levels between the two certified TOEIC tests before and after the course, the listening test developed by the researcher was added to analyze the results. The test, thus, consisted of 20 questions drawn from TOEIC books was conducted in the pre- and post-stages to get more reliable results. The listening comprehension test included 2 questions in part 1, 6 questions in part 2, 3, and 4, each of which was followed by multiple choice questions.
The pre- and the post-tests were the same form of the questions. To access internal consistency and reliability of the pre-and post-listening tests, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of each test was measured. The values of the alpha for pre-test were 0.91 and 0.89 for post-test respectively, which was judged to indicate an acceptable level of reliability.

A self-report survey for the experimental group was designed to gain general information about the participants at the beginning of the study and to examine students’ perspectives toward using the smart phone app in English listening. The survey consisted of open-ended questions and was carried to find out what were the participants’ perspectives about smart phone apps for expanding English listening skills. It contained six questions to answer freely: The first and second questions were about the thoughts and ideas of students’ most or least favorite parts to use the smart phone apps in improving their listening skills. The third and fourth questions focused on the effective or ineffective aspects when listening to English on smart phones using the apps. Concerning the fifth question, it was asked to give suggestions for a more effective way to apply the app in class activity. Finally, the last question was whether they planned on using the smart phone app for self-regulated English learning after the course ended.

3. Procedure

The course was designed to teach listening and reading skills based on a TOEIC textbook. Students were instructed for fifty-minute twice a week for one semester. The participating students were divided into two classes, the control group (class activity only) and the experimental group (mobile-based listening activity in addition to class activity). The participants were provided with pre-test, treatment and post-test over one semester. Before the experiment, they were asked to submit certified TOEIC test scores and took the pre-listening comprehension test on the first week. Every week the participants were instructed to perform reading and listening practices which were relevant to preparing for TOEIC tests. The participants listened authentic listening materials twice a week through the podcasts out of the classroom for 10 weeks, except the first week and the midterm period. The materials were from TBS eFM and EBS On Air. Each listening practice was around 30 minute length, depending on student’s choice. In week 14, they took the post-test which was in the equivalent format as the pre-tests.

The smart phone apps, TBS eFM and EBS On Air, which are English radio broadcast programs, were introduced for the experimental group to practice listening out of the class, as presented in Figure 1. To ensure whether the students facilitated the apps, they were asked to
send text messages within one or two sentences briefly what they listened to on each day (See Figure 1).

In the last phase of the study, the survey was conducted within the smart phone group. The participants in the experimental group filled out a survey anonymously to prevent an internal validity between the researcher and the participants. They were asked to report the use of smart phones and express their attitudes toward the m-learning with open-ended questions.

4. Data Analysis

With all the data gathered after the course, they were analyzed in SPSS 18. Descriptive statistics, including the means and standard deviation, were computed for two sets of the listening tests on pre- and post-stages. To access reliability of the pre-and post-tests, the Cronbach’s Alpha was measured. For the purpose of comparing the means within the groups, paired sample $t$-tests were conducted. To compare the scores of certified TOEIC tests and listening tests between the control group and the experimental group, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used since the two groups had significantly different TOEIC scores ($M=422.19, SD=114.69$ in the control group; $M=490.00, SD=87.09$ in the experimental group, $p<.05$). Finally, in order to investigate the participants’ attitudes towards the smart phone apps for English listening, the responses of open-ended questions of the survey were analyzed.
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Improvement of Listening Skills

To investigate whether there were significant differences in listening skills, the participants’ test scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests. As presented in Table 1, it summarizes the results of a paired-sample t-test in TOEIC LC as well as the listening test consisting of 20 questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>N=24</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC LC</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>248.33</td>
<td>65.07</td>
<td>-3.35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>293.54</td>
<td>70.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC Test</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>10.08</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>-3.29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>11.21</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Number of the students=24, $p < .01**$

The students in the control group showed significant improvement in both tests (see Table 1). The mean of the TOEIC LC scores was 248.33 in the pre-test and 293.54 in the post-test, as shown in the significant difference ($t=-3.35, p<.01$). The mean score of the listening test in the post-test was higher than that of the test in the pre-test ($M=10.08$ in the pre-test, $M=11.21$ in the post-test, respectively). It resulted in noticeable difference between the scores ($t=-3.29, p<.01$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>N=20</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC LC</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>269.75</td>
<td>48.71</td>
<td>-7.40</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>344.25</td>
<td>45.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC Test</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>13.35</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>-4.15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>14.90</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Number of the students=20, $p < .01**$
As seen in Table 2, the test results of the experimental group revealed a significant difference between the scores in the pre-test and those in the post-test. The students showed significant improvement in TOEIC LC ($M=269.75, SD=48.71$ in the pre-test; $M=344.25, SD=45.37$ in the post-test) and the listening test ($M=13.35, SD=2.06$ in the pre-test; $M=14.90, SD=2.51$ in the post-test). The results proved that the mean scores were higher for all the tests after the course at a significant level ($p<.01$).

The findings in the experimental group were similar to those in the control group. The both group students showed much higher scores on the post-stage than the scores on the pre-stage. The reason for the results was possibly due to the fact that all of the students practiced listening exercises with various materials throughout the course.

2. Effects of Smart Phone Apps

1) Results of Listening Comprehension in TOEIC

Table 3 and Table 4 illustrate the results of the certified TOEIC LC using the ANCOVA analysis. Interestingly, the results showed the students in the experimental group got much higher scores on the TOEIC listening tests compared those in the control group. To be specific, the control group received $298.94$ ($SE=10.68$) as the adjusted mean while the experimental group got $337.77$ as the adjusted mean ($SE=11.72$) on the post test. As the result was presented in Table 4, the two groups showed statistically significant difference ($F=5.90, p<.05$) in the TOEIC listening comprehension test. Based on these results, the smart phone apps can be effective to improve listening skills for Korean learners who do not have many opportunities to learn English outside of the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
<th>Descriptive Statistics of Certified TOEIC LC by Groups</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pre-TOEIC LC=258.07.
2) Results of Listening Comprehension Test

For more reliable results, the students took a set of listening tests consisted of 20 questions in the pre- and post-stages. The results of the descriptive analysis are shown in Table 5 and those of the inferential analysis in Table 6. The students in the control group showed 11.94 ($SE=.39$) while those in the experimental group scored 13.57 ($SE=.42$) as the adjusted means after the one-semester course. As shown in Table 6, there was statistically significant difference between the two groups in the listening comprehension test ($F=6.99$, $p<.05$). This result indicates that the smart phone apps as a learning tool can be a variable to expand listening skills.

These results were consistent with those in the certified TOEIC LC scores, indicating that the experimental group students showed significant improvement in their listening skills in comparison to the control group students. In other words, to compare the means of the listening tests between the two groups, the students using the smart phone apps did get better than those who did not use the apps near the end of the course.

As the quantitative data proved, the findings can be explained in relation to the smart phone
Apps which may be directly related to better scores on the tests. A conclusion can be drawn that English listening learning through the smartphone apps provide learners with authentic and meaningful materials, and thus learners can improve their listening abilities to a higher degree (Huang & Sun, 2010).

3. Perceptions towards Smartphone Apps for English Listening

As the researcher attempted to investigate students’ thoughts and attitudes toward smartphone apps on listening more closely, the students in the experimental group were asked to answer the six open-ended questions.

With respect to the first question, the favorite part in using the apps on the smartphone to improve listening skills, most of the students responded positively (Table 7). To be more specific, the students mentioned convenience (33.3%) and anywhere and anytime (27.8%),
easiness (22.2%), authenticity (11.1%), and usefulness and fun (5.6%) to use their smart phone in English listening.

**TABLE 8** Least favorite Part in Apps for L2 Listening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I prefer to use textbooks in classes.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It is difficult to understand while listening to authentic materials in the apps.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It is not helpful since I can’t have listening script.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the responses of the second question, the least favorite aspects of using the smartphone app, the students' ideas are presented in Table 8. The students mentioned 'preference using textbooks in class' (50%), 'difficulty to understand' (25%), and 'no scripts' (25%). However, not many of the students showed negative aspects of using the mobile technology.

**TABLE 9** Effectiveness of Using Apps on Smart-Phones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It is useful to learn a variety of English expression and vocabulary.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I can listen anytime and anywhere so that I can improve my listening skills.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can self-study through the Apps.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I have more confident in listening authentic materials after using the app on my smart-phones.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the third question, how effective it is to use the smartphone apps to develop listening skills, Table 9 presents the responses. The detailed responses revealed that most participants’ feedback focused on a variety of English expressions and vocabulary (38.9%). The second most frequent response was 'good to have more chances to access English anytime anywhere' (22.2%) and 'to be good for self-studying' (22.2%). Furthermore, the students stated that they were able to have confidence in listening authentic materials (16.7%).
In contrast, the points the students considered to be ineffective to use the smart phone apps, the students’ ideas are reported in Table 10. Not many responses to this question were elicited, as seen in Table 10. The responses of the ineffectiveness of using the apps were ‘difficulty to understand’ (42.8%), ‘no listening scripts’ (42.8%), and ‘difficulty of speed’ (12.4%).

In sum, it can be suggested from the findings that the smart phone app would be a more efficient way to expand English listening skills. The findings were similar to a previous study (Nash, 2007) that mobile device allowed learners to integrate the world outside with the authentic materials and give more positive attitudes for language learning.

As for the last part of the survey, the students made the following suggestions to better use the apps in language learning:

“It would be better if I practice dictation.”
“The app of listening English for college students should be developed.”
“The app should provide listeners with expressions and vocabulary.”
“The app should be developed based on English proficiency.”
“The contents should be meaningful and interesting to learners.”

Finally, over 90% of the students answered that they were willing to use the apps for English learning in the future by self-studying. Overall, they seemed to enjoy using the app and thought it useful and effective to develop listening skills.

V. CONCLUSION

Mobile learning technology has a rapid pace of development in learning. The demand for using technology in English learning and the need of learners to use a foreign language through MALL will inevitably increases. In other words, mobile technology makes learning possible in an
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Students can take the advantage of using mobiles in their spare time to learn English when and where they are. L2 learners listen to English radio programs on their mobile phones while walking on the street, which facilitates to incorporate foreign language exercise into real situations. Mobiles, in this regard, serve a function of extending listening opportunities outside of the classroom (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Hadley, 2001; Kao, 2006).

The present study elaborated on an empirical study of m-learning for English listening skills and explored students’ perceptions. The participants in the experimental group were asked to use the smart phone apps for English listening practice while those in the control group were not. As for the first question, whether students improved listening skills after the course, the participants in both groups showed significant improvement in the post-tests compared to those in the pre-tests. After the participants took the course focusing on preparing for the TOEIC tests for one semester, all the students in both group improved their scores on listening.

Regarding the second question, whether there were significant differences in listening improvement between the control and experimental groups, the experimental group showed noticeable development in listening skills compared to the control group. To be specific, the mean scores of the experimental group in the listening tests resulted in higher than those of the control group. A conclusion can be drawn in which a repeated listening practice with authentic and meaningful learning resources through the smart phone apps can be effective to improve listening skills. The results of the study were consistent with the previous studies (Huang & Sun, 2010; Kang & Kim, 2007; Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; O’Malley et al., 2003) that mobile device can develop students’ language skills since they practice outside of the classroom.

Concerning the results of the survey in terms of the third research question, the attitudinal aspects indicated that most of the respondents were answered positively for using their mobiles for English listening practice although they felt difficult in comprehending authentic learning materials. They stated mobile apps in language learning were favorable due to the accessibility and mobility. They also found it effective to learn a variety of English expressions and vocabulary, and self-study. They mentioned that interacting with the real learning objects was more fun and more motivated than sitting in the classroom. In addition, they revealed not only great success in improving listening skills but also interests and strong further intentions to learn through the mobiles. Consequently, the students perceived mobile-based listening practice as effective and motivational.

The findings of the present study led to several pedagogical implications in Korean college learners. First, if students are provided with good smart phone apps as a learning resource, they
would be more motivated and proficient listeners. Second, with the respect to the factor of the smart phone use in listening practice out of the class, it leads learning to happen anywhere and anytime so that the immediacy and authentic context play a significant role in improving listening skills. Finally, the use of the smart phones on language learning could promote students’ listening skills and self-regulated learning.

Although this study examined a valuable query, there are some limitations in MALL approaches which are hoped to be handled with in some future works. Due to the small sample size, especially in the lower level formation, this study cannot be generalized into a larger population. The study focused on using the two different apps, so it would not be possible for the participants to show their preference for choosing one app over another.

The results of the present study may encourage future researchers and instructors in the related field to develop deeper and broader studies into listening of the mobile-based instructional design. Most of the instructors lack the ability to adapt mobile devices on teaching materials or develop user-friendly m-learning tools or smart phone apps for pedagogical purposes. With that in mind, therefore, a well-designed instructional tools and apps should be developed. It would be fruitful to extend to study other skills such as reading, speaking, and writing. Finally, instead of providing the apps by the instructors, it would be interesting to see what kinds of the apps students use for their learning and how it would influence on English skills. Considering that there exists little research on mobile-based listening skills with the smart phone apps, the findings from the present study are to provide valuable insights into the area of foreign language listening research and practical implication for L2 listening classrooms.

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