MOBILE APPLICATIONS AS A TOOL FOR AUTONOMOUS FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract. This article explores the role of mobile applications in fostering autonomous learning of the French language. The rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly transformed approaches to foreign language instruction, creating new opportunities for independent, flexible, and interactive learning. Through the analysis of various mobile applications and their pedagogical potential, the article highlights the effectiveness of these tools in developing linguistic competence and promoting learner autonomy.

Keywords: French language, mobile learning, autonomous learning, digital education, language acquisition, educational technologies.

In recent decades, the field of foreign language education has witnessed a paradigm shift influenced by the proliferation of digital technologies. Traditional classroom-based instruction is increasingly being supplemented - or even replaced-by flexible, learner-centered methods, among which autonomous learning has gained substantial prominence. The concept of learner autonomy, defined as the ability to take charge of one's own learning process, aligns closely with the affordances of mobile technologies, particularly mobile applications designed for language acquisition.

The French language, spoken by over 300 million people worldwide and serving as an official language in numerous international institutions, remains a popular target language among learners. In this context, mobile applications emerge as powerful instruments supporting the self-directed study of French. These tools enable learners to engage with the language at their own pace, access customized content, and develop all four core skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—within a digital environment.

Autonomous learning is rooted in the broader educational philosophy that emphasizes learner agency, motivation, and responsibility. According to Holec (1981), autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning." This includes setting learning goals, selecting materials and strategies, monitoring progress, and self-evaluating outcomes.

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is a subset of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), specifically focusing on learning via smartphones and tablets. It reflects a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogies. In the context of learning French, mobile applications offer an optimal platform for autonomous engagement, fostering motivation through gamification, real-time feedback, and contextualized learning activities.

Numerous mobile applications have been developed to facilitate French language acquisition. Below is an overview of the most prominent ones and their features:

1. Duolingo

Duolingo is one of the most widely used language-learning apps. It employs gamification techniques, such as rewards, levels, and leaderboards, to keep learners engaged. It offers daily practice in vocabulary, grammar, translation, and listening, using a scaffolded approach that adapts to the learner's level.

2. Babbel

Babbel offers structured lessons created by linguistic experts. It emphasizes conversational skills and provides cultural context, which is particularly beneficial for developing communicative competence in French.

3.Busuu

Busuu integrates social learning by allowing users to interact with native speakers. This feature enhances speaking and writing skills through real-life communication. The app also includes grammar explanations, vocabulary review, and personalized feedback.

4. Memrise

Memrise focuses on vocabulary acquisition through spaced repetition and multimedia content. Its use of native speaker videos helps learners acquire authentic pronunciation and intonation.

5. LingQ

LingQ provides access to a wide range of authentic texts and audio materials. Learners can read and listen simultaneously, creating a rich input environment that supports extensive reading and listening strategies.

Mobile applications offer several pedagogical benefits that make them ideal tools for autonomous language learning: Flexibility and Accessibility: Learners can access lessons anytime and anywhere, fitting language study into their daily routines.

Personalization: Most apps use algorithms to tailor content to individual progress, ensuring that learners receive appropriate challenges and reinforcement. Interactivity: Features such as speech recognition, instant feedback, and progress tracking foster active engagement.

Motivation and Retention: Gamified elements increase learner motivation, while visual and auditory aids enhance memory retention.

Multimodal Learning: The integration of text, audio, and video addresses different learning styles, promoting comprehensive language acquisition.

Despite their advantages, mobile applications are not without limitations. Some of the common challenges include:

Lack of Depth: Many applications focus on vocabulary and grammar drills but may lack the depth needed for advanced linguistic competence.

Limited Speaking Practice: While some apps offer speech recognition, authentic speaking interaction is often limited compared to real-life communication.

Overreliance on Technology: Learners may become overly dependent on apps and neglect other essential learning strategies, such as reading authentic texts or writing extended passages.

Assessment Limitations: Automated feedback cannot always detect nuanced errors or provide the kind of formative assessment available in classroom settings.

Empirical research supports the effectiveness of mobile applications in language learning. Studies have shown that learners who regularly use language learning apps demonstrate improved vocabulary retention, increased motivation, and greater engagement with the language (Godwin-Jones, 2017; Stockwell, 2010).

Surveys of learners studying French through mobile applications indicate high levels of satisfaction, particularly regarding flexibility and ease of use. Many report increased confidence in reading and listening, though some express a desire for more speaking practice and personalized feedback.

Mobile applications have emerged as indispensable tools in the realm of autonomous French language learning. Their accessibility, adaptability, and engaging content make them well-suited to support self-directed learners across various proficiency levels. While they cannot fully replace the nuanced guidance of a language instructor, they offer a valuable complement to traditional methods and represent a significant advancement in digital language pedagogy.

As educational technologies continue to evolve, future developments may address current limitations and further enhance the efficacy of mobile learning platforms. For educators and learners alike, integrating mobile applications into language learning strategies offers a promising path toward more personalized, flexible, and effective acquisition of French.

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