



# Vietnamese Students’ Use of Smartphone Apps in English Learning

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### ABSTRACT

Despite an improving interest in mobile-assisted language learning in recent years, little is known about second language (L2) learners’ use of and attitudes to smartphone apps in learning English. This study explores L2 learners’ purposes for and attitudes toward using Smartphone English Language Learning Apps (SELLA) in the Vietnamese context. A sample of 123 Vietnamese EFL students from different universities in Southern Vietnam was invited to fill out a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Data were projected into SPSS 25 for analysis. Results indicated that the participants generally used SELLA to practice and improve all language systems and skills. Also, the students generally showed their positive attitudes toward SELLA. The findings suggest implications for using smartphone apps in English language learning in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** mobile assisted learning, second language acquisition, Smartphone, language learning apps, Technology Acceptance Model

## Introduction

The rapid growth of mobile technology and its corresponding demand has motivated the use of mobile devices in education in recent years. Language learning and teaching have benefited substantially from this trend, and the effect of smartphones on language learning is a current topic of great interest (Chen et al., 2020). Specific terms for such concepts as CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning), MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning), and TALL (Technology-Assisted Language Learning) have been created to specifically describe the corresponding trends. Mobile devices, especially smartphones, offer numerous advantages that may mediate language learning and foster the quality of instruction to a high extent (Dashtestani, 2016). There have been found dominant benefits of smartphones, including usefulness, efficiency, interactivity, and convenience, in assisting learners and instructors in an educational context (Cheung, 2015).

One widespread use of smartphones in assisting language learning is their abundant provision of mobile applications (apps). Smartphone English Language Learning Apps (SELLA) are apps that are designed mainly around the target of assisting learners with the English acquisition process. These apps offer low costs, excellent mobility, customizability, and unlimited access at any time on students' smartphones, resulting in a growing interest in using SELLA among L2 (second language) English learners (Mindog, 2016).

Despite the growing interest in mobile learning, little is known about university students' use of smartphones in second language education in Asian contexts, including Vietnam. As for SELLA, sometimes the apps for language learning purposes are not designed by language experts, potentially leading to expertise-wise loopholes in delivering knowledge to the learners. The abundant and excessive provision of apps on the current market can also be a problem, as learners are left confused about what apps they should choose to satisfy their needs. Therefore, a proper baseline for designing apps needs to be well established with the best interest of learners in mind. This can be accomplished by doing thorough research into how learners use SELLA to learn English and their perceptions of what they consider effective and preferable so that apps can be created with proper configurations to satisfy learners' needs. Considering the rationale above, this study delves into Vietnamese EFL students' use of and attitudes towards the SELLA. It seeks to address the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1. For what purposes do Vietnamese EFL students mainly use SELLA?
- RQ2. What are Vietnamese EFL students' attitudes toward the use of SELLA?

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Framework

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is considered necessary to situate students' use of smartphones in L2 learning as it explains how people accept and use technology. This model interprets “predictors of human behaviors towards potential acceptance or rejection of the technology” with three main multifaceted measures: usefulness, ease, and acceptance (Granić & Marangunić, 2019). The first two dimensions, developed by David (1989), reveal users' “previous experience with technology, enjoyment, self-efficacy, computer anxiety, and social norm”. According to the review by Granić and Marangunić, the third dimension has been added in recent years. All these three dimensions are not separate but interrelated; they influence each other. This model has been criticized for neglecting the characteristics of contexts and individuals. In fact, different users and cultures may perceive the usefulness and ease of a technology differently, resulting in its acceptance or rejection (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017).

### Mobile Assisted Language Learning

Many studies have attempted to investigate the utilization of MALL in ESL and EFL contexts. Due to its nature of being informal, spontaneous, ubiquitous, and highly personalized, MALL has gradually gained the favor of many learners and can be considered an ideal solution to language learning barriers in terms of place and time (Miangah, 2012). Accordingly, MALL can offer an informal learning environment, directions for learning and practice, mutual encouragement system, and elements of play and competition, which are fundamentally different from most conventional language learning settings. In terms of acceptance of mobile language learning apps, particularly SELLA, a few studies have been conducted in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts.

In Cheung's (2015) research on the effects of mobile learning on students' language proficiency conducted at Open University of Hong Kong, the researcher found that students generally demonstrated positive attitudes toward mobile learning and perceived SELLA to be effective in terms of L2 learning. More than half of the students agreed that mobile devices were convenient and effective as they assisted language learning activities. Moreover, most participating students believed mobile learning could pique their interest and facilitate their self-studying process. The students also

expressed their satisfaction and enjoyment regarding using SELLA. However, when asked if mobile learning may improve their academic performance, only less than half of the students agreed and strongly agreed. Moreover, 70% of the students believed mobile learning enhanced their language proficiency. This finding implied that although students' attitudes towards mobile learning were generally positive, they were still inhabited by the belief that mobile learning had less impact in formal academic settings than in informal settings.

Similarly, Dashtestani (2016) studied 345 Iranian students' attitudes towards mobile language learning. Data collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews and observations showed that the students' attitude toward using mobile devices in learning was generally positive. The best-perceived advantages of MALL were the development of ubiquitous learning experience, convenience, capacity to employ multimedia in class, and inherent portability of mobile devices. However, some drawbacks that could discourage students from utilizing mobile learning were also identified, such as a high cost of mobile devices and students' lack of access to high-quality EFL software, awareness of EFL software, and adequate Internet-based facilities.

## **The Use of MALL and Development of Language Skills**

Several previous studies examined the link between MALL and the development of four main language skills (Huong & Hung, 2021). These studies were mainly conducted in western countries. Therefore, they should provide more insights into participants' use of mobile-assisted language learning in those countries.

Awada (2016) conducted an experimental study on the effectiveness of a multimedia messaging app, WhatsApp, in improving EFL learners' argumentative writing. Results indicated that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group. This result suggested that WhatsApp enhanced learners' argumentative writing proficiency more effectively than traditional instruction modes. Also, a follow-up survey showed that most students exhibited a positive attitude toward using WhatsApp to assist their writing assignments. They also revealed that WhatsApp increased their motivation for learning to some extent.

Machmud and Abdulah's (2017) study focused on the connection between students' English-speaking proficiency and anxiety level. These researchers aimed to test the hypotheses that the assistance of smartphones could ease L2 speaking anxiety and consequently improve students' speaking ability. The participants were assigned into two groups, depending on their speaking anxiety level. The results showed that both high and low anxiety groups benefited from using smartphones. The researchers explained that the

informality of smartphones might have helped the students effectively overcome their anxiety when speaking English.

Another study by Aghajani and Adloo (2018) attempted to delve into the effectiveness of using Telegram as a medium to practice cooperative writing activities. The findings indicated that the students participating in the Telegram writing groups achieved higher scores than the group employing conventional face-to-face learning. The students also showed a positive attitude towards using Telegram to assist in cooperative writing. Nevertheless, the students also pointed out some drawbacks of incorporating Telegram into their writing practice. For instance, they reported that some configurations of Telegram, Internet-inherent characteristics, and students' over-reliance on online correction tools distracted them from the core practice activities, resulting in bad habits in learning vocabulary and spelling.

According to a study by Naderi and Akrami (2018), the use of messaging app Telegram effectively improved university students' reading comprehension ability in the Iranian context. The results indicated that Telegram significantly improved students' reading comprehension. These researchers recommended the use of smartphones to enhance students' reading competence.

Abugohar et al. (2019) explored EFL teachers' perceptions and practices regarding the employment of smartphone apps in teaching L2 English speaking skills to Arabian tertiary students. The findings indicated that the participating teachers held positive attitudes toward using smartphone apps to enhance speaking. However, their actual classroom practices seemed to misalign their positive attitudes due to the lack of proper training and insufficient technology-wise experience. Nonetheless, the teachers' positive perceptions of the apps could act as guidance and motivation for more effective adoption of such apps in the classroom. Therefore, smartphone apps in education should be further encouraged to be flexibly integrated into teaching speaking activities. The researchers also suggested that teachers and learners should be equally intensively trained on using smartphone apps to maximize the effectiveness of mobile-assisted language teaching and learning.

A survey by Şad et al. (2020) reported that EFL students used smartphones to practice listening and speaking more often than reading and writing. The students reported that they used smartphones to listen to English songs, read news with subtitles, and watch English serials, movies, and videos most frequently. However, such activities related to writing and reading as blogging, giving online comments, and reading posts in English were most strongly disagreed. The results showed that students did these reading and writing activities on their smartphones less often than in speaking and listening tasks. Overall, the students strongly believed that smartphones

barely had any negative impacts on English learning. However, the acquired English language content did not retain long in their mind because they thought such content could be easily accessed on their smartphones. This might not necessarily be detrimental to their language learning. The researchers concluded that mobile learning requires cognitive loads essential for long-term memory.

## **SELLA**

Several previous studies were carried out to shed light on L2 learners' use of SELLA. Many aspects of SELLA, such as categorization, effectiveness, ubiquity, and limitations, were exhaustively examined. These studies were therefore regarded as the most essential baseline for the current study.

Muhammed (2014) explored Iraqi university students' use of mobile learning. A group discussion was administered to examine the effect of mobile learning on students' English learning process. The findings from the discussion indicated that the students used many smartphone apps to practice language skills and do international tests. The apps that the students mainly used for learning English included radio apps, book readers, spellchecking and proofreading apps, and mock examination apps resembling internationally standardized tests like TOEFL and TOEIC. The respondents generally considered smartphones effective in their English language learning process.

Heil et al. (2016) investigated and evaluated the use of fifty most popularly used SELLA available on the market by using a wide range of criteria. Results revealed three main trends. First, most apps tended to teach vocabulary in isolated and discrete chunks rather than in relevant contexts, suggesting that apps were created to primarily build vocabulary rather than improve language fluency. Second, apps rarely made adaption to suit individual learners' needs. Finally, the available apps did not usually have configurations to give corrective feedback and formative assessment to learners, which was a relatively detrimental factor in language learning. These results indicated that some serious flaws still existed in SELLA, which was problematic in light of the core principles of communicative language learning. This result suggested implications for SELLA development. Given that learners' communication competence is an ultimate goal of second language learning, SELLA should have inherent configurations that assist communication or social interactions between learners (Bui et al., 2022).

Mindog (2016) investigated how Japanese L2 learners used SELLA. Intermediate Japanese EFL learners, according to the findings, revealed that they preferred to use apps that met their social networking needs and demand for a variety of content. However, they neglected the features of apps that

enhanced language learning. Those learners who used autonomy effectively benefited the most from using apps. The “fun factor” or gamification mechanics also seemed to play an essential part in retaining learners’ interest and enthusiasm. The participants also believed that facilitating EFL learning with such apps assisted language learning.

Abdullah et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative study to examine how Mandarin students perceived smartphone apps in learning Mandarin. Results suggested that most students used smartphone apps to find new words and sentences related to their meaning and pronunciation. They found that the experience of using smartphone apps to assist language learning was enjoyable. They were well-adapted to using such apps and believed that this learning modality provided them with opportunities to improve their language performance. Most students were satisfied with using smartphones as a Mandarin learning tool. Overall, smartphone apps accompanied by appropriate instruction could be considered an alternative to the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning of Mandarin.

Metruk (2021) investigated Slovak L2 students’ attitudes to using SELLA to learn and practice English. Results showed that the participants’ attitudes towards SELLA ranged from neutral to positive. The extent to which the participants utilized SELLA to learn language features and practice skills varied greatly. Most students agreed that they mainly used smartphone apps to practice and develop vocabulary. Meanwhile, questions about using such apps to practice and develop speaking skills accounted for the lowest mean scores. The participants also stated that using smartphone apps to practice English was fun and motivating and helped them have self-efficacy. However, their self-reports showed a neutral attitude to the idea that such apps could help them to be more creative and confident. Finally, they were most uncertain about whether SELLA were better than traditional face-to-face English learning. Also, they did not consider such apps indispensable to their language learning process. There was a significant difference between different genders’ attitudes towards using smartphone apps. Females agreed with most of the statements more strongly than males, indicating that they were more subject to acceptance and support of SELLA than males in L2 learning.

Despite the robust research interest in using mobile learning apps in learning English, little is known about using SELLA in Asian contexts, including Vietnam. Given the importance of trends of using smartphone apps in foreign language learning, particularly students’ use and attitudes, this study used a Likert-scale questionnaire to collect data about what Vietnamese students use SELLA for in English learning and their attitudes to such apps. The results would provide implications for SELLA development and English L2 education in Vietnam and other L2 contexts.

## Research Methods

### Research Approach and Design

This study adopted a quantitative approach by using a questionnaire on a 1-5 Likert-scale. It targeted tertiary students at universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The questionnaire was sent to the selected participants by email.

### Participants and Setting

This study employed the random sampling strategy. The researchers sent an email invitation to 510 students at several universities in Ho Chi Minh City. Two hundred thirty-two students responded, and only 145 students agreed to participate. The researcher sent the questionnaire by email to these 145 students. However, only 123 students, from three universities in Ho Chi Minh City, provided valid responses. The participants were 18 and 21 years old ( $M=19.2$ ), and most were in their first and second year, amounting to 42% and 39% respectively.

### Instruments

This study employed a questionnaire on a Likert scale of 1-5 adapted from Metruk (2021). The questionnaire, written in Vietnamese, focused on the roles of SELLA in language skill practice, language acquisition, and language learning. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (1) demographic information, (2) statements about SELLA's use, and (3) statements about participants' attitudes toward SELLA. Section 2 (seven items) aimed to address RQ1, and Section 3 (19 items) aimed to address RQ2. Some of the items in the original questionnaire were removed, and some new items were added to either make the questionnaire more relevant to the research questions or to make the questionnaire more appropriate to the Vietnamese context. For example, the researchers removed three items about the place of using SELLA and one item about the use of dictionary apps in Section 2 from the original questionnaire, as they did not directly answer RQ1. Also, they added two items about how many participants and how often they used SELLA. In Section 3, the researchers added one item regarding participants' attitudes towards the relevance of SELLA compared to traditional face-to-face language learning and removed one item that was found vague. The instrument was piloted with 50 participants to increase research reliability and validity. Data collected in the pilot study were not used



in data analysis in the main study but targeted instrument revision. Results from the pilot study showed that the students rated all items in the range of 3 to 5, and the reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of each category was greater than .7 ( $\alpha > .7$ ). Those participants involved in the pilot study did not participate in the main study.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected in 2021. At the time of data collection, Vietnam was severely suffering from the devastating influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This problem was also the primary cause for the imposition of quarantine regulations, which required all people, regardless of occupation or social status, to stay indoors. All universities were closed, and students studied from home using Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams.

The data were first screened twice by one of the researchers to ensure the validity of the responses. The first screening step was to consider the demographic information provided in the first section of the questionnaire, in which participants were asked about the name of their university. They were also required to verify that they used SELLA. When the answers to the first questions were found invalid, the following responses were automatically rejected and were not considered for data analysis. The second data filtering was conducted when the raw data had been gathered from 141 original respondents. Considering the potential risk to the reliability of responses from using Google Forms, the researchers decided to remove any responses that appeared to be spam. For instance, only one item was selected throughout the entire questionnaire or responses that included suspicious demographic information.

Consequently, the number of responses was reduced from 141 to 123 and was ready to be analyzed. All the data were analyzed using descriptive analysis with the help of SPSS 25 (IBM, NY). For the results of the two sections regarding the purposes of using SELLA and attitudes towards SELLA of students, the data were mainly interpreted in terms of mean scores and standard deviations. To better categorize the mean scores into smaller groups and make it easier to analyze, the researchers adopted the formula by Sarigöz (2016). The researchers used the following formula to interpret the mean scores by using the converted score illustration in Table 1.

$$O = \frac{HV - LV}{NO} = \frac{5 - 1}{5} = 0.8$$

RO: Range of Options

HV: Highest Value

LV: Lowest Value

NO: Number of Options

**Table 1***Mean Score Interpretation*

Mean score	Interpreted degree of agreement	Corresponding level of agreement
1.00-1.80	Strongly disagree	Very low
1.81-2.60	Disagree	Low
2.61-3.40	Undecided	Neutral
3.41-4.20	Agree	High
4.21-5.00	Strongly agree	Very high

**Results****RQ1. For What Purposes do Vietnamese EFL Students Mainly Use SELLA?**

As in the description of the questionnaire, items 1-7 investigated the purposes of students' use of SELLA. The questionnaire items were reorganized in this data report by mean scores from the highest to the lowest (see Table 2). Overall, most of the students used smartphones to learn English. They used smartphones to learn lexical resources and phonological aspects more than practice language skills. This section's reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was acceptable ( $\alpha = .834$ ).

Regarding the percentage of the participants using SELLA, most participants (64%) installed one or two SELLA on their smartphones, followed by a considerable number of respondents (27%) with three to four apps installed on their smartphones. Only 9% of all respondents had five to six apps (4%) or over six apps (5%) installed on their smartphones. Overall, all respondents had at least one SELLA installed on their smartphones.

Regarding the average time spent on SELLA, most respondents (77%) reported spending less than an hour daily using SELLA, followed by 19% reporting spending between two and three hours. Only three participants (2%) reported spending three or four hours, and two (2%) reported spending more than four hours on SELLA daily.

For the target of practicing/improving vocabulary, the students expressed the highest level of agreement ( $M = 4.26$ ) (see Table 2). As for the remaining statements, except for the one regarding practicing/improving writing skills, all students showed a high level of agreement with the claim that their targets of using SELLA were practicing/improving: grammar ( $M = 3.49$ ), pronunciation ( $M = 4.11$ ), reading ( $M = 3.89$ ), listening ( $M = 4.05$ ), and speaking ( $M = 3.67$ ). The participants least frequently used SELLA to improve writing ( $M = 3.23$ ). In other words, the students used SELLA to practice writing less often than the other aspects.

**Table 2**

*Students' Purposes for Using SELLA in Learning English*

Item	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I use SELLA to practice/improve my vocabulary.	4.26	0.65
3	I use SELLA to practice/improve my pronunciation.	4.11	0.82
5	I use SELLA to practice/improve my listening.	4.05	0.82
4	I use SELLA to practice/improve my reading.	3.89	0.84
7	I use SELLA to practice/improve my speaking.	3.67	1.01
2	I use SELLA to practice/improve my grammar.	3.49	0.98
6	I use SELLA to practice/improve my writing.	3.23	1.05
Total		3.81	0.85

**RQ2. What are Vietnamese EFL Students' Attitudes towards SELLA?**

Students' responses to the third section (19 items) of the questionnaire focused on the participants' overall attitudes towards SELLA. The questionnaire items were reorganized by mean scores from the highest to the lowest (see Table 3). Overall, the students highly evaluated SELLA. The results showed that their levels of agreement ranged from neutral to high. In general, they showed positive attitudes towards SELLA ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ). The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for this section was acceptable ( $\alpha = .872$ ).

**Table 3***Students' Attitudes towards SELLA*

Item	Statement	Mean	SD
1	SELLA help me develop and enhance my vocabulary.	4.19	0.71
8	SELLA allow me to practice/study English anywhere and anytime.	4.19	0.78
10	Practicing/studying English by using SELLA is convenient.	4.15	0.69
9	SELLA allow me to practice/study English easily and flexibly.	4.10	0.76
12	Practicing/studying English by using SELLA is comfortable.	4.05	0.69
5	SELLA help me develop and enhance my listening.	4.02	0.81
3	SELLA help me develop and enhance my pronunciation.	3.99	0.81
11	Practicing/studying English by using SELLA is effective.	3.95	0.72
4	SELLA help me develop and enhance my reading.	3.85	0.90
17	Using SELLA is an important part of my English language learning process.	3.84	0.91
14	SELLA help me become more autonomous in practicing/studying English.	3.75	0.85
13	SELLA give me motivation to practice/study English.	3.65	0.97
15	Using SELLA improves my creativity.	3.58	0.93
16	Using SELLA helps me become more confident in my English ability.	3.57	0.91
6	SELLA help me develop and enhance my speaking.	3.55	0.95
2	SELLA help me develop and enhance my grammar.	3.51	0.87
19	I believe that SELLA are more effective than traditional face-to-face English learning.	3.34	1.02
7	SELLA help me enhance my writing.	3.18	0.97
Total		3.80	0.82

The students showed their highest levels of agreement with statements 1, 5, 8, 9, 10, 9, and 12, with a mean score greater than 4.0 each. Their self-reports revealed that SELLA helped them develop vocabulary ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) and that SELLA allowed them to practice English anywhere and anytime ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ).

The students' ratings of the other statements accounted for a mean score lower than 4.0 each. In general, they also agreed with the statements about using SELLA in learning skills, with a mean score within the range of 3.51 and 3.99. Results also showed that their ratings of statements 7 ( $M =$

3.18, SD = 0.97) and 19 (M = 3.34, SD = 1.02) generally amounted the lowest mean scores.

## Discussion

The current study investigated Vietnamese EFL students' use of SELLA. It mainly sought to address the two research questions about the students' purposes for and attitudes toward SELLA. In general, the students' self-reports showed that they used SELLA for various purposes and had positive attitudes toward using SELLA to learn language elements and skills.

In light of TAM, the students' use of attitudes could derive from their beliefs about usefulness, ease, and acceptance. Results showed that the students rated the convenience of SELLA the highest of all included items. They also showed that SELLA helped improve English language competency (vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar) and enhance their language skills through regular practice with SELLA. According to TAM, users' adoption of technology usually stems from their perceptions of its usefulness and ease. Then, their use of a specific technology gives them real experience and helps confirm or disconfirm their perceptions, allowing them to decide if they should continue using such a technology. In this study, all the students revealed that they used different SELLA at different levels of regularity, which may have affected their ratings.

Results also showed that the students used SELLA most prominently to practice and improve vocabulary, demonstrated through the overwhelmingly high mean scores of the statements about vocabulary learning. This result again highlighted the close relationship of SELLA with the learning and acquisition of vocabulary, which did not come as a surprise as this was confirmed in many previous studies (Heil et al., 2016; Klimova, 2017; Metruk, 2021; Mindog, 2016). The students also used SELLA to practice pronunciation to a high degree. This inclination towards the practice of vocabulary and pronunciation can probably be explained by the fact that they are interconnected (Vu et al., 2022). To date, most available dictionary apps are integrated with a text-to-speech function that can provide accurate pronunciation in the form of either the International Phonetic Alphabet or voiceover for searched words. They target helping users acquire vocabulary and enhance pronunciation at the same time (Hung et al., 2022), which indeed shows a positive advancement in the current development of such apps, which is favorable to the language learning process and meets the criteria to be considered good mobile learning services (Miangah, 2012). The current study reported that students engaged least often in grammar learning activities through SELLA. Although grammar learning activities were least strongly agreed upon, the students rated grammar within the range of agreement. This

finding, therefore, deserves more attention from both researchers and app developers, as this seems to be a neglected domain in MALL and SELLA studies.

Results also showed that the students used SELLA to practice all language skills except writing. Metruk (2021) explained that the practice of writing through SELLA does not receive much agreement from L2 learners. Moreover, high levels of agreement for the statements regarding listening skills suggest that students tended to practice these skills through SELLA more frequently than other skills. The studies by Gangaianmaran and Pasupathi (2017) and Şad et al. (2020) also found that L2 learners in different contexts used SELLA to practice listening quite dominantly. These researchers explained that this practice could derive from the compatibility of the nature listening practice and configurations of current SELLA. Overall, from the data of this study, the students agreed with most items included in the questionnaire about the use of SELLA in learning language elements and practice language skills.

Regarding the attitudes towards SELLA, the students showed a high level of unanimous agreement on all the surveyed items (except one item regarding writing skills), meaning that their attitudes towards SELLA were generally positive. The students agreed that SELLA helped them develop and enhance vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Accordingly, the students agreed that SELLA helped them develop and improve reading, listening, and speaking skills, but they were uncertain about whether SELLA helped them develop and enhance their writing skills. This result means that although students intended to use SELLA to practice writing skills, they were not sure whether such an attempt was effective in developing their writing skills. This finding, in turn, might reduce their self-efficacy level for writing skills, which could hamper their overall acquisition and performance of such skills since self-efficacy has long been regarded as one of the strong predictors of performance in different language skills and tasks.

Regarding students' perspectives on the benefits and affordances of SELLA, the students' level of agreement with all items in this group was universally high, consistent with most previous studies on student attitudes toward SELLA or MALL. First, they agreed that SELLA allowed them to learn and learn English anywhere and anytime, suggesting that SELLA gave them freedom in the manner of time and place. According to Miangah (2012), learner autonomy is an inherent characteristic of SELLA and MALL, resulting in learners' decision to use apps in L2 education. Second, the students agreed that learning and practicing English on SELLA was easy, flexible, and convenient, meaning that they viewed SELLA's innate accessibility and portability as a valuable affordance in their English language learning process. The studies by Dashtestani (2016) and Cheung (2015)

confirmed the finding that this feature of MALL and SELLA led to their prominent use among L2 learners. The students also reported that learning and practicing English by using SELLA was effective. Cheung (2015) explained that the effectiveness of SELLA is the key predictor of students' acceptance, which is a result of students' use and experience. Surprisingly, the students reported their comfortability from using SELLA to learning and practicing English, which was directly connected with their actual sentimental judgment of SELLA. This result can be a reference for contexts where English is learned as a foreign or second language.

As for the other aspects, the students agreed that SELLA motivated them to learn and practice English regularly. Several studies (e.g., Abdullah et al., 2019; Cheung, 2015; Kacetl & Klímová, 2019) explained that SELLA learner autonomy provided by SELLA is usually highly appreciated by L2 students as they could use SELLA to practice at their own speed, time, and place. It motivated L2 students to use SELLA to improve their knowledge of language and language use. Surprisingly, the students revealed that using SELLA improved their creativity and confidence. However, the study by Metruk (2021) showed controversial results. This controversy could be due to a difference in students' technological awareness and beliefs in the two contexts. In this study, Vietnamese students could attribute the use of technology to a broader range of benefits, leading them to a belief that using apps in language learning helped them improve more skills than just language skills alone (Hung & Nguyen, 2022).

The contributions of this study mainly came from Vietnamese EFL students' self-reports about their use of SELLA. First, the students seemed to practice all language systems and skills through SELLA uniformly. This finding is worth noticing and should be added to the local literature and a valuable reference for foreign researchers looking into using SELLA in Vietnam. Second, Vietnamese students appeared to be more receptive to using SELLA, as shown in their generally high level of agreement towards all the questionnaire items. This result shows a shift in perception toward using technology in education to meet the needs of the time or the fundamentally optimistic nature of Vietnamese students toward such technology use.

This study was by no means exhaustive and had its limitations. Although the questionnaire employed in this study was adapted from previous endeavors, its questionnaire factors should have been confirmed. Further studies could also recruit a larger sample size from different places to validate the instrument and give more implications for SELLA. Furthermore, as this study mainly relied on students' self-reports to investigate students' use of attitudes towards SELLA, it lacked experimental results about the effects of MALL on second language acquisition and learning. Employing additional research methods, such as experimentation, observations, and

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interviews might provide more insightful information on how students use SELLA and its effects on learning different language elements and skills.

### Conclusion

The current study investigated Vietnamese students' purposes for and attitudes toward using Smartphone English Language Learning Apps or SELLA. The study can serve as a helpful direction for institutions that aim to incorporate smartphone apps into their educational structures and organizations striving to improve such apps to match the demand of L2 learners. Further researchers and practitioners can also use this study as a reference source should they want to further investigate the topic. The utilization of SELLA seems to have earned growing attention worldwide, but it remains underexplored in Southeast Asia. Thus, additional investigations into this research interest are of great importance as research on mobile learning still has a long way ahead, and new insights and findings will keep paving the way and provide more insights into the issue.

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