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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mobile Fiction Apps for Enhancing EFL Students' Reading and Appreciation Skills

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ABSTRACT

The present study proposes the integration of mobile fiction Apps (MFAs) in reading instruction to help EFL college students understand the form and content of literary works. It will give examples of fiction Apps that can be downloaded from the Google Play and iPhone App Stores, give the advantages of using MFAs, literary appreciation skills that can be developed with MFAs and instructional stages with MFAs. MFAs can be used as extension activities or as a supplement to in-class reading instruction in ESL/EFL. They are free, easy, and quick to download, update and delete, can be used anywhere, anytime and as many times as the students need. Instruction with smart mobile phones begins with downloading an MFA such as Harry Potter, Oliver Twist, Sherlock Holmes, Wuthering Heights, a novel by Agatha Christi or a collection of stories. Both simplified and original versions can be used depending on the student's proficiency level, story/novel length and difficulty level. A story/novel video, app or e-book can be used online or offline. Some MFAs provide notes and tests. The instructor can ask pre-questions that require the students to identify the plot, setting, characters, main theme, point of view, symbolism, style, and tone of the narrative, and infer the meanings of figurative language and imagery in the story. Questions and students' answers, summaries, comments on each other's' responses can be posted in an online discussion forum, blog or social media page. The students can discuss the elements of a literary work under the instructor's supervision. The integration of fiction Apps showed improved reading comprehension, literary appreciation and text analysis skills among participating students and increased their engagement in reading and literary analysis.

KEYWORDS

Mobile apps, fiction apps, appreciation skills, reading comprehension, literary genres, novels, short stories, extensive reading activities, reading instruction, EFL college students.

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1. Introduction

Literature genres such as short stories, novella, poetry, fiction, drama, novels, fairy tales and others have been part of the first and second language curriculum for a very long time due to their numerous benefits to students of all ages and in many countries. In English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL), literature provides the students with interesting resources for developing their reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation skills. The students enjoy learning English through literature which provides them with a strong motivation for language learning. Literary works help enrich students' vocabulary, acquire the standard use of the language and develop their analytical and interpretive skills and. The students consider grammatical competence the main factor in understanding literary works. Without having basic knowledge of grammar, ESL/EFL students might face difficulties in learning a particular language. Literary texts have an impact on EFL students' cultural awareness. Literature can serve as a potential tool for communicative language teaching. Literary texts offer teachers opportunities to provide their students with authentic materials to heighten their motivation by involving them in challenging task-based activities in which they interact with authors (Ashrafuzzaman, Ahmed & Begum, 2021; Isariyawat, Yenphech & Intanoo, 2020); Arboleda & Castro Garcés, 2019)A review of the ESL/EFL literature showed a variety of strategies that instructors and researcher used in teaching literature in different countries. For example, in Uzbekistan and Colombia, Gavell (2021) and Arboleda and Castro Garcés (2019) used authentic material with task-based reading and writing activities with their students.

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In Thailand, Kaowiwattanakul (2021) utilized the Reader-Response theory¹ that focused on the reader's reaction to a particular text and emphasized their role in actively constructing texts. EFL Thai second-year students' reading, and critical thinking skills improved significantly after participating in literature activities based on the Reader-Response theory. The students exhibited average level critical thinking skills and had positive attitudes towards the use of literature activities for developing reading and critical thinking skills.

In Turkey, Karatay (2017) employed literature circles², a kind of book club for the classroom. Literature circles are effective, research-based literacy strategies that combine the principles of independent reading, cooperative learning, and group discussions. The literature circles strategy was effective in developing third-year Turkish students' text analysis ability such as finding the theme, main idea, and keywords in a text. This strategy also increased the students' interest and desire for communication, and enhanced their independent reading skills, critical thinking, reading objectively, cooperative learning and self-confidence.

Another study in Turkey used the discourse analysis method. Kapanadze, 2018 found that this method helped develop students' reading comprehension, textual analysis, language use, critical and evaluative thinking, analysis and synthesis and provided a meaningful learning environment, lead to permanent learning. The discourse analysis method increased students' active participation in the classroom and made it more enjoyable. It contributed to the students' personal development, social and communication skills. It can be also transferred to and used in other areas of study.

In the Philippines, assessment of university students showed that they had a moderate level of literary appreciation skills, low ability to judge a text, recognizing the author's point of view, recognizing personal philosophy, and relating the stories to their personal lives. Utilization of innovative learning tasks enhanced the students' literary appreciation skills, reading performance, and literary competence. There was a positive relationship between the students' literary appreciation skills and their reading performance (Magulod, 2018).

At the Languages and Literature Department, Utrecht University in the Netherlands, students read and reread the original version and a manipulated (rewritten) version of a story and evaluated the story after reading it for the first and second time. <u>Kuijpers</u> and Hakemulder (2018) found that rereading the original story resulted in an increase in appreciation, but there was no change in the students' evaluation after rereading the manipulated (rewritten) version.

In few more studies, a number of technologies were utilized in reading instruction to develop read, critical and appreciation skills. The Online Digital Storytelling significantly improved the critical reading skills, critical thinking, and self-regulated learning skills of third-year undergraduate, prospective teachers of Arabic at Kuwait University. It was found that blended learning should be thought of as a good match for students from communities with poor digital literacy and technology infrastructure (Al-Shaye, 2021). In another study, multiple technologies were used with ESL Thai students. These included a movie, a video interview with the author, a CD-ROM package consisting of listening exercises, computer technology, the Internet, and an overhead projector to present the literary materials to the students. These strategies helped make the literary materials relevant and useful to the students (Traore & Kyei-Blankson, 2010). Similarly, literature students perceived the use of movies and videos as a powerful viewing teaching technique. Technology combined with viewing teaching techniques enhanced undergraduate literature students' viewing comprehension skills (S. Guieb & Ortega-Dela Cruz, 2017).

Regarding the integration of mobile technology and social media in reading instruction, the literature review showed a dearth of studies that focuses on using mobile fiction apps (MFAs) as a pedagogical resource and as an extensive reading activity in the EFL/ESL classroom to develop students literary text analysis, critical reading, and literary appreciation skills. The integration of MFAs in ESL/EFL college instruction is significant because students live in the age of mobile technology, and they spend a lot of time interacting with their smart phones. To fill in this gap in the literature, the current study proposes a model for integrating MFAs in the teaching of English to Saudi students as an extension activity to help them understand the form and content of a literary work. The pedagogical model aims to show the following: (i) how MFAs can be integrated in English instruction. (ii) examples of fiction, novel and short story Apps that can be downloaded from the Google Play and iPhone App Stores; (iii) the advantages of using MFAs; (iv) criteria for selecting MFAs for pedagogical purposes; (v) literary appreciation skills that can be practiced with MFAs; (vi) instructional stages with MFAs; (vii) the instructor's role; and (viii) the effect of using MFAs on students reading and appreciation skill development.

 $^2 https://www.bing.com/search?q=literature+circles\&cvid=2eaf0c5fd8224bf09717c70e010bda25\&aqs=edge.0.69i59j0l7j69i60.1520j0j1\&pglt=931\&FORM=ANNTA1\&PC=HCTS$

¹ Reader-Response theory - Search (bing.com)

MFAs can be used as extensive reading activities or as a supplement to in-class instruction in ESL/EFL. The integration of MFAs in English instruction will provide Saudi students at the College of Languages and Translation with additional opportunities for practicing and improving their reading comprehension skills such as literary analysis and appreciation skill. They are free, and easy to use. They are quick to download, update and delete. A variety of MFAs exist which students of different proficiency levels (beginners, intermediate and advanced) can use. Several versions of a novel or short story are available in the App Store. MFAs can be used anywhere, anytime and as many times as the students need. They are available as movies, e-books or apps.

2. Context

Students majoring in translation at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia take English language courses (Listening, speaking, Reading, Writing, Grammar and Vocabulary Building courses) in the first four semesters of the translation program (20 hours per semester). Specifically, reading is an important skill that translation students need to acquire at an advanced level, as understanding of written texts in a variety of subject fields is a pre-requisite for transferring the meaning of specialized text form the source to the target language especially in the literary translation course that the students take.

In addition, learning English from a textbook is not enough to develop students' proficiency level in English reading because instructors do not cover a sufficient amount of material and all of the exercises and parts of the reading textbooks (Al-Jarf, 2021e). Therefore, reading courses should be supplemented by extensive reading activities and has to be practiced outside the classroom (Al-Jarf, 2009c; Al-Jarf, 2009d). MFAs provide students with a good opportunity to learn authentic English and develop their reading comprehension, critical and appreciation skills.

Moreover, many prior studies show that use of mobile apps can be an important pedagogical resource in language learning. The Android and Apple App Stores have thousands of applications that are useful for language learning such as developing general English language learning by students of all ages and all majors (Al-Jarf, 2020; Cheng & Kim, 2019; Mindog, 2016); listening and speaking skills (Al-Jarf, 2021f; Al-Jarf, 2012b); reading skills (Al-Jarf, 2021b; Al-Jarf, 2012a); vocabulary skills (Al-Jarf, 2022b; Al-Jarf, 2022c); mobile flashcard apps for standardized test preparation (Al-Jarf, 2021g); and specialized dictionary mobile apps for ESP students (Al-Jarf, 2022d). Similarly, special needs college students can use mobile Apps to learn English (Al-Jarf, 2021a).

3. Materials, tasks, and instructional strategy

In literature, fiction³ refers to written works that are characterized by narratives or stories that are created, invented, and made up by the writers. Fictional works mainly take the form of novellas, novels, or short stories. Fictional works have numerous elements such as *plot*, *characters*, *setting*, *and theme*. These elements can be artistic, symbolic, and unstructured.

3.1 Locating and Searching for MFAs

A variety of MFAs can be integrated into reading instruction such as: A single novel or play; complete works of an author/writer or novelist such as Shakespeare; a collection of classical literature; ebook libraries; literature ebooks from book yards; literary collections; different versions of a particular novel such as Oliver Twist, different Oliver Twist apps; audiobooks, videos and literature notes and quizzes.

To search for MFAs on a mobile device or laptop, the students can go to Google Play and enter search terms such as: "English Fiction", "English Literature", "Charles Dickens", "Oliver Twist", "Aladdin", "Arabia Nights", "Merchant of Venice", "Classic literature", "literature audiobooks", "literature e-books" in the search box. The students can also search ebook libraries such as Wattapad. She can enclose the search terms in quotation marks and use Boolean operators (&, or, not) to narrow the search. It is important to add "English" in order to get more accurate results and to avoid getting MFAs in other languages. Once a search term is entered in the search box, Google Play will suggest related search terms that can be tried. The students can also locate, select, and suggest MFAs for specific genre, author or novel that is of interest to them.

3.2 Types of MFAS

The Google Play or Apple App Stores feature a multitude of literary genres, a multitude of works within each genre and a multitude of authors. The following are some types of fiction apps that can be used online or downloaded and used offline:

- English Novels Collections; English Novel Books Offline; 1000+ Stories Offline; Novels and Books in English Offline; Offline English Novel Books; English Stories Offline; English Stories with Levels.
- The English Stories offline app includes the following story collections: 100 famous stories, Aladdin Stories, Animal Stories, Bedtime Stories, Best English Stories, Bible Stories, Classics Stories, Comical Stories, Daily Life, Education Stories, Fairy tales

³ Fiction - Examples and Definition of Fiction as a Literary Device (literarydevices.net)

and Fable Stories, Famous People, funny Stories, General Stories, Grimm's Stories, Indian Mythology Stories, Inspirational Stories, Kids Stories, Life Stories, Love and Family, Moral Stories, Motivational Stories, Night Stories, Proverbs Stories, Romance Stories, Self-Motivation, Small Stories, The Arabian Nights.

- Audio Book 1001 English Stories; Read & Listen English Stories; English Stories with Audios; Learn English with Short Stories and Audiobooks; Learn English by Short Stories; English Stories Offline 10000 + Storyteller; Learn English Audio Stories.
- Famous Writers, stories and Novels; Novels by William Shakespeare.
- English Stories with Pictures and Photos.
- English Literature MCQs Tests; English Literature Exam Quiz.
- English Literature PDF Notes.
- Novel Summary App.

3.3 Criteria for Selecting Fiction Apps

The MFAs selected should target a specific literary genre, a specific novel or short story that is of interest to the students. The instructor can download and try several MFAs for the same novel, novella or short story before deciding which ones are useful and appropriate for the students, to find out whether it is suitable for the students' proficiency level and needs. To accommodate the students' different proficiency levels, interests, needs and learning styles and to be familiar with different MFA designs and content, several versions of the same literary work can be assigned. The instructor should take into consideration the difficulty level of the novel selected, its length, and content complexity. The instructor can look at the MFA star ratings and read the users' reviews and comments. She can select those that are free of charge and easy to use by the students. One novel (with its versions) can be selected at a time.

3.4 Skills Practiced with MFAs

Literary appreciation⁴ is reading, understanding, and making a critical judgment of the theme, style, plot, setting, metaphor, symbolism, and use of figurative and non-figurative language and other elements of a literary work. It is also discussing, judging, and giving opinions about a literary work. According to Barrett⁵, appreciation includes the following:

- Students/readers' emotional response to the content or the text they have read.
- Students/readers' identification with the characters or incidents in the text.
- Students/readers' reaction to the author's use of language.
- Understanding and explaining imagery.

Magulod (2018) classified literary appreciation skills into:

- Identifying the author's point of view.
- Identifying how the author introduces the characters.
- Understanding the imagery employed by the author.
- Recognizing the author's prime scheme.
- Recognizing the purpose of the title of the literary work.
- Identifying the parts of the plot in the story.
- Describing the author's tone, mood, and style used in the story.
- Judging the text in which generalizations, assumptions, hypotheses, theories, and arguments are formed.
- Recognize evidence proving a universal truth or philosophy.
- Relating the story to the students' lives.

3.5 Instructional Stages with MFAs

Every two weeks, the students can download an MFA related to a specific novel, short story or play they would like to read. The MFA should be used as an extensive out-of-class activity. Instruction with MFAs begins with downloading an assigned an MFA such as Harry Potter, Oliver Twist, Sherlock Holmes, Wuthering Heights, a novel Agatha Christi. Tell the students what they are going to do (objective) and how to download it. Both simplified and original versions can be used. Explain what is to be performed and how (individually, in small groups, in pairs). Give pre-questions that require the students identify the theme, setting, characters, symbolism, tone and style, point of view, imagery, figurative language, the main events of the story (plot), setting, characters, main

⁴ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332036566

⁵ https://www.academia.edu/36100454

theme, point of view, symbolism, style and tone of the narrative, and inferring literal meanings from the author's use of figurative language and imagery.

The instructor can use a social media page such as a Facebook page, an online discussion forum, a blog, or a Learning Management System such as Blackboard for posting pictures of MFAs, to post questions, tasks to be performed, students' responses to the tasks and teacher's feedback. Live discussions can be held via the Facebook Watch Party or the Live tool, Blackboard' Elluminate. The Zoom platform can be also used for discussing the elements of the fiction under study in class under the instructor's supervision

To help students engage in the novel while reading/watching it, the instructor may ask a series of questions about the story elements and story language as in Table 1.

Table 1: Examples of questions that can be asked about the elements of a story and its use of language⁶

Characters	A Male a Parafall the decrease to the condi-
Characters	Make a list of all the characters in the novel.
	Who is the protagonist/villain (main character) in the story? Why?
	How does the main character change throughout the story and its events?
	What does the main character say and do?
	What kind of conflicts does the main character go though?
	How does the main character handle these conflicts?
	Who and what causes the change in the character?
	• What do the appearance, dialog and actions tell the reader about the characters' motives, beliefs, values, and interests?
Setting	Where does the story take place?
	In which time period?
	How does the setting of the story affect the events in the story?
	Could the story take place in another setting?
	How does the setting affect the characters and the mood of the story?
	What is the mood like throughout the events of the story?
Main theme and sub-themes	What is the main themes of the story (good vs. evil, true love, the pain of war, seeking freedom, political corruption, the importance of faithetc).
	What is the moral of the story?
	Which theme do you see as the most important?
	Is the main theme implicit or explicit?
	What does the story's main theme tell you about the world, human values, and human experience?
	Why did the author write the story? What was his/her purpose?
	What message or lesson or moral does the author want to convey to the reader?
Plot & Conflict	What type of conflict is used in the story: protagonist vs antagonist, protagonist vs nature,
	protagonist vs self, or protagonist vs society?
	What is the main conflict in the novel?
	What is the turning point of the story?
	Make a list of the sequence of events in the novel?
	Are these events in chronological order
	Do the events flash back or forward?
	Does the author use flashback? If so, how?
	Does the author use flashforward? If so, how?
	How does the author create suspense?

⁶ The 8 Elements of a Story - Explained for Students! (2022) (helpfulprofessor.com)

	 Identify the introduction, rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the resolution. Identify the conflict in the story.
Point of view	 Is the point of view in the novel subjective or objective? If the narrator uses the words "I" and "me", it is a first-person narrative. Is the protagonist narrating the book, or is it an observer of the events? Is the narrator reliable or unreliable? Who is narrating the story? If the narrator uses "I" and "me" in the dialog, is he/she omniscient, i.e., all-knowing of the events? if the narration is limited, or told from the perspective of the main character, what kind of point of view does the author use?
Tone	 How would you describe the tone of the narrative in the story? Is it melancholic, uplifting, hopeful, ominous, or intellectual? Does the narrator in the novel make you feel sad or laugh? What is the author's attitude toward the events in the novel? What is the author's attitude toward the readers of the novel (condescending, ironic, comic)?
Style	 Is the author's style formal or informal? Is it fast-paced? What types of diction does the author use (slang, formal, profanity)? How does it affect the story? How does it affect you as the reader? What types of sentences does the author use (fragments, short sentences, simple, complex, highly descriptive, rhetorical,)? How do they affect the story?
Figurative language	 What types of imagery does the author use? Identify some paragraphs where the author uses imagery? Are there any similes, metaphors, and personification?
Imagery	 What kinds of imagery does the author use (visual, olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), tactile (touch), and auditory (sound)⁷? In what places in the novel does the author evoke your senses (touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing)?
Symbolism	 Is the setting symbolic? What kinds of symbols are used by the author? Does any character act as symbols? Why? Do any of the characters symbolize something? Does the story use one symbol? Or do the symbols change in the progress of the story?

In the *Task Phase*, the students work with the MFAs on their mobile phones, tablets, or laptops at home. They work on MFAs individually, in pairs or small groups. They post questions, comments, and evaluations of the MFAs they have read on the LMS or a social media page, or blog. The instructor answers students' questions, provides guidance and help with difficulties. The instructor sets a time limit or deadline for reading/watching a story/novel and completing the tasks.

In the *Post Task Phase*, the instructor gives feedback and comments on the students' performance. The students correct their classmates' errors and make comments on each other's performance. They keep a log of the MFAs they have used with their evaluation of and comments on each. She encourages the students to propose MFAs of interest to them.

3.6 Instructor's Role

The instructor serves as a facilitator. She helps the students find and download relevant MFAs that meet their needs and purposes. She matches the students' proficiency level with the MFAs difficulty level. She encourages the students to fully engage in the MFA

⁷ www.tckpublishing.com/imagery/?msclkid=7daf44f5ba9011ec8598de74cea8f799

activities. She follows the students up to makes sure they are making the best use of the MFAs. She encourages the students. She gives the students extra credit for working on the MFAs proportionate with the number of MFAs completed. Skills practiced with MFAs may be included on reading tests to motivate the students to take the MFA activities seriously.

4. Effects of Using MFAs on Skill Development

The integration of MFAs showed improved reading comprehension, literary appreciation and analysis skills among participating students and increased student engagement in reading and literary analysis. The students who participated in the MFA activities reported that they could use those MFAs anywhere, anytime and as many times as they need. MFAs improved students' literary comprehension and literary appreciation skills. They enjoyed MFAs and continued to MFAs of their choice on holidays.

5. Recommendations

EFL instructors should exploit latest advancements in mobile technology to help students develop their reading skills, especially literary text analysis and literary appreciation skills. students should not be left on their own and should never use an MFA passively, i.e., without a task to perform. They should always remember that MFAs do not teach by themselves, and their use does not guarantee the automatic development of the reading comprehension and literary appreciation skills. They should encourage their students to engage in, respond to, and be actively involved in activities with MFAs. They should supervise the students, guide them, give them feedback, and encouragement. Students who do not possess a smart phone with an App store, may use another version of the same MFA on their laptop.

To help EFL/ESL college students develop their reading, text analysis and literary appreciation skills, the current study recommends the following:

- 1) EFL instructors can prepare a taxonomy of available MFAs according to genre and most notable authors and literary works within each genre.
- 2) Introducing a list of e-books and having each student read some out of class, aiming at reading at least 4 MFAs a month.
- 3) Instructors may combine reading and writing, reading and speaking, or reading and listening activities using MFAs and mobile audiobooks. They can integrate simplified literature, multicultural children's short stories e-books, ethnic culture on social media, art texts (Al-Jarf, 2021f; Al-Jarf, 2019a; Al-Jarf, 2019b; Al-Jarf, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2014b Al-Jarf, 2013; Al-Jarf, 2011; Al-Jarf, 2010; Chou, 2016; Chou, 2015).
- 4) Extending extensive collaborative MFA reading to the Reading II, Reading III, and Reading IV at COLT. Students enrolled in the Reading I, II, III and IV courses at COLT can participate in collaborative MFA reading together with their instructors. The instructors can encourage the students, prompt, and motivate them to participate. Rules for using extensive collaborative MFA reading should be made clear. Administrative support is also required to make extensive collaborative MFA reading a mandatory part of reading instruction in EFL, in order for the students to take the activities seriously.,,,,
- 5) The integration of extensive reading activities such as reading, and analyzing inspirational quotes and linguistic landscapes (Al-Jarf, 2021h; Al-Jarf, 2009c; Al-Jarf, 2009d).
- 6) Using mind-maps to show the components of the story/novel under study and help the students understand the relationships (Al-Jarf, 2021i).
- 7) Encouraging collaborative reading and task-based reading activities using online courses (Al-Jarf, 2021b; Al-Jarf, 2019b; Al-Jarf, 2009a; Al-Jarf, 2009b; Al-Jarf, 2007a).
- 8) Using web-conferencing tools such as Elluminate for discussing the stories read (Al-Jarf, 2014a).
- 9) Integrating global themes in reading materials and reading instruction (Al-Jarf, 2022a, Al-Jarf, 2007b).
- 10) Reading and analyzing the lexical, syntactic, rhetorical, and pragmatic features of English news headlines and news stories (Al-Jarf, 2021c).

The above-mentioned MFA reading strategies would be very helpful for developing EFL students' comprehension of English fiction works of different genres and would help students engage in MFA reading. The utilization of different literary genres in the form of mobile apps by students learning English together with their preference and views on their usefulness, is still open for further investigation by researchers in the future.

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