




*Conceptual Model of Mobile Assisted Language Learning
Applications To Enhance English Speaking Skills*

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لمسات من المأساة اليونانية في منظر من الجسر

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Abstract:

Recently, the use of technology is fast becoming a key instrument in language learning. In addition, the use of mobile devices for improving learning English in the foreign language (EFL) context is necessary to all language learners as it will help to motivate the learning through adding enjoyment and usefulness to the process of learning. The learners' motivation of using Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications is one of the significant issues that may encounter the use of these applications by EFL learners. Adding to that, English speaking is considered as the most challenging aspect in the process of enhancing the language skills. The main purpose of this study is to present a conceptual model to motivate the English speaking learning by EFL learners using MALL applications. The conceptual model is proposed based on Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) supported by related theories and studies. MALL applications could motivate the English learner to enhance the speaking skills due to many factors such as self directed learning, variety of learning styles, and accessibility and availability of learning content. This study is important to explain the various factors that could help to motivate the use of MALL applications by EFL learners to improve their speaking skills. Based on the proposed conceptual model, the future work and recommendations are suggested in this study too.

Keywords: *MALL, English speaking, motivation, EFL learners, TAM.*

المخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث بشكل رئيسي المسات اليونانية العميقة في رواية "منظر من الجسر" لأرثر ميلر والتي تعتبر مأساة حديثة. ويهدف إلى معرفة ما إذا كان يشترك في بعض المسات اليونانية مثل القيم والصراع والتنقيص والعيب والمعاناة. الكتاب المسرحيون القدماء، مثل الكتاب المسرحيين المعاصرين، يأخذون على أكتافهم مهمة تصوير حالة الإنسان في العالم حيث لا يوجد شيء مؤكد؛ عالم منزعج من الآثار المرعبة للحرب والتكنولوجيا. أصبح الإنسان الآن ضحية التقدم السريع والحضارة الجديدة والطبقات الاجتماعية والبطالة والتلوث. ومن هنا يقدم عدد من المسرحيين المعاصرين الإنسان المعاصر كمخلوق عاجز يبحث عن مأوى في زوايا المجتمع المدمر.

1.0 Introduction

The advent of mobile technologies in applications assisting language learning process seems to be generally accepted and growing. Hence, the wide use of smartphones and other portable devices has been significantly changing the ways of learning in many contexts, including language learning (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009). Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) is a key aspect of language learning and it is regarded as one of the most pertinent application areas. Miraz & Ali (2014) mentioned that there are numerous studies may be found on second and foreign language mobile learning. This study is rooted in the use of a new evolved technology that is mobile applications, in improving language learning. Specifically, the use of MALL applications in the improvement of the English speaking skills among Arab EFL university students.

In recent the years, the use of technology is fast becoming a key instrument in language learning. Using mobile devices for improving learning English in the foreign language context (EFL) is necessary to all language learners as it will help to facilitate the process of learning and to add some enjoyment and fun (Mohammed, 2015). Various studies have been done to investigate the use of MALL applications in language learning and they concluded that using MALL in EFL context is an effective way to

improve the language skills (Muhammed, 2014; Miangah & Nizarat, 2012; Abdus, Camerena, and Facer, 2009; Hulme & Shield, 2008; Ali et al. 2014; Vogel, Kennedy, Kuan, Kwok, and Lai, 2007; Azar & Nasiri, 2014; Hosni, 2014, Dekhurdi & Golestan, 2016). One of the main skills to be greatly improved through the use of MALL applications is said to be speaking skills (Bamanger & Alhassan, 2015).

MALL provides many learning styles that could make the learning environment more attractive and likable for learners. In the context of English language learning, many of MALL applications are developed to improve the quality of English learning inside and outside the classrooms (Miraz & Ali, 2014). Several researchers argued that MALL is a reliable environment for second or foreign learners of English due to flexible integration between the MALL and the learning activities (Bracke & Vandepitte, 2013; Liu & He, 2015; Quizhpi Picón, 2015; Al-Zahrani, 2015). Based upon this standpoint, this research is aiming to explore the use of MALL applications in self-directed learning activities based on various learning styles in order to improve the speaking skills among Arab EFL university students.

Improving the speaking skills of EFL learners is in the core concern of many studies. The main reason for this is that speaking considered as the most important among the language skills because people who know a language are referred to as speakers of the language (Ur, 1996 cited in Hosni, 2014). It has been proved by many researchers that the success in language learning is measured by the ability to speak the language and to carry out a conversation (Sheppard, 2004; Gou, 2013; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Therefore, speaking could be considered of a high priority to EFL learners (Florez, 1999) as it has the potential to increase the overall learners' motivation and to help making the language learning as a fun and dynamic (Nunan, 1999: cited in Fauzan, 2016 & Celce-Murcia , 2001). Furthermore, speaking can also promote other language skills (Farabi et al. 2017). Therefore, this paper aims to propose a motivational conceptual framework of MALL applications to encourage the English speaking learning by EFL Arab university students in order to improve their speaking skills.

2.0 Theoretical Consideration

This section presents the theoretical considerations of the study, which includes an overview of EFL speaking, the related theories of speaking learning based on MALL applications, and the related works of MALL applications for EFL speaking.

2.1 Overview of EFL Speaking

As a significant aspect of foreign language learning, speaking has been viewed as the most challenging among the four language skills; speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The most comprehensive definition of speaking is presented by Chaney (1998, p. 13) who defines speaking as “the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts.” Speaking skills are very important in English language learning as it enables learners to express their ideas and thoughts. Being able to speak a language is one of the indicators of mastering the language (Fauzan, 2014). Nunan (1999: quoted by Fauzan, 2016, P:50) says “the ability to function in another language is generally characterized in terms of being able to speak that language. Considering the importance of the speaking mastery, some teachers focus on how to teach speaking effectively in his/her English class”.

Speaking represents the real use of language to express meaning, and for EFL learners, the spoken language is the medium through which a new language is encountered, understood, practiced, and learnt (Alhosni, 2014). Among other English skills, the speaking skills are important to be developed and improved by the learners because people who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language (Ur, 1996). This indicates that using a language is more important than just knowing about it because "there is no point knowing a lot about language if you can't use it" (Scrivener, 2005).

The need for speaking in English has been dramatically increasing due to the strengthening position of English as a language for international communication. Its use as the working language in 85% of international organizations (Crystal 1997) and its function as the main gate to get a better job, especially in multinational companies have motivated a great number of people around the world to learn English as a foreign language in order to be able to speak in it. Graves (2008) stressed that the purposes of learning a language is to communicate, to improve one's economic prospects, to expand one's horizon's both literally and/or figuratively to be a global citizen". In relation to this, Richards and Renandya's (2002) assert: "A large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking".

One of the main challenges of English speaking learning by EFL learners is the limited time to provide the speaker skills (Faberova, 2014). Speaking demands an ability to mobilize the words, phrases and the whole sentences very fast (Bygate, 1987, p.33). As speaking is a common activity, it includes also an ability to deal with unpredictable problems, which interaction brings, learners can carefully learn some phrases which they expect to use in some interactions, however, the situation can change and they get easily lost. Zhang (2009) stated that speaking remains the most difficult skill to master for the most of English learners, and they are still incompetent in oral communicating in English.

2.2 Related Theories

There are many theories supporting the standpoint of this research (improving the English speaking skills of EFL learners using MALL applications). This section presents the main important theories; VARK, informal learning, and Technology Acceptance.

VARCK theory was developed by Fleming in 1987, and based on VARK (Figure 1), the effective learning activities would be conducted based on combination of two or more learning styles, and these styles are visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic (Brown et al., 2008). The visual style includes the learning events

such as images, posters, videos, and diagrams. The aural style includes the learning events such as audio, music, discussion, and guest speakers. The read/write style includes events such as instructions, handbooks, and handouts. The kinesthetic style includes events such as drama, moving around, and artifacts. Therefore, the learning activities based on various learning styles and events could be effective to enhance the English speaking learning performance of the EFL students according to their preferred styles.

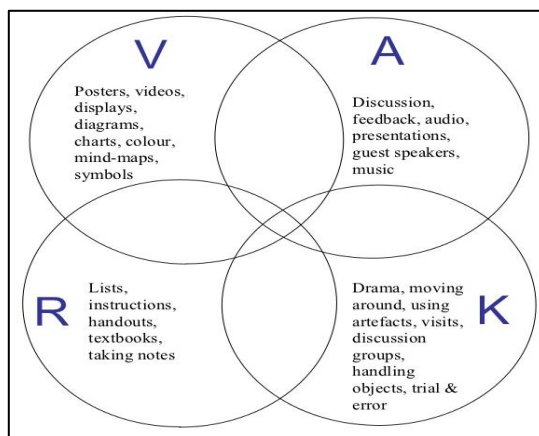


Figure 1: VARK Theory

Based on VARK theory, MALL applications for EFL speaking is useful to present the materials of English according to the nature of learning activities and students preferred styles. For example, the mobile applications can be utilized to enhance the speaking skills of learners through oral or visual events. Other applications could be utilized to enhance the knowledge acquiring of language speaking through visual or reading texts. Here, the

students are able to select the most suitable style for them to accomplish the learning activities.

The learning activities can be classified as two main activities; (1) formal learning that conducted in the classroom (face to face with teacher), and (2) informal learning that accomplished by the students themselves outside the classroom (such as home or discussion with family and colleagues) (Wang & Shen, 2011). Affected by the trend of lifelong learning, informal learning increasing attention (Lee, 2014). The informal learning theory is presented by many researchers (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Cseh et al., 1999; Marsick et al., 2008).

Informal learning can encourage structural learning environment to growth, while informal learning is incidental learning occurs in learners unconsciously (Marsick& Watkins, 1990), such as those comprising self-directed learning , e-learning , mentoring, to complete the task , namely to provide learning opportunities needs (Marsick& Watkins, 2001a). Learning process can happen at work place in order to help organizations operate more efficiently. The informal learning is important due to many reasons such as supporting the self-learning activities outside the classroom, expending more efforts and time outside the classroom to enhance the students' skills, avoiding the students diffident in

formal learning inside the classroom, and making the learning activities more enjoyable for the students.

Kukulska and Shield (2007) mentioned that by utilizing MALL in English learning, the students can enhance their English skills such as listening and speaking due to the availability and accessibility of English materials based on various learning styles like multimedia and texts. In addition, MALL offers effective collaboration environment (students with students, and students with teachers) which allows the students to solve the problems that face their learning activities depending on themselves. Moreover, MALL connects the students with various sources of English materials such as Wikipedia, which allows the students to acquire the required knowledge to develop their skills (Chinnery, 2006). This makes the learning environment more fun and likeable to the learners, which encourage the self-learning activities.

The acceptance of using the technology systems is supported by many theories such as a Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). TRA assumes that human beings are usually quite rational and make systematic use of information available to them. According to TRA, a person's performance of a specified behavior is determined by his behavioral intention to perform the behavior.

The intention behavior can be determined by the person's attitude and subjective norm concerning the behavior. The attitude is mostly determined by the person's salient beliefs about the consequences of performing the behavior. Figure 2 illustrates the model based on TRA.

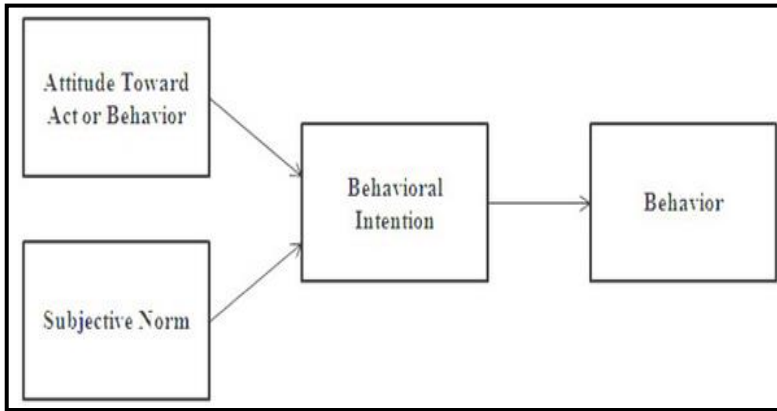


Figure 2: Model based on the theory of reasoned action

Source: (Sathapornvajana & Watanapa, 2012)

Rivera et al. (2015) explained that the development of mobile applications based on the TRA is very important. The weak level of users' acceptance of mobile application causes the adoption fail of these applications. Hence, it is necessary to assure that the users have positive attitudes and high intention level in using the mobile applications. The same explanation is presented by several works (Tsai, 2010; Leong et al., 2011; Zhu et al., 2012; Kwon et al., 2013; Kim & Qu, 2014; Morosan & DeFranco, 2014).

Tsai (2010) found that the intention of using the mobile applications is influenced by attitude, entertainment and perceived control. Hong and Tam (2006) argued that the attitudes toward the use of mobile applications is influenced by consumers' need for uniqueness, perceived usefulness, ease of use, value, as well as social influence. Leong et al. (2011) and Kwon et al. (2013) determined that perceived usefulness and the ease of using the mobile applications is strongly affecting the attitudes and intention of using the mobile applications.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is extended theory based on TRA, which suggests the measuring aspects of the acceptance of using technology facilities (infrastructures and services) (Davis, 1985). Fred Davis develops TAM to measure the users' technology acceptance. Davis measured the technology acceptance by analyzing the motivation levels of using systems features and capabilities and evaluated the measurement through the actual use of the systems. Figure 3 illustrates Davis' proposed model.

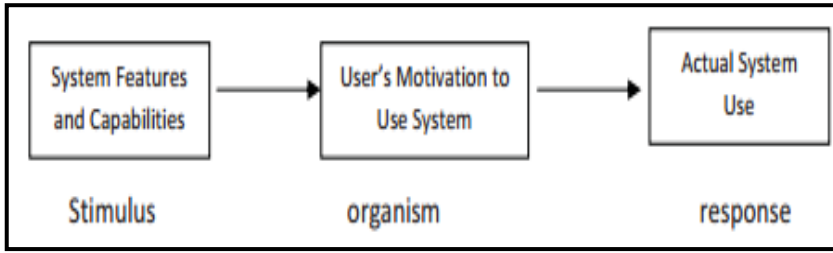


Figure 3: Aspects of Technology Acceptance Theory (Davis, 1985)

Based on TAM, Davis proposed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in 1985. The main factor of TAM is the user motivation, which consists of two variables; the technology usefulness and ease of use. The users should believe that the mobile application can be used easily and provide many benefits for them, whereby the users' awareness of the benefits of mobile application must be addressed.

2.3 Related Works

Currently, the mobile technology revolution allows the use of mobile applications in various life aspects, and learning activities are amongst them (Park et al., 2013; Merchant, 2012; Li et al., 2013; Matias & Wolf, 2013; Hopia et al, 2015; Al-Emran et al, 2016; Aithal & Aithal, 2016). In few years, the mobile market has changed drastically with the advent of smart-phones with android systems and Apple products with iOS system such as iPad and

iPhone, and the number of people that own these kinds of devices is growing at a fast rate. With the mobile devices, a new market of application software called Mobile Apps has appeared and is growing at an incredible speed (Andersen, 2013). Apps are easily available online through many stores like play store, iTunes App store and Android Market. For example, iTunes App store offers over 700.000 apps available to consumers, while there are over 675.000 apps on Android Market.

Among this incredible number of mobile applications, there is a large number of apps related to English learning for EFL learners (Bracke & Vandepitte, 2013; Liu & He, 2015; Quizhpi Picón, 2015; Al-Zahrani, 2015) These English learning applications can be easily and freely downloaded by students according to their own interests. Also, using applications on mobile devices to learn English also breaks the restriction of time and place (Huang et al., 2010; Miangah & Nezarat, 2012; Burston, 2014; AbuSa'aleek, 2014). It means that learners can learn English at any time and in any place. Hence, mobile devices are becoming a kind of important tools for learning English language.

Several researches were conducted in the domain on the enhancement of the speaking skills by EFL learners based on MALL applications (Xu & Peng, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2016; Hwang

et al; 2014; HuiGuo, 2013; Alemi, 2012; Kim & Kwan, 2013; Al-Jarf, 2012; Brown, 2001; Demouy, V., Eardley, A., Shrestha, P., & Kukulska-Hulme, 2011). The significant results of these researches show that EFL learners are motivated to accomplish the learning tasks or events of English speaking learning through using MALL applications. MALL applications offer enjoyable learning environment such as learning through games, social chats, and informal calls.

MALL applications offer various learning styles to accomplish the learning events of tasks (video, audio, images, and texts). For examples repeating of voice records, learning the speech pattern by click on texts or images, learning the speaking skills from YouTube, and learning the spoken English concepts by playing the visual games. Therefore, EFL students can enhance their speaking skills based on their preferred style(s).

Furthermore, MALL applications support the self-directed learning activities outside the classrooms through providing effective guidelines to accomplish the learning events of English speaking learning. There are wide number of MALL applications that are suitable for different purposes and levels of speaking skills. Also, the students will not feel shy from making mistakes

while improving the English speaking skills based on MALL self-directed learning applications.

Other researchers (Ma, 2017; Hsieh et al., 2016; Liu & He, 2014; Cavus&Ibrahim, 2009) argued that MALL is an effective environment to improve the English speaking skills by EFL students. MALL applications are flexible in handling the various learning stages and components of English speaking. The components of knowledge acquiring stage (pronunciations, usage of vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammatical usage) can be conducted using various applications such "MOLT" (Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009), and "Crazy English" (Liu & He, 2014). For example, "MOLT" application allow EFL students to learn new vocabularies based on SMS. The components of practicing stage of ESL learning (fluency, responses to oral and graphic stimuli, volume of voice, tone of voice, and kinesthetic expressions) can be conducted using several MALL applications such as "Wechat" (Ma, 2017), "Line" (Hsieh et al., 2016), and "Fluent English" (Liu & He, 2014). For example, the "Fluent English" allow EFL students to repeat the voice records.

In conclusion, there are large numbers of MALL applications that can be used by EFL students to improve the English speaking skills. EFL students would be motivated to use MALL application for English speaking learning due to many

reasons such as enjoyable learning environment, various learning styles, and effective self-directed learning activities.

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the EFL learners' motivation level of using MALL applications to improve English Speaking Learning. Table 1 summarizes related works that conducted on the motivation of using MALL applications in speaking learning.

Source	MALL Application/s	Learning Purpose	Motivational Reasons						
			Usefulness	Ease of Use	Flexibility	Enjoyable	Variety of learning styles	Accessibility	Availability
Azli et al. (2018)	General	General	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓
Xu and Peng (2017)	WeChat	Speaking skills	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	X
Kim and Lee (2016)	General	General	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	X
Shahrokhi and Kamyabi (2016)	E-dictionary, YouTube, and social chat	General	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X
Hwang et al. (2014)	General	Speaking and listening	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X
Kabilan et al. (2010)	Facebook	General	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 1: summary of studies on the Motivation of using MALL to improve English speaking skills

3.0 Conceptual Framework and Model

Based on the reviewed aspects, directions, theories, and studies in the domain of English speaking improvement using MALL applications, the conceptual framework of this research is formulated as in Figure 4. One of the theoretical foundations used in the study is VARK Theory, in which the learning process is based on various learning styles; Text, Image, Audio, and Video. VARK presents a variation of learning styles, and this will help to add some enjoyment for Arab EFL learners while they are learning. MALL applications based on various learning styles could motivate the speaking improvement through providing enjoyable learning environment. Hence, MALL environment could simplify the implementation of these theories.

The use of MALL applications for speaking provides the learners with accessibility (to use the applications from anywhere) and availability (to use the applications in anytime). Thus, MALL applications can support the self-directed learning activities based on attractive learning styles, which motivate EFL students to expend more efforts and time for speaking improvement.

Another important theory would be applied in this research is the technology acceptance based on Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Although, VARK theory is supporting the use of

MALL in speaking improvement, TAM is crucial to measure the acceptance of using MALL applications by EFL students to accomplish their learning activities. The students should accept the use of MALL applications in their learning.

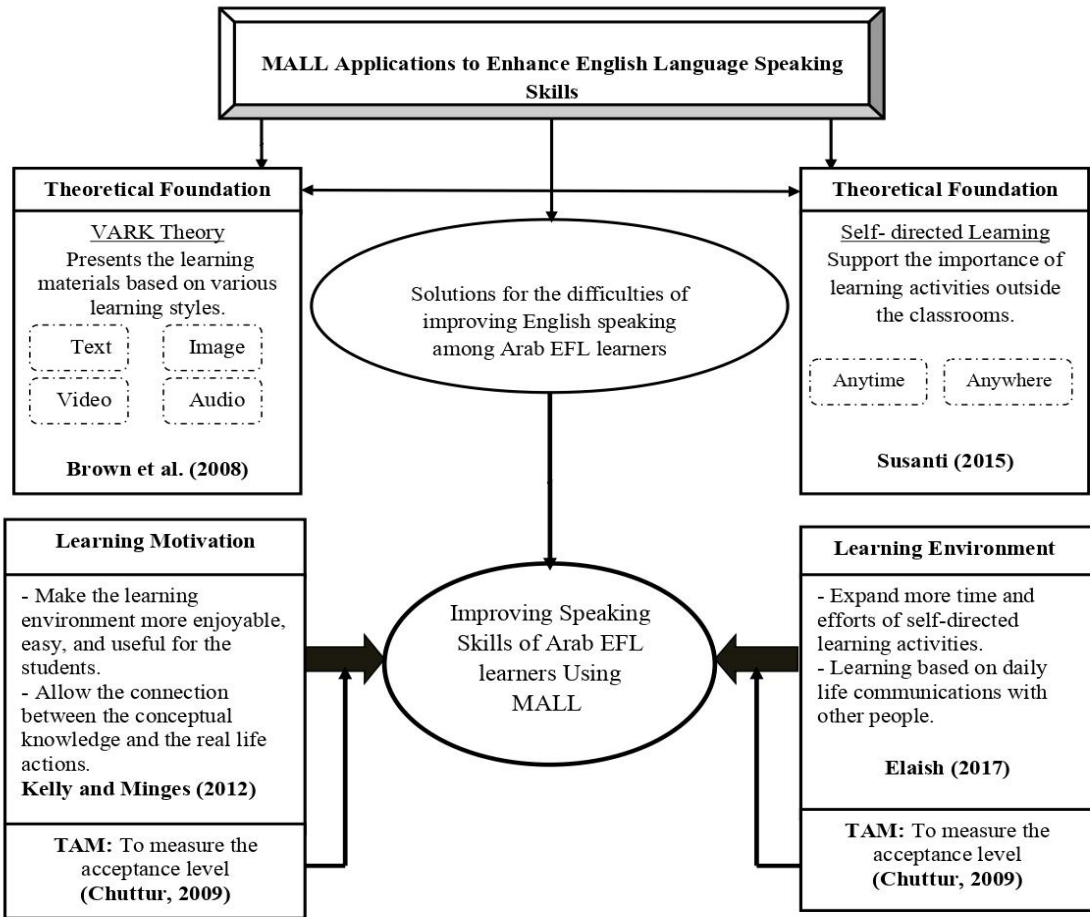


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework of the Study

The motivational variables of using MALL in English speaking learning are related to the acceptance of using the mobile applications by the users. TAM is one of the most recognized models that suggest the measuring aspects of the acceptance of using technology facilities (infrastructures and services) (Davis, 1985). Davis measured the technology acceptance by analyzing the motivation levels of using systems features and capabilities and evaluated the measurement through the actual use of the systems. Hence TAM will be adopted to measure the acceptance of using MALL applications by EFL students for speaking improvement. According to TAM, the usefulness and ease of use are the motivational factors of using the technology in specific implementations. These factors could be affected by many independent factors, and the relationship between the independent and motivational factors could cause an effect on the actual use of the technology (i.e. attitudes and intention).

By reviewing the works related to the motivation of using MALL in English speaking, it could be concluded that there are many independent factors that could affect the motivation of using MALL application by EFL students, and these factors are as the following:

- **Accessibility:** the students can access MALL applications from anywhere using the portable devices (mobiles) to accomplish the learning activities.
- **Availability:** The students can use MALL applications in anytime to accomplish the learning activities.
- **Flexibility:** There are various MALL applications of different learning approaches and different skill levels that could be used to accomplish the learning activities of the English speaking. Thus, the students can select the most suitable applications or learning approach to accomplish the learning activities by themselves (The self-directed learning of English speaking).
- **Variety of learning styles (VARK theory):** MALL applications offer learning activities based on various learning styles such as audio, video, images, and texts. Hence, the students can select the preferred learning styles to accomplish their learning activities of English speaking.

- Enjoyable environment (VARK theory): the learning activities of English speaking can be conducted through enjoyable MALL facilitates such as games, social communications, and audio broadcasts. Therefore, the students can accomplish their learning tasks based on attractive and enjoyable activities.

Based on TAM structure, all of the above factors considered as independent factors that could motivate the use of MALL applications by EFL students. These factors could play important roles in the students belief of the usefulness and ease of use (motivational factors) of MALL applications in English speaking activities.

Furthermore, the relationships between the independent and the motivational factors could have positive impacts on EFL students' attitudes (actual use) toward MALL applications for English speaking. Figure 5 presents the theoretical model based on TAM to address the second objective of this research supported by the questionnaire data collection instrument.

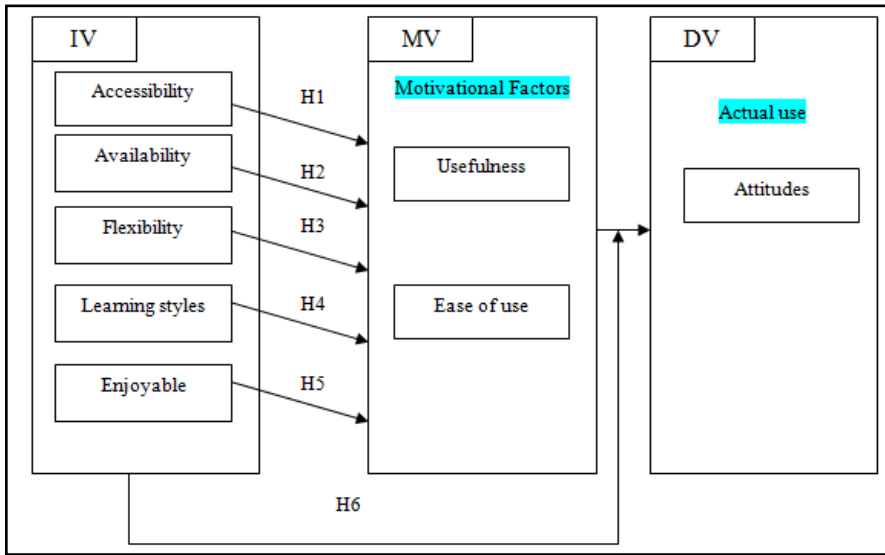


Figure 5: Study Conceptual Model

As shown in the above figure 4, there are 6 research hypotheses should be tested to address the second research objective, and these hypotheses are as the following:

- **H1:** there is a positive relationship between the accessibility of MALL applications and the motivation of English speaking improvement (ease of use and usefulness).
- **H2:** there is a positive relationship between the availability of MALL applications and the motivation of English speaking improvement (ease of use and usefulness).
- **H3:** there is a positive relationship between the flexibility of MALL applications and the motivation of English speaking improvement (ease of use and usefulness).

- **H4:** there is a positive relationship between the learning styles of MALL applications and the motivation of English speaking improvement (ease of use and usefulness).
- **H5:** there is a positive relationship between the enjoyment of MALL applications and the motivation of English speaking improvement (ease of use and usefulness).
- **H6:** the motivation of using MALL applications in English learning has mediating an effect on the relationship between MALL characteristics and the attitudes toward the use of MALL applications by Arab EFL students.

The research hypotheses according to TAM structure show that the characteristics of MALL applications (such as learning styles) are the independent factors. On the other hand the motivational factors (such as usefulness) of using MALL applications are the mediating factors. Furthermore, the attitudes toward using MALL applications in English speaking are the dependent factor.

4.0 Conclusion and Future Work

This study focuses on the motivational factors of using MALL applications to improve the speaking skills of English language by EFL learners. The conceptual model and framework of this study is proposed based on the related theories and previous studies. The learners could be motivated to use MALL applications in their

speaking learning due to many reasons such as variety of learning styles, learning flexibility, learning accessibility and availability. However, MALL applications need to be useful and easy to use in order to encourage the learners' attitudes towards the speaking learning based on MALL applications. This study presents the conceptual model for the purpose of testing the learners' attitudes toward using MALL application. The Hypotheses are proposed to conduct the model testing in a sufficient manner. A questionnaire survey could be carried out in the future with EFL learners for the purpose of testing this proposed conceptual model.

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