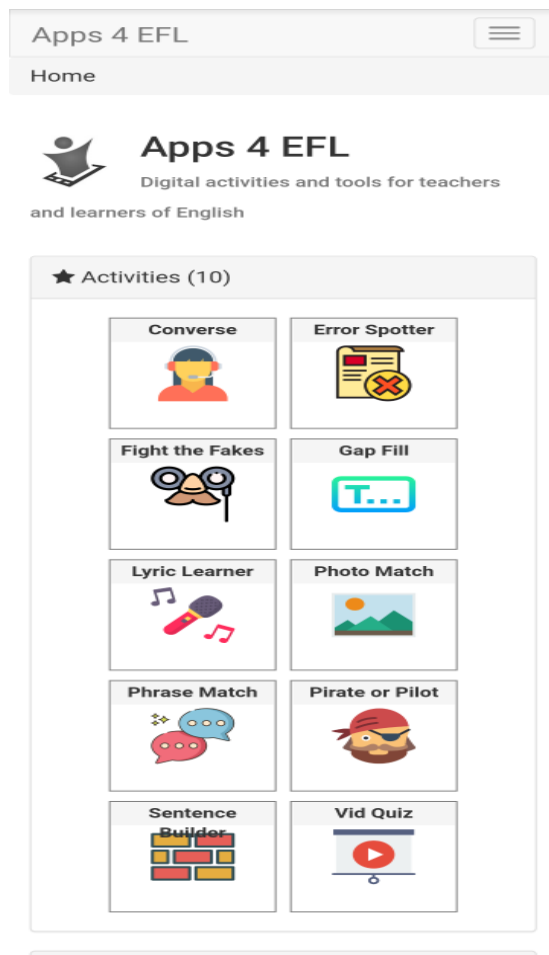


Degree Show 2021

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**English Language Learning and
Applied Linguistics MA**

Evaluation of the Mobile App Apps4EFL



Apps4EFL (2016) is a free web-based language learning (WBLL) platform. It provides learning activities, such as cloze test and listening gap fills, for students to practice their English independently. Tools that can be used by both teachers and students for assisting language teaching and learning can be found in this platform as well. By using the framework of Rosell-Aguilar (2017), we can evaluate the effectiveness of language learning and the design of Apps.

1. General description

Apps4EFL (2016) is a free web-based language learning (WBLL) platform developed by Paul Raine, which utilizes creative commons data and open web technologies to facilitate engaging online study for teachers and students of English (Raine, 2017). Apps4EFL can be accessed through mobile phones and laptop browsers. iOS 9 or above, Android 5.0 or above, Windows 7 or above are recommended for the perfect operation of this platform.

Apps4EFL provides learning activities, such as cloze test and listening gap fills, which can be done by students independently. Meanwhile, there are also tools (e.g. ER level check, timer) that can be used by both teachers for assisting teaching activities and students for checking their study level for example. In this review, the activities (mobile version) are evaluated according to Rosell-Aguilar's framework for language learning app (Rosell-Aguilar, 2017), with 'Pirate or Pilot' and 'Sentence Builder' in detail examination.

2. Evaluation

2.1 Technology features

Apps4EFL is a web-based platform, so it requires internet connection to function, and the stability and the responding speed may depend on the quality of the user's internet connection or the condition of the hardware (mobile phone). The interface is simple and tidy as shown in Figure 1. Options are

directly shown so users can navigate easily. Each activity has a clear instruction of the purpose of it and how it is carried out, which is convenient for users to understand and to work with.

Other sites for English teaching and learning are also recommended here.

Users can find more information about this website and the author of this site in the FAQ section. Additional support may be provided by contacting the developer.



Figure 1 Interface of Apps4EFL

Users do not need to login to use the website. However, users can log in with a Google account or create an account with Apps4EFL. Creating an account is free of charge and registered users will have their points tracked when they using the activities. Figure 2 shows the awarded points of a user and the time used for the activity.

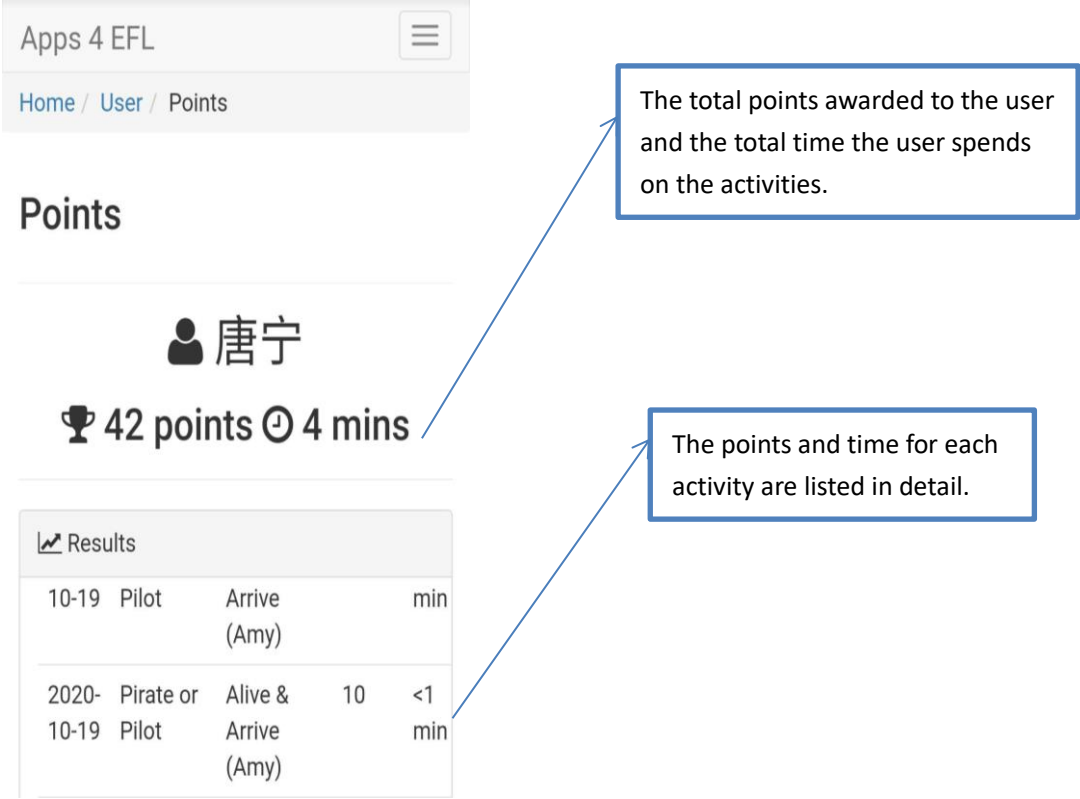


Figure 2 Point tracked for the individual user

The site has integrated a gamification element into the learning process. There is a sound effect in 'pirate and pilot' indicating whether the user gets the right answer or not. And in the 'Sentence Builder' activity, users have three chances for making mistakes, which is like players have three lives in the game. And if

all three chances are used, users are judged as failed and no point will be awarded.

2.2 Pedagogy

'Pirate or Pilot' is used as pronunciation training for distinguishing the minimal pairs in English. This activity is based on the behaviourism/structural perspective theory (representative scholars are Watson and Skinner) of computer-assisted language teaching and uses the Audiolingual teaching method (Li., 2017; Johnson, 2008). Users can choose from different groups of words and distinguish words that have very similar pronunciation after listening to the speaker (shown in Figure 3). During the tests, there is a sound effect showing whether the answer is right or not, which is stimulation for the users. After each test, results are shown and users can listen to the words again. This activity is a simple drill practice and no scaffolding available.

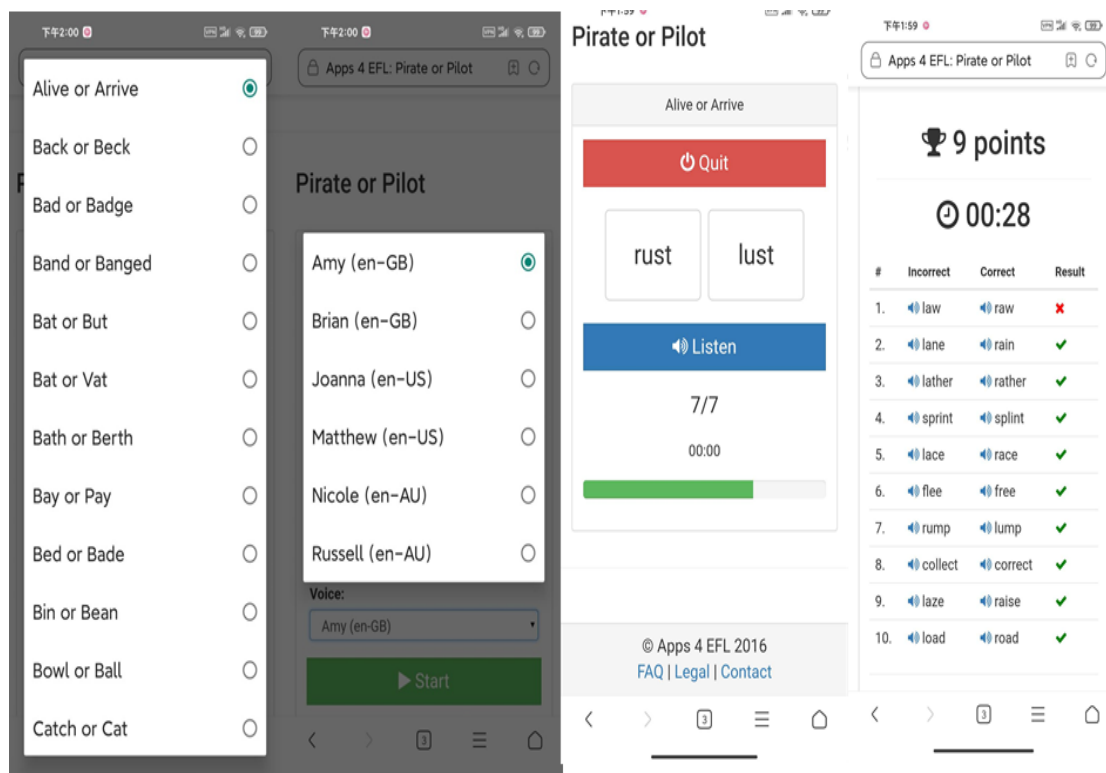


Figure 3 Different groups of words and pronunciations can be chosen in 'Pirate or Pilot' and results are listed for further study.

'Sentence Builder' activity is a grammar practice, which users have to translate sentences from their native language into English (shown in Figure 4). Users can choose the topics and the length of the sentence. Before the test starts, they can first learn the sentences in a flashcard way. Once the tests begin, users should re-arrange the words to construct the right sentence. After the test, feedback with all the users' answers and the correct answer for each sentence are shown and points are awarded if the users have logged in. One thing worth noticing is that the Tatoeba Database used it not error-free, so users have to have their own judgment.

As the author claimed, it focuses on ‘breaking down and reconstructing the elements of language’ (Raine, 2018b, p131). It uses the Grammar Translation teaching method (Li., 2017; Johnson, 2008), which is not recommended by many scholars (e.g. Mukalel, 2005; Richards & Rodgers, 2016) as the only way to teach language. However, the translation should be treated as the fifth skill besides listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Campbell, 2002). Besides, this activity can be used as a kind of contrastive analysis, which helps users identify the similarity and differences between their native language and English. In this way, it may help prevent the development of errors (Baker, 2003).

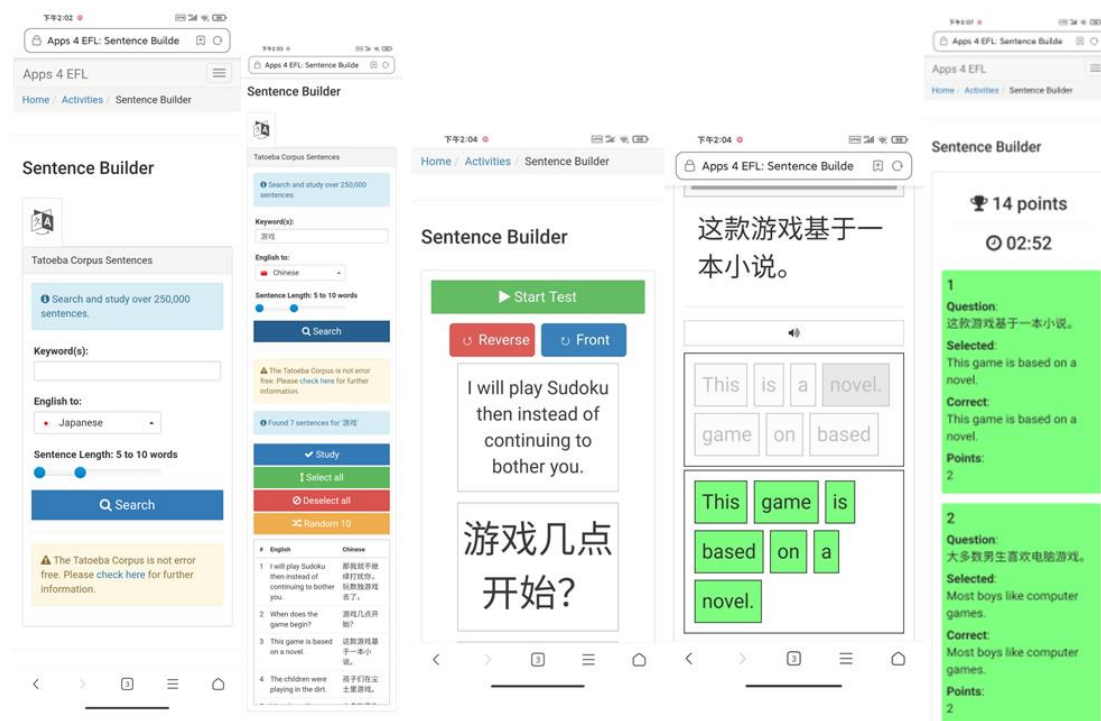


Figure 4 How ‘Sentence Builder’ works and its feedback

2.3 Language learning

There are ten activities included in Apps4EFL, and they provide users with tests on listening, reading, speaking, grammar, and vocabulary in the English language. Writing test is not included, since it is difficult to mark and give feedback depending only on artificial intelligence (AI) without the judgment of human teachers.

As claimed by the author of this website, this website uses Creative Commons Data (Raine, 2017) for users' learning activities. Texts from Wikipedia and songs of some popular singers are integrated into different tests, and the Tatoeba sentence database and Web 2.0 technologies (Raine, 2018) are combined to form translation tasks. Thus, the website provides users with the most up-to-date and authentic materials, which can be chosen based on users' preference, for learning the English language. In the case of language varieties, users can choose from American English (en-US), British English (en-GB), or Australian English (en-AU) pronunciation by selecting different artificial voices, as shown in Figure 3.

2.4 User experience

All the activities can be used by users independently, and allow users to have autonomy in their learning process and actively engage with the website.

However, there is no option for badging, so users can not share their learning

content or achievement (points they earned) on social media. However, users can share their progress by entering the email address of other users (shown in Figure 5). This gives the users a certain degree of motivation from the environment (e.g. their teachers, classmates, and family).

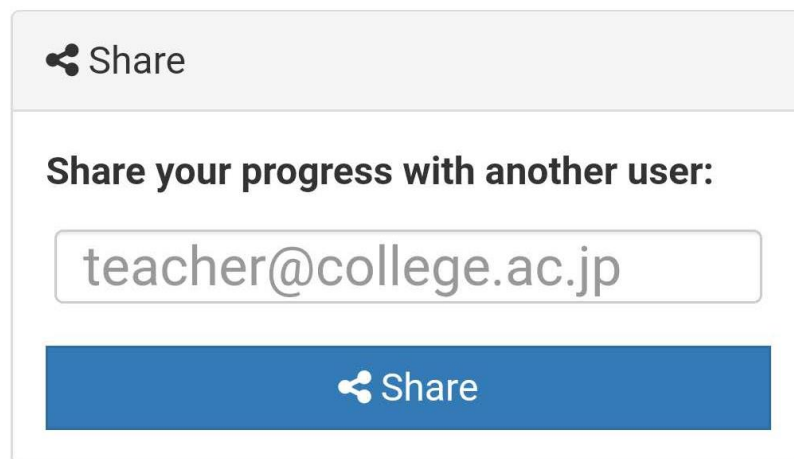


Figure 5 Users can share their progress by entering the email address

As mention in the previous section, this website is free of charge, and registration is not obligated, but users do get their points recorded when they log in. The interface is clean and tidy, with no advertisements popping up. Since there is no distraction, users can focus on their learning and this is a great advantage of this site. And if users donate more than 5 dollars to the site, they can have an additional 'point tracking' function, which allows them to track the points of other users who have chosen to share their progress with them. This feature adds a competition element into the learning progress and may be useful for teachers to monitor their students' progress as well.

3. Summary

In conclusion, Apps4EFL is consistent with its author's claim that it provides free, engaging, and effective English language learning activities (Raine, 2017). It provides an adaptive learning (Kerr, 2015) process, in which users can have autonomy in their learning. For vocabulary and grammar learning, the Audio linguistic learning method and the grammar-translation method are quite appropriate. However, there is no training for writing skills, the communicative language teaching method only takes a small part in the design of activities, and users are not allowed to practice their ability to output authentic English language. Therefore, Apps4EFL should not be used as the main source for English learners, but as a supplement to assist their learning.

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