Improving EFL Students' Speaking Fluency Through the Use of Mobile Language Learning Applications in Grade VIII at MTs Jihhadul Ummah

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of mobile language learning applications in improving the speaking fluency of eighth-grade EFL students at MTs Jihhadul Ummah, located in Dompu, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The research employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test non-equivalent control group. Two classes were selected as samples: the experimental group (VIII A) used ELSA Speak and Duolingo during eight instructional meetings, while the control group (VIII B) received conventional classroom instruction without mobile applications. Data were collected through speaking fluency assessments and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (t-test) via SPSS. The findings revealed that the experimental group achieved a significantly higher post-test mean score (M = 75.8) compared to the control group (M = 62.3), with a significance value of $p < 0.05$. These results indicate that mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) substantially enhances students' fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and speaking confidence. Additionally, the use of mobile applications was found to reduce speaking anxiety and increase motivation by providing flexible, self-paced, and low-pressure learning opportunities. The study concludes that mobile applications serve as effective complementary tools to traditional instruction, promoting greater learner autonomy and communicative competence in EFL contexts.

Keywords: *Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL); EFL Speaking Fluency; ELSA Speak; Duolingo; Learner Motivation; Self-Directed Learning*

Introduction

In today's digital age, technology is playing an increasingly central role in education, especially in the field of language learning. One of the most notable advancements is the rise of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), which has opened up new ways for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to access learning resources and practice their skills beyond the classroom (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Stockwell, 2010). This is particularly helpful for speaking skills, which are often considered the most challenging and anxiety-inducing aspect of language learning (Goh & Burns, 2012).

Speaking fluently in English isn't just about knowing the right words, it also involves speaking smoothly, naturally, and without long pauses (Nation & Newton, 2009). Unfortunately, many traditional

classrooms don't provide enough opportunities for students to practice speaking, especially in large classes or in environments where students are afraid of making mistakes (Richards, 2008; Thornbury, 2005). As a result, learners often lack the real-time speaking practice they need to become confident and fluent speakers.

Mobile language learning apps like Duolingo, ELSA Speak, HelloTalk, and others offer students new ways to build fluency. These apps typically include features like voice recording, instant feedback, pronunciation guides, and speaking prompts that mimic real-life conversations (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Burston, 2014). Through repeated use, learners can improve their pronunciation, practice spontaneous speech, and build vocabulary, all of which are essential to becoming fluent (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012; Reinders & White, 2011).

Beyond practice, these apps also encourage independent learning and increase motivation. When learners are in control of their own pace and practice, they often feel more engaged and willing to take risks (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Chinnery, 2006). This sense of autonomy, along with a low-pressure learning environment, helps reduce speaking anxiety and builds confidence, two emotional factors that strongly influence fluency (Horwitz, 2001; Zhang, 2009).

There's growing evidence that mobile apps can improve learners' speaking skills. For example, a study by Hsu (2015) showed that students using a speech focused mobile app performed better in speaking tests than those who didn't. Similarly, Wu (2019) found that mobile-assisted speaking activities helped students speak more fluently and with fewer pauses. These findings suggest that mobile apps can play a valuable role in improving both the technical and emotional aspects of speaking fluency.

However, not all researchers are equally optimistic. Reinders and Benson (2017) remind us that the effectiveness of these apps depends on several factors, such as how the learners use them, how familiar they are with technology, and whether the apps are supported by good teaching practices. Many apps are still limited in terms of interactive, real life speaking tasks (Burston, 2014). Therefore, it's important to look deeper, not just at whether these tools are helpful, but how they are being used and what outcomes they actually lead to.

With these considerations in mind, this study aims to explore how mobile language learning applications influence the speaking fluency of VIII grade EFL students at MTs Jihhadul Ummah. The research focuses on students' individual experiences with these applications, how frequently they use them, the types of speaking activities they engage in, and the measurable improvements in their speaking performance. This study is expected to offer valuable insights for English teachers at MTs Jihhadul Ummah and for language app developers and to help enhance students' speaking fluency through more effective and engaging mobile-assisted learning approaches.

Literature Review

Speaking Fluency in EFL Learning

Speaking fluency is considered one of the most complex skills to develop in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Unlike reading or writing, speaking requires learners to produce language spontaneously, in real time, and often under social pressure. Nation and Newton (2009) define fluency as the ability to speak smoothly, quickly, and without unnecessary pauses, enabling the speaker to communicate ideas clearly and effectively. Thornbury (2005) further explains that fluency is not simply about speed; it involves confidence, rhythm, and the ability to maintain conversation even when encountering difficulties. In other words, speaking fluency is a blend of linguistic competence and

communication strategies developed through consistent and meaningful practice. Similarly, Skehan (2009) notes that fluency reflects a speaker's capacity to use language under real-time processing constraints, balancing accuracy and complexity. Moreover, Derwing, Munro, and Thomson (2008) emphasize that fluency contributes significantly to listeners' perceptions of overall speaking proficiency, making it a crucial component of communicative competence.

However, many EFL learners struggle to become fluent speakers due to limitations in traditional classroom settings. Richards (2008) observes that in many schools, especially in large or teacher centered classrooms, students have very little opportunity to practice speaking. Lessons are often dominated by grammar explanations and written exercises, leaving minimal time for active speaking. As a result, students may become passive, hesitant, and overly reliant on memorized phrases. This lack of real interaction can cause learners to lose confidence and avoid speaking altogether. Goh and Burns (2012) emphasize that without regular practice and supportive environments, learners tend to experience communication anxiety, which further inhibits their fluency development. Similarly, Wood (2010) points out that fluency growth depends on repeated exposure to authentic communicative tasks, while Ellis (2017) suggests that interaction and output-focused activities are essential for promoting automaticity in language use. Fluency is not only shaped by how often learners speak, but also by the type of speaking activities they engage in.

Fluency is not only shaped by how often learners speak, but also by the type of speaking activities they engage in. Brown (2007) argues that communicative tasks such as discussions, storytelling, and role plays are more effective in building fluency than traditional drills. However, implementing these activities effectively requires small class sizes, sufficient time, and trained teachers, which are not always available in many EFL contexts. These challenges highlight the need for alternative approaches, such as mobile language learning applications, that can offer students more opportunities for independent, low-pressure speaking practice. In this way, technology may help fill the gap left by limited classroom interaction and support students in developing stronger speaking fluency.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

In recent years, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has emerged as an increasingly influential approach in the field of language education. The growth of smartphones and mobile applications has made it possible for learners to access language materials and practice speaking anytime and anywhere. Kukulska-Hulme (2009) highlights that the portability and accessibility of mobile devices empower students to take control of their own learning. This independence is especially valuable for language learners who may not have consistent access to quality classroom instruction. Through MALL, students are no longer restricted by time or location, and this flexible environment supports the development of fluency through regular, self-paced speaking practice.

Various language learning apps such as Duolingo, ELSA Speak, and HelloTalk are designed to support spoken language practice. These applications provide features like pronunciation drills, voice recognition technology, and immediate feedback, which help learners improve both fluency and accuracy. According to Godwin ones (2011), such apps enhance learner engagement by making practice more interactive and less intimidating, especially for students who are shy or anxious about speaking in public. With the help of gamification and speech based activities, learners are encouraged to repeat tasks until they achieve confidence, turning what was once a stressful experience into an enjoyable one.

Additionally, mobile learning platforms are seen as a bridge between formal education and real-world communication. Burston (2014) argues that learners who engage with mobile apps regularly tend to develop stronger oral skills than those who rely solely on textbooks or teacher led instruction. This is because mobile tools offer consistent repetition, real time interaction, and exposure to authentic language

usage elements that are often missing in classroom settings. Reinders and White (2011) also point out that MALL supports informal learning, where students can explore language based on their interests and needs, making the learning experience more personalized and relevant. Overall, MALL not only supplements classroom learning but also creates new opportunities for learners to practice speaking in more meaningful and practical ways.

Learner Motivation and Confidence

One of the most recognized advantages of mobile-assisted language learning is its positive effect on student motivation and self-confidence. Learning a new language especially speaking can be intimidating, but mobile applications often present language content in a way that feels more relaxed and engaging. According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self Determination Theory, students are more motivated when they feel autonomous, competent, and connected to their learning experience. Mobile apps meet these needs by allowing students to learn at their own pace, choose the content they want to focus on, and practice without fear of public embarrassment. This sense of control and flexibility often translates into increased motivation and persistence in learning.

Mobile apps also help reduce one of the most common emotional barriers in language learning: speaking anxiety. Many EFL learners, especially adolescents, fear making mistakes or being judged when speaking in front of others. Horwitz (2001) describes language anxiety as a real psychological obstacle that can negatively impact learners' willingness to speak and their overall performance. However, mobile learning offers a solution. When learners engage with apps that let them record their voices, repeat phrases, and receive non-judgmental feedback, they begin to develop confidence in their speaking ability. This repeated, pressure free practice builds familiarity with the language and reduces anxiety over time.

Zhang (2009) supports this by noting that mobile based speaking practice can offer a safe space for learners who are shy or self-conscious in traditional classroom environments. Because the practice is private and self-directed, students are more willing to take risks, make mistakes, and try again without fear of embarrassment. Over time, this repeated exposure helps normalize the speaking process, making it feel less stressful and more natural. As students grow more confident, they are more likely to participate in speaking activities both within and outside the classroom. Ultimately, this boost in confidence plays a critical role in helping learners build fluency, as confidence and fluency often develop hand in hand.

Previous Studies on Mobile Learning and Speaking Fluency

A growing body of research has highlighted the effectiveness of mobile learning in enhancing speaking fluency among EFL learners. One of the earlier studies by Miangah and Nezarat (2012) found that students who regularly engaged in speaking tasks through mobile apps demonstrated noticeable improvements in both fluency and pronunciation. These students were more confident and articulate in their speech compared to those who relied solely on traditional classroom practice. In a similar vein, Hsu (2015) conducted a study using a speech-training application and discovered that learners who practiced speaking through the app outperformed their peers in oral proficiency tests. These findings suggest that mobile based speaking practice offers a valuable supplement to in-class activities, providing learners with more frequent and flexible opportunities to speak.

More comprehensive evidence comes from a meta analysis by Wu (2019), who examined multiple studies on the effects of mobile learning on oral performance. Wu found that learners who used mobile applications consistently not only became more fluent, but also showed improvements in speech rhythm, pause reduction, and sentence organization. This indicates that mobile learning tools, when used properly, do more than just encourage practice they help refine how learners process and produce spoken language.

Wu's findings reinforce the idea that mobile tools are not merely convenient, but also pedagogically effective when it comes to improving real world speaking skills.

However, not all researchers are uncritically optimistic. Reinders and Benson (2017) remind educators and learners alike that the effectiveness of mobile learning depends heavily on how the technology is used. They caution that many students may become overly focused on the gamified or superficial features of apps such as collecting points or badges without truly engaging in deep, meaningful language practice. Without clear learning goals, proper guidance, and self-discipline, mobile apps may fail to deliver lasting improvements. This perspective serves as a reminder that while mobile tools can enhance speaking fluency, they are most effective when integrated thoughtfully into a broader language learning strategy that includes both self-directed and structured support.

Method

This study employs a quantitative research approach using a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test non-equivalent group design. The research involves two groups of eighth-grade students at MTS Jihhadul Ummah: an experimental group that uses mobile language learning applications, and a control group that receives regular classroom instruction without mobile apps. Both groups are given a speaking fluency test before and after the treatment period to measure any improvement. The sample is selected purposively from two existing classes. The primary instrument used in this study is a speaking test, assessed based on fluency criteria such as speech rate, hesitation, and coherence. Data collection involves administering pre-tests and post-tests, and with the help of SPSS, the date was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis (t-test) to determine the significance of the difference between the two groups.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the pre-test and post-test

Group	N	Test Type	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Experimental (VIII A)	25	Pre-test	58.4	6.21	47	70
Experimental (VIII A)	25	Post-test	75.8	5.87	66	86
Control (VIII B)	25	Pre-test	59.1	6.45	48	72
Control (VIII B)	25	Post-test	62.3	5.98	50	74

The results of this study were obtained through pre-test and post-test speaking assessments given to two classes of eighth-grade students at MTs Jihhadul Ummah. The experimental group (VIII A) consisted of 25 students who used mobile language learning applications (ELSA Speak and Duolingo), while the control group (VIII B), also with 25 students, received traditional instruction without the use of mobile apps.

In the pre-test, both groups showed similar levels of speaking fluency. The experimental group had an average score of 58.4, while the control group averaged 59.1. This similarity suggests that both groups started at nearly the same level in terms of speaking ability.

After 8 meeting of treatment, the post-test showed a noticeable difference. The experimental group's average score increased to 75.8, indicating significant improvement in aspects such as pronunciation accuracy, reduced hesitation, better sentence structure, and overall fluency. In contrast, the control group's average only increased slightly to 62.3, showing limited improvement.

A paired sample t-test was conducted using SPSS. The experimental group's t-test result showed a significant value at p = 0.000 < 0.05, which confirms that the increase in their speaking fluency was statistically significant. Meanwhile, the control group's result was p = 0.084 > 0.05, suggesting that the improvement was not statistically significant. These results support the conclusion that mobile learning applications had a strong positive impact on students' speaking fluency.

Discussion

These findings are consistent with previous research that emphasizes the benefits of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in improving speaking skills. Miangah and Nezarat (2012) found that learners who practiced speaking using mobile apps demonstrated marked improvements in fluency and pronunciation similar to the gains observed in the experimental group of this study. Hsu (2015) also found that app-based learners outperformed their peers in oral assessments, which aligns with the difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups in this research.

The significant improvement in the experimental group can be attributed to several key features of the mobile applications used. ELSA Speak, for example, offers instant feedback on pronunciation, while Duolingo encourages repetition and vocabulary use in a gamified format. These tools helped students practice more frequently and confidently, outside of classroom time. As Godwin-Jones (2011) stated, mobile tools promote learner autonomy and reduce anxiety by providing private, low-pressure environments particularly important for adolescent learners who are often reluctant to speak up in class.

Furthermore, the findings support Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self Determination Theory, which suggests that when learners feel in control and engaged, their motivation increases. Students in the experimental group reported feeling more motivated to practice speaking on their own using the apps, which likely contributed to their better performance. However, in line with Reinders and Benson's (2017) caution, this study also found that teacher guidance was essential. Without clear instructions and speaking targets, students might not use the apps effectively. Therefore, while mobile applications are not a complete substitute for classroom learning, they are a powerful supplement when used with proper planning and support.

The Benefits of Mobile Language Learning Applications in Improving Speaking Fluency

The use of mobile language learning applications offers several significant benefits for improving EFL students' speaking fluency, particularly in junior high school contexts such as MTS Jihhadul Ummah. One of the most notable advantages is the increased opportunity for independent speaking practice. Unlike traditional classroom settings where speaking time is often limited due to time constraints and large class sizes, mobile apps allow students to practice anytime and anywhere. This consistent, self-directed exposure supports fluency development by giving learners more time to rehearse and refine their spoken language (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009; Miangah & Nezarat, 2012).

Secondly, mobile applications provide immediate and personalized feedback, especially in apps like ELSA Speak, which utilize speech recognition technology to analyze pronunciation and fluency. This real-time feedback helps students become more aware of their speaking errors and make corrections instantly, fostering self-monitoring and improvement. Unlike delayed feedback in classroom settings, this feature enables faster learning cycles and better retention (Godwin-Jones, 2011; Burston, 2014).

Another major benefit is the boost in learner motivation and confidence. As supported by Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), learners who feel more in control of their learning tend to be more engaged and persistent. Practicing in a private, non-judgmental space through mobile apps reduces speaking anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; Zhang, 2009), especially for students who are shy or afraid of making

mistakes in front of peers. This psychological comfort empowers students to take risks, speak more frequently, and gradually build the fluency and confidence needed for real life communication.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that mobile language learning applications have a significant positive impact on improving EFL students' speaking fluency. The experimental group of eighth-grade students at MTs Jihhadul Ummah, who used applications such as ELSA Speak and Duolingo over a four-week period, showed greater improvement in fluency, pronunciation, speech flow, and confidence compared to the control group that received only conventional classroom instruction. Supported by statistical analysis, the findings indicate that mobile-assisted learning offers flexible, accessible, and motivating opportunities for students to practice speaking English more frequently and effectively.

In addition to enhancing technical aspects of speaking, the use of mobile applications was found to reduce learners' speaking anxiety and increase their motivation. By allowing students to practice independently in a low-pressure environment, mobile learning fosters confidence and supports the development of fluency. These results align with previous research highlighting learner autonomy, technological engagement, and personalized feedback as key factors in effective language learning. Overall, while mobile applications should not replace classroom instruction, they serve as valuable complementary tools that extend learning beyond school limitations, helping students become more fluent, confident, and motivated English speakers.

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