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# The Use of HelloTalk as a Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) Tool in Senior High School Students' Listening Comprehension: A Qualitative Study

**Umi Imtitsal Rasyidah[1]; Muh Futuhu Rifqil Aziz[2]**
[1,2]Universitas Islam Tribakti Lirboyo Kediri
Correspondence e-mail: umi.imtitsal@uit-lirboyo.ac.id

**Abstract:**
This study aims to explore high school students' experiences using HelloTalk as a Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) tool to support listening comprehension skills. A qualitative approach with a case study design was used, involving 7 high school students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis. The results revealed three main themes: (1) how students utilized HelloTalk's features for listening practice, (2) students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of HelloTalk, and (3) challenges and strategies for overcoming them. The findings indicate that HelloTalk provides authentic exposure to spoken English, boosts motivation, and builds students' confidence, although technical and affective barriers still exist. This study offers pedagogical implications for teachers and curriculum developers in contextually integrating MALL at the high school level.

**Keywords: Hellotalk; High School Students; Listening Comprehension; Mobile-Assisted Language Learning; Qualitative Research**

## Introduction

Listening comprehension is one of the most fundamental receptive skills, yet it often poses the greatest challenge for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In the Indonesian context, this difficulty is exacerbated by limited exposure to authentic spoken English and natural pronunciation. Classroom instruction often fails to provide sufficiently varied listening experiences, making it difficult for students to understand the speaking speed of native speakers, different accents, and the vocabulary and idiomatic expressions used in everyday conversations.

Advances in digital technology have opened up new opportunities for language learning through the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) approach. MALL provides mobile access to interactive audio content that enables an adaptive learning experience and continuous exposure to a variety of accents. One standout app is HelloTalk, a language exchange app that connects users with native speakers from around the world through chat, voice calls, and social posts.

HelloTalk offers features that have the potential to support the development of listening skills, such as voice-to-text, voice messages, and voice calls with native speakers. Previous research has shown HelloTalk's positive impact on various aspects of language learning. However, most of these studies have focused on college students or used quantitative designs. An in-depth understanding of how high school students experience and interpret the use of HelloTalk for listening skills remains very limited.

This qualitative study involved 20 high school students selected through purposive sampling. Given this sample size, the study does not aim to generalize findings but rather to explore in depth the students' experiences, perceptions, challenges, and strategies. The subjective perspectives of these 20 participants are expected to provide contextual insights for educators and curriculum developers.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. A case study is an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon in a real-life context, whether it be a program, event, process, group, or individual (Creswell and Creswell 2017) . Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves selecting data sources based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives.

The research participants consisted of seven 11th-grade students from Madrasah Aliyah Roudhatul Tholabah in Kediri, East Java. All participants used Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in their English language learning. Data were collected through flexible in-depth interviews to obtain information about their experiences and practices in using MALL for learning. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to identify and interpret emerging patterns or themes. Data validity was strengthened through member checking, which involved follow-up interviews with participants to confirm, clarify, and validate the results of the previous interviews.

## Results and Discussion

### Findings

Based on a thematic analysis of interviews with seven 11th-grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Roudhotul Tholabah in Kediri, East Java, several main themes were identified regarding the implementation of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in English language instruction. The analysis yielded four themes, namely: (1) MALL as a flexible learning support tool, (2) increased engagement and independence, (3) the use

of MALL for language skill development, and (4) technical and pedagogical challenges in its implementation.

1. MALL as a Flexible Learning Support Tool

In the view of the students interviewed, they explained that MALL serves as a medium that provides flexibility in the implementation of English language learning. The use of mobile devices allows students to access materials, exercises, and learning resources not only during class but also outside of class. This flexibility is one of the reasons for utilizing mobile devices as part of learning activities. These findings indicate that MALL does not entirely replace face-to-face learning but serves as a supplement to learning activities.

These findings indicate that MALL provides opportunities for more flexible language learning and supports the development of English language skills. More recent studies also show that MALL enables learning to take place in a more personalized and interactive manner, transcending the spatial and temporal limitations of conventional learning.

2. Increased Student Engagement and Independence

Based on the interview results, the use of mobile devices and language-learning apps adds variety to learning activities, so that students do not rely solely on textbooks and the teacher's explanations. Mobile-device-based activities also provide students with the opportunity to practice more independently, in accordance with their needs and abilities. In this context, MALL has the potential to foster learner autonomy, as students have the opportunity to access materials, repeat exercises, and develop their language skills outside of formal learning time.

These findings are consistent with previous research showing that MALL can enhance students' motivation, engagement, and independence in language learning. Studies on MALL in the context of EFL also indicate that the use of mobile technology can provide a more interactive learning experience and support independent learning.

3. MALL to Support the Development of English Language Skills

Interview results show that students use MALL to support various English language skills, particularly listening, speaking, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Mobile devices provide access to various forms of language input, such as audio, video, interactive exercises, and authentic materials.

In listening lessons, for example, mobile devices allow students to listen to material repeatedly so they can adjust their learning pace to their individual abilities. In speaking lessons, mobile technology can be used for voice recording, pronunciation practice, and audio- or video-based communication. Meanwhile, mobile apps can also be used to enrich vocabulary through interactive exercises.

4. Technical and Pedagogical Challenges in Implementing MALL

Although it offers various opportunities, the implementation of MALL is not without its challenges. Based on the interview results, the challenges that arise can be categorized into technical and pedagogical aspects. Technical aspects relate to the availability of devices, internet connectivity, data allowances, and students' ability to operate the applications. Meanwhile, pedagogical aspects relate to teachers' ability to select applications, adapt technology to learning objectives, and manage student activities while using mobile devices.

These findings indicate that the mere presence of technology does not guarantee the successful implementation of MALL. The use of mobile devices must be designed based on learning needs and accompanied by teacher guidance. Thus, technology functions as part of a pedagogical strategy, not merely as an add-on to learning.

Overall, the research findings indicate that the implementation of MALL among the students in this study exhibits three main characteristics: flexible access to learning, support for student engagement and independence, and the provision of alternative activities to develop English language skills. However, its implementation still faces technical and pedagogical challenges that require readiness on the part of teachers, equipment, and the school environment.

## Analysis

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) by English teachers at five high schools offers a number of opportunities to support the language learning process. The main findings of this study include learning flexibility, increased student engagement and independence, support for language skill development, and the emergence of technical and pedagogical challenges. These findings indicate that MALL is not merely related to the use of mobile devices, but rather to how this technology is pedagogically integrated into the language learning process.

*The Flexibility of MALL in English Language Learning*

Research findings indicate that teachers use mobile devices to provide flexibility in accessing learning materials and activities. Students can access materials, complete exercises, and use learning resources both inside and outside the classroom. This expands the learning environment, which was previously limited to the time and place of formal instruction.

These findings are consistent with Hsieh' , which explains that MALL enables language learning to take place in both formal and informal settings and provides teachers with the opportunity to create more engaging and flexible learning activities. Flexibility is also one of the key characteristics of mobile learning, as mobile devices allow students to learn according to their own time, place, and needs.

The results of this study also support the " , which identifies the flexibility of the learning environment and the accessibility of mobile devices as forms of MALL's functional affordances. Thus, the use of MALL in this study can be understood not merely as the transfer of learning materials to digital devices, but as an expansion of learning opportunities for students.

However, this flexibility does not mean that learning is entirely delegated to technology. Findings indicate that teachers continue to play a crucial role in setting learning objectives, selecting appropriate applications or materials, and guiding student activities. This reinforces the view that MALL should be positioned as a pedagogical support tool, not as a substitute for teachers( Sahril et al. 2022).

1. *MALL, Student Engagement, and Student Autonomy*

The second theme relates to student engagement and independence. The use of mobile devices gives students the opportunity to interact more actively with the material through various types of digital activities. Students can review the material, access additional resources, and complete exercises according to their needs.

These findings are consistent with the results of studies (Marbun, and Pratolo 2023), which show that the use of MALL in English language learning can increase motivation, support language learning, and positively contribute to student performance. These studies also indicate that MALL has been widely used in the context of English language learning in Asia, including Indonesia.

The relationship between MALL and independent learning is also supported by systematic reviews on self-directed language learning. MALL enables students to gain broader access to learning resources and provides opportunities for independent

learning, including through self-directed learning activities, reflection, and feedback (Li and Singh 2024) .

From a pedagogical perspective, this situation indicates a shift from entirely teacher-centered learning toward a model that gives students greater autonomy to manage their own learning process. However, student autonomy does not arise automatically simply because technology is used. Teachers still need to provide objectives, instructions, guidelines, and feedback to ensure that the use of mobile devices is truly directed toward learning activities.

Thus, the findings of this study indicate that MALL's contribution to student independence is highly dependent on the instructional design implemented by teachers. The use of smartphones without a clear pedagogical purpose risks reducing technology to a mere tool for consuming information, rather than a meaningful learning tool.

2. *MALL in the Development of English Language Skills*

The research results show that teachers use MALL to support various language skills, particularly listening, speaking, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This indicates that the multimedia features of mobile devices provide opportunities for students to receive language input through audio, video, text, and interactive activities.

Findings regarding listening are supported by (Azli, Shah, and Mohamad 2018), which, based on a synthesis of MALL research, found that mobile-based learning can support students' ability to distinguish sounds and accents, understand natural speech, expand their vocabulary, and improve their pronunciation and speaking skills.

These findings are also consistent with (Nuraeni et al. 2020), which, through a systematic literature review of MALL and pronunciation instruction studies, found that the use of mobile devices generally has a positive impact on the development of pronunciation and receives positive feedback from students. Smartphones were also the most widely used devices in the MALL studies reviewed.

From a language learning perspective, these characteristics are important because language skills require repeated exposure and practice. Mobile devices allow students to access audio or video materials more than once and practice more flexibly. Thus, MALL can provide additional opportunities for students to receive language input and engage in language practice outside of regular class time.

However, the findings of this study do not indicate that all language skills automatically develop solely through the use of MALL. Its effectiveness still depends on the type of activity, the quality of the material, the duration of use, and the alignment of the application with learning objectives. A meta-analysis of MALL studies also indicates that research design and intervention duration are important factors to consider when assessing the effectiveness of mobile--based learning.

3. *The Role of Teachers in MALL Integration*

One of the key findings of this study is that teachers remain a key component in the learning process even when mobile technology is used extensively. Teachers play a role in selecting apps, determining content, organizing activities, providing instructions, and monitoring student engagement.

This finding reinforces the argument that digital transformation in language learning requires not only the availability of devices but also teachers' pedagogical competence in integrating technology (Rajendran and Yunus 2021) indicates that teachers generally hold positive views toward MALL, but its implementation still faces pedagogical, technical, and psychological limitations.

In this context, teacher competence is not limited to the ability to operate applications. Teachers need to understand when technology is used, why it is used, and

what language activities can be facilitated through that technology. In other words, the integration of MALL should begin with pedagogical needs and then select the appropriate technology—not the other way around.

This perspective aligns with the findings of a meta-analysis on MALL, which identifies the instructor's role, curriculum, student-centered learning, and contextual learning as key themes in MALL design (Hashim et al. 2017) . Therefore, the successful implementation of MALL at the five schools in this study can be understood as the result of the interaction between technology, teachers, students, instructional materials, and the learning context.

1. *Challenges in Implementing MALL*

Although MALL offers various benefits, this study also identified a number of challenges related to technical and pedagogical aspects. Obstacles such as access to devices, internet connectivity, data allowances, proficiency in using applications, and the management of student activities are factors that require attention.

These findings are consistent with a systematic literature review (Burston and Giannakou 2022), which identified several challenges in MALL, including limitations in infrastructure and technology, access to devices, limitations in device features, users' technical skills, and pedagogical issues. (Gael and Elmiana 2021) also categorized the challenges of implementing MALL into psychological, pedagogical, and technical aspects.

Thus, the challenges identified in this study indicate that the digitization of learning cannot be focused solely on the provision of devices. Support for teachers and students, equitable access, the selection of appropriate applications, and instructional planning are all crucial components of MALL implementation.

In addition to technical issues, the use of mobile apps must also take into account pedagogical and ethical considerations. Recent studies indicate that issues such as privacy, security, user readiness, app design, and the alignment of apps with learning needs are among the challenges of implementing MALL [2]. Therefore, teachers need to weigh the benefits and risks of using apps before integrating them into their teaching.

2. *MALL as a Complement, Not a Replacement for Conventional Learning*

Overall, the study's findings indicate that MALL is best positioned as a supplement to English language learning. MALL provides students with additional opportunities to receive input, practice, interact with the material, and learn independently. However, these functions still require integration with learning activities designed and facilitated by teachers.

These findings are consistent with recent studies that emphasize that MALL should be used as a pedagogically designed complement to classroom learning, rather than as a substitute for teachers or conventional learning (Wu 2015) . Thus, the use of mobile technology should be based on learning objectives rather than simply keeping up with technological advancements.

In the context of the five high schools studied, MALL can be understood as part of a learning ecosystem that connects classroom learning with out-of-class learning activities. This integration allows for a more flexible learning process, provides opportunities for additional practice, and supports student engagement. However, the effectiveness of its implementation is still determined by the quality of the pedagogical design, teacher competence, student readiness, and the support provided by the school environment.

Thus, this study reinforces the view that the pedagogical value of MALL lies not in the mobile devices themselves, but in how the technology is used to achieve language learning objectives. MALL becomes meaningful when technology, pedagogy, content, and student needs can be systematically integrated.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that HelloTalk, as a Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) tool, offers opportunities to support senior high school students' English listening comprehension. Based on interviews with seven eleventh-grade students at Madrasah Aliyah Roudhatul Tholabah in Kediri, the findings indicate that mobile-assisted learning provides flexible access to learning resources, encourages student engagement and independence, and supports the development of listening and other English language skills. HelloTalk also offers opportunities for authentic exposure to spoken English, which may help students become more familiar with natural pronunciation, different accents, and everyday expressions. Furthermore, the use of mobile technology can increase students' motivation and confidence in practicing English beyond the classroom.

However, the findings also reveal that the implementation of MALL faces technical and pedagogical challenges, including internet connectivity, data availability, device accessibility, and the need for appropriate teacher guidance. These challenges demonstrate that technology alone does not guarantee successful language learning. The educational value of HelloTalk depends on how its features are integrated into purposeful learning activities and aligned with students' needs and learning objectives.

The findings have several implications for educational knowledge and practice. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes contextual insights into the use of MALL among senior high school students, particularly in the development of listening comprehension. It highlights the importance of considering not only technological affordances but also students' experiences, learning autonomy, and the conditions that influence technology integration. From a practical perspective, English teachers are encouraged to incorporate HelloTalk into structured listening activities, such as listening to voice messages, identifying key information, recognizing pronunciation patterns, and reflecting on authentic conversations. Teachers should provide clear instructions, appropriate learning tasks, and feedback to ensure that students use the application for meaningful language practice. Schools and curriculum developers should also consider equitable access to digital devices, internet connectivity, and teacher professional development when implementing mobile-assisted learning.

In conclusion, HelloTalk can serve as a complementary resource for English listening instruction rather than a replacement for classroom teaching. Its integration should be guided by pedagogical objectives, teacher facilitation, and students' learning needs. Since this study involved only seven participants in one educational institution, its findings are context-specific and cannot be generalized to all senior high school students. Further research involving diverse educational settings and additional data sources is recommended to examine how HelloTalk contributes to listening comprehension development over time.

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