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Investigating students' perspectives on the utilization of mobile-assisted language learning and mobile games for developing speaking proficiencies

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Abstract

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, speaking is a skill that poses significant challenges, primarily due to insufficient practice, low self-esteem, and limited conversational opportunities. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and mobile gaming offer creative and engaging ways to enhance speaking abilities in the current digital learning environment. This qualitative study examines how students perceive the impact of mobile games on enhancing their English-speaking skills. Ten undergraduate EFL students, ages 20 to 23, who had studied English for six to ten years and frequently played mobile games, participated in semi-structured interviews to gather data. According to a thematic study, mobile games increased learners' motivation, improved pronunciation, helped them acquire new vocabulary, and gave them more confidence when speaking. Participants observed that the interactive elements of games reduced speaking anxiety and promoted real-world conversational practice. However, difficulties remained, such as comprehending rapid-fire discourse and navigating new colloquialisms. The study shows that the deliberate integration of mobile apps can augment conventional classroom techniques and promote organic spoken language development.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology has transformed the world of education in recent years. It has changed the methods of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in many contexts. Mobile technology can provide students with flexible, individualised and contextually relevant learning experiences outside the conventional classroom. Therefore, these technologies are increasingly popular (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008; Hwang & Chen, 2022). It is imperative to use technologies that help people learn languages, especially speaking, as more and more educational institutions are using digital technologies. Wongsuriya (2020) states that the use of mobile technology in language education provides creative solutions that meet the needs of modern students. Mastery of English has become very important in an increasingly globalised and technologically interconnected society (Navidinia et al., 2009; Özdemir et al., 2021). The following paragraphs are indented 1 cm in the first line, which is the same for the whole manuscript.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has initiated a sea change in education as it offers an innovative method for students to interact with language resources in a native and mobile context. Using mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones, MALL allows students to learn at their leisure and at their own pace. EFL students who may not have regular access to native speakers or immersion language environments can have their needs met with this customizable strategy. While Athoillah (2022) stated that MALL improves speaking and listening skills through interactive media, Soparno and Tarjana (2021) showed that Indonesian students value the independence and convenience offered by speaking apps on mobile phones. These results suggest that more people recognise that informal, student-centred situations can significantly improve formal education.

As one of the main features of MALLs, mobile games have attracted much interest due to their ability to enhance expressive language skills through interaction, engagement and immersion. Mobile games often simulate real-world activities, encourage social interaction, and provide students with contextual knowledge and pronunciation patterns in a challenging way (Gamlo, 2019; Grimshaw & Cardoso, 2018). According to Bakan et al. (2022), MMORPGs, such as *Elder Scrolls Online*, improve communication skills by reducing anxiety in a friendly way and increasing player engagement. According to Dorji and Sakulwongs (2024), students who used the *Cake* app reported significant improvements in their self-esteem and self-control, mainly due to features that allowed them to simulate dialog and change time. In addition to making the work easier, these resources create an emotional connection with the content, which is crucial for language work and retention.

Theoretical frameworks such as Constructivist Learning Theory and Self-Determination Theory provide important insights into the ability of mobile games in teaching English as a Foreign language. According to Jonassen (1999), students learn through experience and problem-solving activities. This is a principle that can be explained in terms of game-based learning as players must understand and use the language contextually to be successful. Deci and Ryan (2000) state that students' motivation will increase when their needs are met by autonomy, competence, and connection to their needs which can be met by mobile games through personalized learning, teamwork, and cooperative play. Among other things, Gamification Theory, as defined by Deterding et al. (2011), encourages the use of (2011), encourages the use of game design elements such as incentives, levels, and competencies to increase motivation and longevity in educational settings. These ideas explain why students often show greater perseverance and passion when they interact with English through mobile games compared to traditional tasks.

Mobile games provide a conducive environment for learning an unused language, especially in written communication. Comas-Quinn et al. (2009) state that internal learning occurs when students are not actively learning the language through engaging activities. In mobile games, players often encounter new words, speech patterns, and pronunciation elements when interacting with colleagues, completing tasks, or overcoming obstacles. Numerous studies support the idea that these environments improve speaking fluency and lexical memory. According to Berry et al. (2021), the MALL platform being developed in Asia-Pacific enhances the accuracy of results through audio-based training, while Wang and Han (2021) note that users of the *Liulishuo* app are more likely to perform business-related tasks due to the silent backup provided by the AI platform. Integrating fun and education to create mobile games is a highly effective way to improve speaking skills that are often criticized or not adequately developed in textbook-based EFL programs (Chen et al., 2019; Alzatma, 2020).

The difficulty in encouraging EFL students to speak English consistently is still a major problem in Indonesia. Many students find it difficult to communicate in formal settings, which is often due to

fear of being evaluated, lack of confidence, or their inability to communicate in English (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021; Coskun, 2016). Therefore, informal learning activities such as mobile games are highly relevant. Students often express a greater desire to play with a language in private or semi-anonymous digital environments, where the emphasis is more on achieving game goals than language proficiency (Muengsan & Chatwattana, 2024; Head et al., 2014). These environments encourage risk-taking and repetition—two essential elements for building a balanced life.

However, despite the potential of mobile games for language learning, research has specifically focused on their effect on speaking skills that approach full language proficiency (Govender & Arnedo-Moreno, 2021; All et al., 2021). One of the most significant studies to date prioritizes vocabulary learning or listening comprehension, which would increase the productivity of language use, especially in real-time spoken interactions. Furthermore, there is no clear correlation between students' perceptions of these tools and their motivation, confidence and success in effective English communication. Given these difficulties, it is important to assess students' personal experiences when using mobile games as an informal medium.

While MALL research has underscored advancements in vocabulary and listening skills (Athoillah, 2022; Berry et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2019), little studies investigate speaking development. Mobile games alleviate anxiousness (Bakan et al., 2022), augment motivation (Gamlo, 2019; Wang & Han, 2021), and facilitate incidental learning (Comas-Quinn et al., 2009), although the perspectives of learners about speech enhancement remain inadequately examined. The majority of research emphasise receptive skills (Govender & Arnedo-Moreno, 2021; All et al., 2021), rather than productive oral usage. This study examines how EFL students view the significance of mobile games in improving speaking fluency and confidence.

Therefore, this study aims to explore students perspective on how mobile games and mobile integrated media affect to their English speaking skills. The study will be more seeking about how learner perceive improvement in vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and confident in speaking English.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative descriptive methodology to examine students' perspectives on the effect of mobile phone-assisted language learning (MALL) and mobile games on their proficiency in English. The qualitative approach demonstrates the ability to conduct research on the subject of students' subjective attitudes that are difficult to measure using quantitative instruments (Creswell, 2013). It should be noted that this study focused on understanding personal perceptions, motivations, and contextual behaviours in an informal learning environment. Qualitative methods provide the best working practices for assessing human creativity. Similar to numerical data that can indicate individual complexity, qualitative research allows the use of rich and contextualised language to determine how students personally behave while playing mobile games.

Purposive sampling was used to select a number of undergraduate EFL students from a national university in Central Java, Indonesia. The students were educated in English until the end of the school year and came from various gender-neutral backgrounds. They frequently played mobile games for three to five hours every month, interacting mainly in English with various game genres, such as multiplayer, simulation and role-playing games. Their engagement with in-game English content (instructions, dialogues, and interactions) rendered them appropriate for examining the development of informal speaking skills.

Data were obtained via WhatsApp video call in June 2025. Interviews were not audio- or video-recorded due to patient privacy and comfort concerns. Similarly, to highlight important reflections and answers, field notes were made in full at each session. After the phone call ended, the researcher summarized each participant immediately to ensure accuracy and completeness. This method was used to uphold moral principles while reducing the amount of time required for qualitative analysis.

The basis for the development of the interview questions was the main theories supporting mobile phone-based education and second language proficiency. Participants' motivation and self-confidence were examined using Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), specifically how their autonomy and engagement in the context of the mobile phone game influenced their desire for independence. The addition of vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening components was a result of constructivist educational theory (Jonassen, 1999), which emphasizes contextualized education through real-world problem solving. In addition, the question of interactive elements and feedback systems in games is influenced by the principles of gamification (Deterding et al., 2011). The

theoretical framework is supported by speaking fluency, vocabulary retention, spontaneous language use, and learners' engagement in digital games.

The interviews addressed subjects including speaking confidence, vocabulary growth, pronunciation and listening exercise, Speaking Motivation, as well as exposure to real English idioms. Guiding questions included: "In what ways do mobile games facilitate your English speaking skills?" "What incentivizes you to utilize English while or subsequent to gaming?" "What obstacles do you encounter when utilizing English in gaming?"

Six-Stage Thematic Analysis The following techniques were used to analyze the data: introduction, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting (Braun and Clarke, 2006). During the familiarization stage to identify themes, the researcher carefully observed each field note several times. Manual coding was used by describing common words or phrases, such as "more confident", "not feeling afraid", and "speaking like a native". Phrases like these were classified under the first code as informal practices and developing self-confidence. For example, "I'm not afraid to speak up in the game because I just want to help my team" was used as a communication tool based on confidence and effort. After coding, the related codes were assigned to large-scale themes such as Motivation from Challenge Games, Self-Confidence Through Informal Behavior, and Vocabulary Acquisition from Game Contexts. The illustrations used were simple, and the themes were well chosen to ensure that they conveyed the essence of the participants' experiences. The themes were checked for consistency across multiple responses, and participants' summaries were sent back for divergence by members to ensure credibility.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants' reflections on their experiences of using mobile games to improve their English language skills are presented in this section. Confidence in speaking, vocabulary enrichment, better pronunciation, motivation to speak, and comments regarding clear English expression are the main themes identified through thematic analysis of the field categories and interviews. Below, each topic is explained using examples and interpretations based on the data that has been collected.

Speaking Confidence

After playing mobile games, some players say that they feel more comfortable speaking in English. Many people believe that the game environment offers a safe and relaxed atmosphere for language use. One participant said, "I usually get nervous speaking in class, but I don't feel scared in the game." I just focus on my goal and act consciously so that my journey becomes more enjoyable. In addition, voice chat allows communication in a variety of contexts, so students can practice without needing to be questioned. Through this lesson, students can improve their writing skills more than just their language skills, which will boost their confidence and self-esteem.

Vocabulary Enrichment

While playing the game, players attentively identify new words, especially in the form of item labels, character dialog, and mission descriptions. This concept is taught through context and necessity, not through formal education. "I have to check when I don't know a word and I need it to complete a task," said a student. This improved my understanding of it. Learner independence was signaled by the number of students who reported typing in new words or looking up definitions on their own phones. In the various game scenarios, retention was further characterized by repeated context-based vocabulary exposure.

Pronunciation Improvement

Despite the fact that pronunciation is not the main focus, many students believe that playing games that depict real-world situations help them in their artistic endeavors rather than hinder them. Through games depicting narrative and voiceover content, students were able to develop their characters and understand intonation, stress, and rhythm. One participant said, "I mimicked the character's speech patterns." Now that I have a clearer understanding of myself, I am confident that I will improve my confidence. Increased sensitivity to natural English speech patterns and improved phonological awareness are two benefits of this intensive learning.

Motivation to Speak

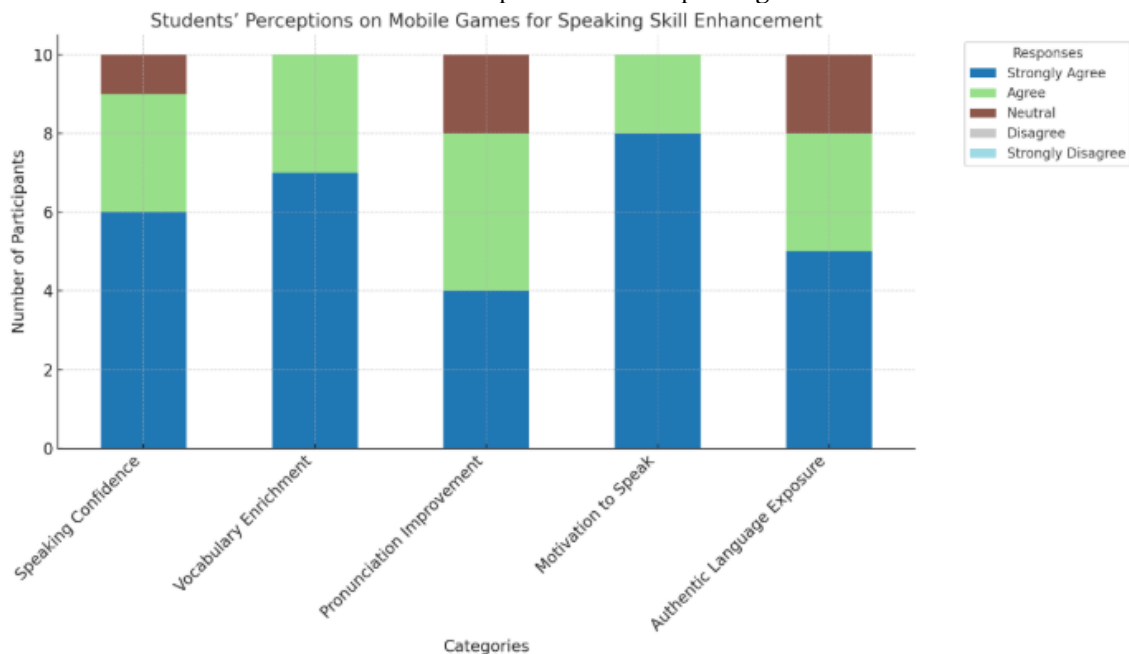
According to the students, they are more motivated to use English when playing mobile games. They were encouraged to work together, although not always obviously, by the gamification environment, which included points, levels, rewards and time-based collaboration. One student said, “I just want to help my team complete the level.” Even if I make mistakes, I don't care. In addition to language learning, the incentive to participate in game activities promotes communication goals. Through their emotional investment in the story and character interactions, the students are able to engage with English actively and passively.

Exposure to Authentic English Expressions

Idiomatic expressions, slang and colloquial phrases that are often absent from textbooks are provided through mobile games. Initially, students reported difficulties, especially when faced with rapid speech or unfamiliar cultural references. However, they eventually adjusted through repetition. “I learned the difference between British and American English just from how the characters speak,” said one participant, while another expressed his confusion over the characters' rapid use of foreign slang. As an important component of communicative competence, this exposure helped them become more aware of cultural differences and the use of English in the real world.

Discussion

Illustration 1. Students' Perceived Improvements in Speaking Skills via Mobile Games.



The results of this study showed that there was a significant improvement in EFL teachers' ability to work with mobile game players in the MALL work environment. A significant breakthrough was the increase in confidence among the students in a group environment. There are many people who believe that mobile games provide a safe environment for learning without the negative effects, which are usually associated with traditional classroom settings. This is in accordance with Bakan et al. (2022), who stated that MMORPGs improve communication by transferring students' linguistic knowledge to complete tasks. One of the features identified by Coskun (2016) as important for improving speech is that in relaxed digital interactions, students experience a greater sense of self-awareness and improve their ability to manage risk.

The participants' experiences consistently highlighted vocabulary learning as a prominent feature. Students acquired new language more organically and vividly through contextual learning integrated into gaming objectives, conversations, and interactions. This aligns with Comas-Quinn et al. (2009), who define incidental learning as the inadvertent acquisition of language through

meaningful activities. Instead of rote memorizing, learners were motivated by urgent communication requirements, resulting in enhanced retention. This reinforces the concept of task-based learning (Phetsut & Waemusa, 2022), wherein learners assimilate linguistic structures through the execution of genuine activities.

Pronunciation and listening skills improve when learners are consistently exposed to speech, like native speakers, in game situations. Many participants mentioned that they filled in the voices and spoke with the characters, which gradually increased their awareness of natural stress patterns, intonation and speed. This study draws on the research of Dorji and Sakulwongs (2024) and Chaya & Inpin (2020), which showed that the use of mobile technology in writing can improve the quality of writing. Students are not just passive learners; they actively engage with auditory information, leading to the development of phonological awareness and auditory comprehension simultaneously.

Students' motivation was significantly improved. Game elements, like objectives, point systems, leaderboards, and interactive narratives, cultivated a sense of advancement and accomplishment. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which asserts that learners exhibit heightened motivation when they experience autonomy, competence, and social connectedness. Deterding et al. (2011) propose that gamified learning environments enhance persistence by rendering the learning process entertaining. The participants' eagerness to speak in English, despite making mistakes, originated from an innate goal to succeed or cooperate, rather than merely fulfilling a linguistic obligation.

Nonetheless, the results also indicated difficulties. A number of students indicated challenges comprehending quick speech, colloquial slang, or regional dialects in games. These challenges illustrate the constraints of unstructured informal learning, particularly in the absence of sufficient scaffolding (Koowuttayakorn & Taylor, 2022). While students developed confidence in informal settings, others acknowledged that this confidence did not consistently translate to academic or formal speaking circumstances. Berry et al. (2021) also asserted that enhancements in informal environments must be bolstered by systematic practice to ensure sustainability and academic relevance.

Consequently, although mobile games provide advantageous opportunities for speaking practice, their function should be supplemental rather than substitutive. Educators must assume a mediating role by incorporating digital experiences into classroom activities, such as reenacting game events, evaluating in-game language, or developing oral presentations based on game narratives. Lestari (2021) posits that this pedagogical bridge may facilitate students' transfer of fluency to formal speaking environments.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize the emotional component of game-based learning. As they interacted with English in gaming contexts, participants reported feeling immersed and enjoying themselves, which helped language practice become more organic and less like a chore. Because they connected English with positive experiences, students were more likely to persist in their practice, which improved both retention and persistence. This is consistent with both Kukulska-Hulme (2020), who highlighted that emotional engagement through mobile technology plays a crucial role in self-directed learning outcomes, and Gamlo (2019), who observed that learners are more engaged when language learning is connected to fun and entertainment.

Aside from linguistic benefits, communication skills among students emerge as a non-essential but crucial advantage. Several people express their opinions about various types of English and references to everyday life that are used in conversations or character actions. As an example, some games depict British versus American English, or idioms that are common in the relevant cultural context. This study helps students increase their tolerance for a variety of English dialects, which is a result that is consistent with the goal of teaching English as a global language (Jenkins, 2006). Ihnatova et al. (2021) states that digital tools that display educational content can increase students' awareness of linguistic and sociolinguistic variations, which is crucial for interactions in the real world.

Furthermore, the application of artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance business procedures via mobile games is growing in importance. Some users make use of AI-powered applications like Cake or Liulishuo, which offer voice recognition and real-time feedback. Students can practice continuously and uninterruptedly in a safe environment with this technology, which also offers them limitless feedback on their grammar, intonation, and language proficiency (Wang & Han, 2021). Students who might struggle in a focused classroom setting benefit most from this type of personalization.

The results also highlight how crucial it is to incorporate digital literacy into language instruction. Students gain digital competencies like information filtering, ethical communication, and technological adaptability in addition to language skills as they operate in-game, navigate mobile game

interfaces, and investigate online communities. This supports the argument made by Cochrane et al. (2022) that multiliteracies, in which language learning is intertwined with digital fluency, are necessary in mobile learning environments. By creating curricula that incorporate digital tasks into language learning objectives, educators can take advantage of this.

Finally, the extent to which students persist in their language acquisition is contingent upon their attitudes toward the challenging aspects of video games. By failing and attempting again, students can develop the ability to perceive errors as opportunities rather than obstacles. "I never felt hopeless," stated a player, despite the fact that they lost a few contests. In order to succeed in the game, I must begin learning the English language in a formal manner. In an academic environment, students may acquire the fortitude necessary to confront their anxiety regarding learning and overcome their challenges by emphasizing the significance of education.

CONCLUSION

This study has found that mobile games, when included in a Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) framework, enhance the speaking proficiency of EFL students. Participants exhibited heightened confidence, gained vocabulary in context, improved their pronunciation and listening skills, and showed greater drive to communicate in English. These results closely pertain to the study inquiry on students' perceptions of the use of mobile games in speaking proficiency. Despite ongoing issues associated with slang and rapid speaking, the findings indicate that mobile games can effectively augment formal education when utilized wisely. Integrating game-based experiences into classroom practices may significantly improve communicative fluency among English learners.

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