MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING: EXPLORATION OF EFL MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

This study aimed to explore the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) from students' perspectives in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) among middle school students. This study found patterns of mobile technology use among students, commonly used applications, and obstacles faced when using mobile technology in the learning process. This study also used a mixed-method methodology, which combined questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in the data collection process. The subjects for this study were 18 eighth-grade students from SMPN 1 Lamongan in the 2023/2024 academic year, and they were selected using a random sample. The results of the questionnaire showed that most of them had used mobile devices for over three years. The most common thing found was that they used this tool to help understand vocabulary, especially using Google Translate. Not only that, they also underlined the obstacles they faced when learning using mobile technology, such as difficulty in understanding certain contexts and distractions from non-educational contexts. Although MALL has positive potential as a medium for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), more improvements are still needed in application design and instructional approaches to optimize its use. This study is expected to broaden the insight about MALL in English language learning. This study offers a new perspective for educators, application developers, and policymakers who want to utilize mobile technology in the English language teaching process.

Keywords: *EFL Middle School, MALL, Students' Perspectives*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development in the world of pedagogy, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), has recently had a positive impact on the field of language teaching, especially English. This can be seen in a person's ability to adapt mobile devices to improve language skills, especially English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) provides an opportunity for anyone to improve their language skills. Based on what we can see in this era, middle school students are a group of mobile users who are quite proficient in their crucial phase. This makes them the right target for exploring the positive impact of using mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) applications.

Constructivist and sociocultural learning, which underlines the importance of interactive and learner-centered classroom settings, can be realized supported by the integration of mobile technology in the learning process (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018). Mobile applications provide interesting opportunities and insights, which can enable students to strengthen their language skills (Burston, 2014). In addition, mobile devices also often integrate gamification features that have the potential to increase students' motivation and active involvement during the learning process (Duman, Orhon, & Gedik, 2015).

Mobile applications in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can be used as a breakthrough to improve language skills, such as improving vocabulary mastery, listening, writing, reading, and speaking (Hwang & Chen, 2013; Viberg & Grönlund, 2013). Previous research also shows that vocabulary learning facilitated by mobile devices can improve students' memory in language learning (Azar & Nasiri, 2014; Wu,

2015). In addition, mobile applications also offer valuable aspects for direct interaction, which is important for developing language skills (Kim & Kwon, 2012). Other research also reports that in this era of globalization, mobile devices must be integrated with language learning methods or media to maximize learning (Syafrizal, 2024).

Among the various types of mobile applications, of course, there are several applications that have become popular in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) according to students. Today's students use applications such as Duolingo, Memrise, and Quizlet because of their fun and accessible pedagogical approaches (Loewen et al., 2019). For example, the language learning platform Duolingo uses a gamification method by providing short courses and immediate feedback. This can increase student engagement and persistence in learning because it is not boring (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012). Another study revealed that Duolingo can positively enhance students learning of new vocabulary (Sakkir & Syamsuddin, 2023). Memrise employs spaced repetition and mnemonic techniques to enhance vocabulary recall, whereas Quizlet enables the creation of user-customized flashcards and interactive quizzes, promoting personalized learning experiences (Ashcroft & Imrie, 2014). Another study by Darsih and Asikin (2020) also showed mobile applications that students often use to help their learning, for example, ELSA Speak, Kamusku, YouTube, Google Translate, Google Meet, and Zoom.

Although MALL has shown very good results overall, obstacles and limitations still exist and need to be improved. Important factors include digital literacy, technology accessibility, and the possibility of distraction from various content (Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). Additionally, the advantages of MALL applications may vary based on individual student characteristics, such as age, proficiency level, and learning ability preferences (Reinders & Pegrum, 2015).

Since previous research focused on the context of high school and college students, this study focuses more on exploring high school EFL students' perspectives regarding the use of mobile devices for English language learning. By analyzing the applications most frequently used by students, as well as understanding their experiences and difficulties, this research offers new insights into how Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) can be improved to facilitate the language learning process in certain groups. This research contributes to the current discussion regarding the integration of mobile technology in EFL learning by thoroughly analyzing students' feedback and mobile device usage habits. The results of this research can be used by educators, application developers, and parents.

2. METHOD

This study used mixed methods to explore the perspectives of secondary school students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) on the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Lamongan, using a random sample involving 18 students in the eighth grade. During the data collection process, this study was conducted by distributing questionnaires and conducting semi-structured interviews with students, focusing on their experiences, preferences, and perceptions regarding the use of mobile applications for EFL acquisition. The survey overall collected information on mobile applications or features frequently used by students, the frequency and duration of mobile device use, and the

perceived effects of mobile technology on their English proficiency. The survey incorporated closed-ended (using a Likert scale of measurement with five options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) and open-ended questions through semi-structured interviews to enable participants to articulate their viewpoints, recommendations, and any obstacles they encounter while participating in MALL. The quantitative data from the Likert scale were examined using descriptive statistics, while data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The results from the quantitative data were analyzed and interpreted to find out the highest perspectives from the average responses. Meanwhile, the data from the interviews were reduced and categorized based on the scope of the theme, which were then interpreted to become the final findings. Employing this approach, the research seeks to offer a thorough comprehension of the function of mobile applications in facilitating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) acquisition among secondary school students.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Mobile Devices Usage Duration and Frequency

This study involved 18 eighth-grade students. Based on the questionnaire's result, 83,3% of participants said that they had been using mobile devices for more than three years, with a significant number reaching four years of usage. This significant exposure indicates that students have been provided ample opportunity to investigate and employ various applications, making their perspectives on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) more insightful. Continuous use of mobile devices suggests a high degree of familiarity with the technology, which may improve the seamless incorporation of these tools into daily learning activities. The percentages replied can be described below.

Table 1. Students' Mobile Devices Usage Duration

No.	Year	Percentage	Number of Students
1	Less than a year	11,1%	2
2	1 – 2 years	5,6%	1
3	3 – 4 years	38,9%	7
4	More than 4 years	44,4%	8

### 3.2. EFL Middle School Students' Perspectives on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL)
3.2.1. The Students' Usage Patterns of Mobile Devices in Learning English

The introduction of mobile technology in education has wholly transformed how students acquire languages, mainly English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The present study investigates the perspective of using mobile devices employed by students in secondary schools to acquire English language abilities and their perspectives on using these tools. The following table and figure show the results of the questionnaire survey.

Table 2. Students' Perspective of Mobile Devices

No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

1	Using mobile devices helps learn new English vocabulary more quickly.	27,8%	61,1%	11,1%	0%	0%
2	Mobile apps help improve English skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking).	16,7%	55,6%	27,8%	0%	0%
3	Mobile devices make learning English more fun and exciting.	22,2%	55,6%	22,2%	0%	0%
4	More motivated to learn English when using mobile apps.	11,1%	55,6%	33,3%	0%	0%
5	Prefer using mobile devices over traditional methods (such as books) to learn English.	11,1%	44,4%	44,4%	0%	0%
6	Using mobile devices for English learning is effective.	11,1%	55,6%	33,3%	0%	0%
7	Using mobile devices to practice English skills outside of school.	27,8%	33,3%	38,9%	0%	0%
8	Mobile-assisted English learning helps perform better in language tests.	16,7%	66,7%	16,7%	0%	0%
9	Easy to use English learning apps on mobile devices.	16,7%	38,9%	44,4%	0%	0%
10	Recommend mobile-assisted English learning to friends.	11,1%	33,3%	50%	5,6%	0%
	Total	**17,23**	**50,00**	**32,21**	**0,56**	**0**
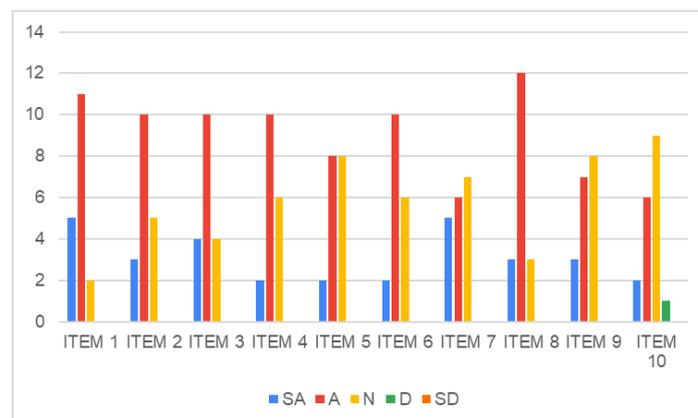
Figure 1. Students' Perspective of Mobile Devices

From the first statement, 'using mobile devices helps learn new English vocabulary more quickly', it is shown that 61,1% of students agreed that mobile devices greatly help the process of acquiring new English vocabulary, and 27,8% of them stated strongly agree. The convenience of accessing translations might enhance students' confidence and motivation to acquire further knowledge of unfamiliar terminology. Nevertheless, the dependence on translation applications can occasionally affect acquiring and retaining vocabulary at a deeper level, as students prioritize quick

translation over the long-term acquisition and use of new words. Furthermore, 11,1% of students maintained a neutral stance on the influence of employing mobile devices to acquire vocabulary, highlighting the diversity in how they engage with and derive advantages from the applications. The variety noted may be attributed to several factors, including individual learning styles, the language material's complexity, and the application's user-friendliness.

And then the next regarding the second statement, 'Mobile apps help improve English skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking)', it is shown that 55,6% of students commonly perceive mobile applications as valuable tools for improving their comprehensive English proficiency, encompassing reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This wide-ranging advantage highlights the adaptability of mobile applications in dealing with different facets of language acquisition. Nevertheless, students should maintain a neutral stance, suggesting that although they perceive some potential in these applications, there may be constraints or aspects where the apps fail to fulfill their requirements adequately. For example, students may discover that select applications are more efficient in developing particular abilities (such as listening and speaking) but less so for others (such as writing). Furthermore, the efficacy of these technologies can be impacted by the app's design, the caliber of the material, and the level of interactivity and feedback offered.

The third statement, 'mobile devices make learning English more fun and exciting', shows that 22,2% really agree with the statement, and the other half choose to agree, while only 22,2% choose neutral. From here, it can be seen that most middle school students prefer to learn using mobile devices as a tool for learning English. This can be used as a reference for teachers who still think in this era that using mobile devices in the classroom is a violation because it can distract the learning process; in fact, the use of mobile devices in this digital technology era makes students feel interested and joyful.

The fourth statement, 'more motivated to learn English when using mobile apps', it is shown that 66.7% of students chose to agree and even strongly agree with the statement. Only 33.3% of students were neutral. And there were even no students who chose to disagree. This shows that utilizing the features or applications of language learning that are currently available is very helpful for students to increase their motivation to learn, especially in the field of English. Therefore, the homework for teachers in this digital era is to find a million ways to integrate learning into the use of mobile devices so that students are motivated and do not feel bored during the learning process.

There are 44,4% of students who chose neutral with the fifth statement, which is 'prefer using mobile devices over traditional methods (such as books) to learn English,' and the other 55,1% of students chose to agree or even strongly agree. From here it can be seen that some students still prefer to learn using traditional methods rather than mobile devices. This is certainly still a natural thing for the middle school level because they may have just used mobile devices for a period that can be said to be quite new. However, considering that we are now entering the era of globalization, where

technology is developing rapidly, it would be excellent if students were taught interesting learning features or applications so that they are interested in learning digitally. However, its implementation must remain under the supervision of teachers and parents.

Regarding the sixth statement, 'using mobile devices for English learning is effective', almost all students said they agreed, and 33.3% were neutral. The answers can certainly change over time because the effectiveness of each student is undoubtedly different from one another, depending on how long they have used mobile devices as a tool for the language learning process. Moreover, most participants in this study stated that mobile devices are effective for learning English. The reasons can certainly vary depending on the conditions and experiences of each individual.

In the seventh statement, 'using mobile devices to practice English skills outside of school,' 38,9% stated neutral, while 33.3% said they agreed and 27.8% strongly agreed. It can be interpreted that middle school students are still not very willing to utilize mobile devices as a tool to learn English independently outside of class or outside of school hours.

The eighth statement, 'mobile-assisted English learning helps perform better in language tests,' shows that 66,7% of students agreed with it. This suggests that during language test activities, such as daily tests or other tests, students prefer to use mobile devices because, according to them, this really helps their test process.

The ninth statement, 'easy to use English learning apps on mobile devices,' shows that 44,4% of middle school students still don't know so deeply about the types of language learning applications on mobile devices, even though the types are very varied and interesting. However, only a few students answered agree, and some others chose neutral.

Meanwhile, the last statement, 'recommend mobile-assisted English learning to friends,' shows that 50% of students chose neutral, and even 5.6% stated that they disagreed. From here, it can be seen that they do not really know what interesting applications or features can be utilized in the English learning process.

From the whole statement, it can be concluded that most students have felt the positive impact of using mobile devices in language learning. Because from all the statements above, 50% of students answered agree, 17.23% of students even answered strongly agree, 32.21% answered neutral, and only 0.56% of students disagreed. From these results, it can be said that the use of mobile devices at the middle school level has had a positive impact in its application as a tool for learning English.

3.2.2. The Commonly Used Application in Learning English

The results of the study show that middle school students also use several types of English learning applications. The following is a figure of the application data results used mainly by middle school students.
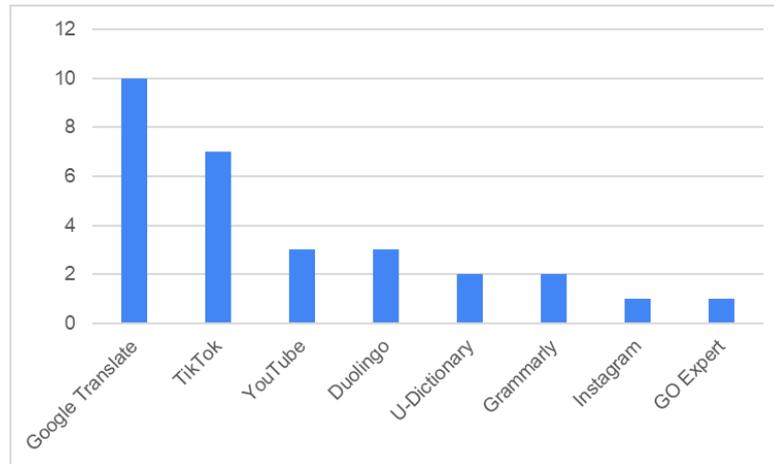
Figure 2. The Commonly Used Application

Students reported using diverse applications for language acquisition, which can be obtained from several online features or applications, such as Google Translate. This instrument's capacity to offer instant translations and pronunciation advice establishes it as an essential component of their learning methodology. However, over-reliance on translation apps may have negative consequences down the road. While such apps provide quick feedback, they may not consistently promote deep vocabulary acquisition and understanding. Students consider translation features to be a key aspect of English learning apps. The arguments mentioned earlier underline the importance of an appropriate and easy-to-use translation system that can help learners understand and use new vocabulary effectively and efficiently. In addition, including features that help with proper pronunciation and contextual use of words is highly appreciated in these apps. Apps or features that provide quick feedback and feature some interactive features to master pronunciation can directly improve students' oral communication skills.

On the other hand, students also improve their mastery of English material through modern social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. These platforms provide a variety of complete English materials, presented through various types, such as instructional films, music, and learning content created by someone, which can easily improve individuals' listening and understanding skills. The informal and interesting quality of social media materials is a popular choice among students, providing a fun and contextual means to practice English much easier and more enjoyable.

In addition, students also underline the use of game-based learning applications and modern interactive platforms such as Duolingo, which combines gamification to increase the fun of acquiring English learning materials. These applications create a competitive and engaging setting that might inspire students to practice more frequently and enhance their language proficiency.

The following English learning application that is also popular among middle school students is the U-Dictionary dictionary. Compared to Google Translate, U-Dictionary is much more complete in explaining the meaning of a word, and this application is also easy to access because it can be downloaded for free on mobile devices. However, for the middle school level, this application is still rarely used; most

students are more interested in using the Google Translate application as the idol application for translating.

In addition, students also mentioned the grammar Checker application, Grammarly, as an application that is believed to facilitate the process of learning English. This application offers a quick way to correct sentences or even paragraphs in an instant. Making it one of the favorite applications for students, especially college students.

And the last application is GO Expert. GO Expert is an application created by one of the course institutions, Ganesha Operation, which aims to make it easier for students to work on various practice questions during the course process. GO has a variety of choices of subjects offered, one of which is English.

It can be concluded that middle school students know a lot about the various features of applications or platforms that make it easier to learn English. This can be seen through the various answers of students who say that there are many English learning applications that can make it easier for them, one of the most frequently mentioned examples is Google Translate. There are still many other applications, such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Duolingo, Grammarly, U-Dictionary, and GO Expert.

3.2.3. The Students' Challenges of Using Mobile Devices

Despite the benefits, students encounter obstacles when using mobile devices to study English. An often encountered challenge is understanding the language used in some programs or information, which can limit the learning process. This situation reminds us of the importance of applications that provide content with varying levels of difficulty to facilitate students with different levels of ability.

Another critical obstacle is the possible distraction of non-educational material on mobile devices during the learning process. Social media, games and other entertainment applications have the potential to divert students' attention from previously targeted learning goals. To overcome this problem, one suggestion that can be offered is that educators and parents should look for alternative applications that combine learning with fun, to ensure students remain focused on their educational goals.

Besides problems with applications or software on mobile devices, students have technical challenges such as limited internet connectivity, device incompatibility, and inadequate technical assistance. These obstacles can undoubtedly hinder the student's learning process. Therefore, educators also need to prepare other alternatives to overcome this. Among the things that can be done are preparing offline media, using applications or features that do not require a strong enough internet connection, or carrying out group learning activities to minimize obstacles.

4. CONCLUSION

In short, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) among secondary school students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) still has advantages and challenges. This research shows that most students have used mobile devices for quite a long time, so they are quite familiar with the latest educational applications. Various mobile device applications or software, especially Google Translate, are seen by

students as the most important application in facilitating vocabulary mastery. Translation and pronunciation aids have a very positive impact on secondary school students. However, to optimize the benefits of mobile technology, it is important to address the obstacles students face. In this case, educators and application developers must prioritize creating applications or learning features that are attractive, easy to understand, and have a purpose that accommodates the various needs of EFL students. In addition, interactive features such as quizzes or gamified learning activities are also very important in this regard. Tailoring the learning flow to the development of each student's competencies and offering focused practice can increase the effectiveness of language learning with the help of mobile devices.

This research also discovered the barriers students face when using mobile devices to improve language skills. These factors include challenges in understanding the language used in the application, which is sometimes still difficult to understand even after using translation tools, distractions from non-educational material, and technological problems such as limited internet connectivity and inadequate types of devices. Overcoming these barriers requires collaborative efforts from multiple stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and app developers, to ensure that mobile devices are functional, accessible, and engaging for all students. Advanced features such as translation tools and interactive learning activities that combine quizzes and gamification highlight the importance of mobile applications that are versatile and easy to use.

Overall, this study confirms the potential of MALL to improve EFL proficiency among secondary school students. However, continued improvements in app design and pedagogical capabilities are still needed to fully exploit the potential of mobile devices. To improve the effectiveness and experience of mobile-assisted language learning, teachers, parents, and app developers must come together to help overcome known barriers and integrate student preferences into the app development process. Doing this will equip students to learn the skills necessary to thrive in today's increasingly interconnected global society.

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