

PROSPECTS OF THE USE OF MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) APPLICATIONS IN PUBLIC SPEAKING COURSES

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Abstract: This study attempts to show how helpful mobile assisted language learning applications are in improving the speaking skills of students enrolled in a university public speaking course. Two mobile applications were utilized to target two areas of speaking, one is fluency, and the other is pronunciation. Peer evaluation was used to assess the fluency of the students in speaking using the corresponding mobile application and an informal teacher evaluation was given to the students for the mobile application on pronunciation. For both the mobile application used, the students were also given an evaluation form to assess the functionality of the applications in improving their speaking skills. Results of the evaluation tools showed that the students who took part in the study generally thought the applications helpful and welcomed the use of such technology to supplement their learning of the course.

Keywords: Mobile Assisted Language Learning; mobile applications; fluency; pronunciation; public speaking.

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INTRODUCTION

Facing a generation of learners that are wont to technology, and all its advancements, come with a great challenge to educators of today. Gone are the days when one can hold the attention of a class of students for long periods of time with just one's skill in teaching. These new breeds of learners come with new names: 'Digital natives', 'new millennium learners', 'the gamer generation', and 'generation M' (Smith, Kahlke, & Judd, 2020). Just as daunting as their names sound, is the greater challenge of accommodating the varied characteristics of these learners into a style of instruction that can engage them in learning. But the advantage that educators of today also have is the very source that is causing the drastic changes in education-- technology. Teachers have a plethora of resources at their disposal that are literally just a click away that targets the technologically-inclined learners of this generation. One just needs to be resourceful, innovative, and adaptive to change (Asad et al., 2021).

The gradual shift as well from teacher-centered to learner-centered education have made the use of technology in class very conducive and applicable. In the past decade the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) was the trend and the most popular medium to language learning, but in recent years, with the advent of new technology and

applications available through smartphones, students are given a new tool for learning. The new wording for mobile usage in language classrooms is Mobile Assisted Language Learning, for short, MALL. Since mobile phones are more light, handy, and from the word itself 'mobile', it is fast becoming a more popular instrument among language learners. And since practice is key to language acquisition, reinforcement of learning has become easier with the 'mobility' of a mobile phone. With mobile applications targeting specific skills in language, learners now have access to these lessons and can improve their skills "individually" anytime and anywhere.

The term mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) was first coined by Kukulska-Hulme (2020) and since its lexical birth, the use of mobile devices to support language learning has increased exponentially. Although, in general, MALL has been considered as a subset of both mobile learning and computer-assisted language learning, Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) note that MALL differs from CALL "in its use of personal, portable devices that enable new ways of learning, emphasizing continuity or spontaneity of access and interaction across different contexts of use".

Mobile technologies remarkably extend learning opportunities, needs, goals, and have profound effect on many learning activities and learning styles. Despite this ubiquitous presence, there is yet no agreed-upon definition of 'mobile learning' or 'm-learning'. Many researchers have emphasized "mobility" of mobile learning (Ken Nee, 2017). Mobility needs to be understood not only in terms of spatial movement, but also the ways in which such movement may enable time-shifting and boundary. Khan et. al (2019) attend to five unique educational properties of mobile devices which precisely describe mobility aspects of m-learning: portability, social interactivity, context sensitivity, connectivity (Danish & Hmelo-Silver, 2020).

El-Hussein and Cronje (2010) succinctly define the concept of mobility in three significant areas: mobility of technology, mobility of learning, and mobility of learner. In mobility of technology, mobile technology includes smartphones, digital cameras, hand-held computers (e.g. table PC, PDA), global positioning system (GPS) devices or other mobile devices that are furnished with wireless application protocol (WAP), or Wi-Fi. These technologies deliver content and instruction through the Internet or satellites that can enable learners to learn anywhere, anytime. Mobile technology also enables users to perform many kinds of social-interactive functions including communication (phone, SMS, SNS, email), organization (memos, address or calendars, other utilities), applications (e-books, database, tools, and office), information (webs, references) or relaxation (camera, music, movies, or games) (Trinder, 2005).

Mobility of learning also generates new modes of educational delivery: personalized, learner-centered, situated, collaborative, ubiquitous, and lifelong learning (Sharples et al., 2005). The mobile learners can have very personal and unique experiences within the context they are situated. There is neither limitation nor privilege with regard to age, place, time or duration. The learners can easily connect with each other for their own purposes and interests. The way they construct, organize, and reconstruct knowledge is based mainly on social trust (Globeck, 2006, 2009) in the context of the social process.

Ting (2005) adds that mobile learning enhances the mobility of individual learners. Learners usually take the advantage of their learning to facilitate productivity and effectiveness, allowing them to be more flexible, accessible, and to personalize their learning

activities. Environments for new learning modes should engage them in their ongoing learning activities and enhance their productivity and effectiveness. Learning advantages such as more flexible, accessible, and personalized learning activities provide this engaging encouragement. The mobile learners can develop sense of individuality and community which might bring them the enjoyment of having a certain amount of freedom and independence. Figure 1 shows the concept of mobile learning in higher education summarized in the previous studies.

A range of studies have highlighted the benefits of using mobile devices for language learning. Slavuj (2023) found that learners perceive and prefer mobile-based lessons over paper or computer-based ones. Slavuj identified the diverse range of mobile applications used for language learning, as well as the benefits and challenges associated with their use. Gangaiamaran and Pasupathi (2017) emphasized the role of mobile apps in enhancing language skills, particularly in listening. Darmi (2014) further supported the potential of mobile phones as a learning tool, particularly for vocabulary acquisition. These studies collectively underscore the positive impact of mobile devices on language learning, particularly in terms of accessibility, engagement, and skill development.

With all the seeming advantages and necessity of MALL usage in language teaching and learning, the researcher would like to assess the applicability of mobile applications in the learning of students for specific language skills. This study zeroes-in on two mobile applications for speaking that were used on students. The study aimed to address several questions related to the use of mobile applications in a public speaking course. Firstly, it explored the perceived helpfulness of these applications in enhancing the learning experience. Secondly, the study assessed the level of engagement that students experienced while using mobile applications as part of their learning process. Thirdly, it investigated the user-friendliness of these applications for university-level students. Lastly, the research examined the favorability of incorporating mobile application usage in language learning from the perspective of the students.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design

The design of the study is a descriptive survey research aimed at evaluating the benefits of the use of mobile applications to improve the speaking skills of students enrolled in a public speaking class at the Mindanao State University.

Research participants

The respondents of the study consisted of university students from MSU who were taking up different majors and were enrolled in English 7 (Public Speaking) course. Two mobile applications were chosen for the respondents that targeted specific speaking skills.

Research procedures

The first mobile application used is SpeakApp which targets fluency in speech through its topic-generating feature. There were 42 students that took part in the use and evaluation of the application. The application was used in the Just a Minute (JAM) speaking activity of the students. Since there was time-constraints and not all students had mobile phones, they were divided into (at least) groups of four and each of the members of a group were made

to speak for a minute using the topic generated by the SpeakApp. The members of the group rated each other's speaking ability from 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest). The peer rating is for the purpose of allowing the students to be aware of their level of fluency in speaking and to encourage improvement of skill if needed. After all the groups completed the task, they were made to answer a questionnaire to evaluate the application used. The questionnaire used in the study was developed by the researcher and it contained 9 questions pertaining to specific areas for assessment of the mobile applications utilized in the study.

For the second application, the same set of students were used but since it was conducted during another class time, the number of students differed; there were 34 students who took part. Speaking English was the application used and its spoken sentence and phrase samples in British accent with a record and playback feature was utilized for the study. After trying out the application individually, the students were also given a questionnaire to evaluate the application.

FINDINGS

During the study, the following findings were gathered. Figure 1 shows the peer rating (1-5, with 5 being the highest) of the students for their individual JAM session using the topic-generating feature of the SpeakApp application. The numbers found above the bar of each rating number correspond to the number of students who rated under that number. Most of the students were rated with 4 (29 students) or 69 % by their peers; 7 students or 17% with the rating of 3; 6 students or 14% with the highest rating of 5; and none for the ratings of 1 and 2.

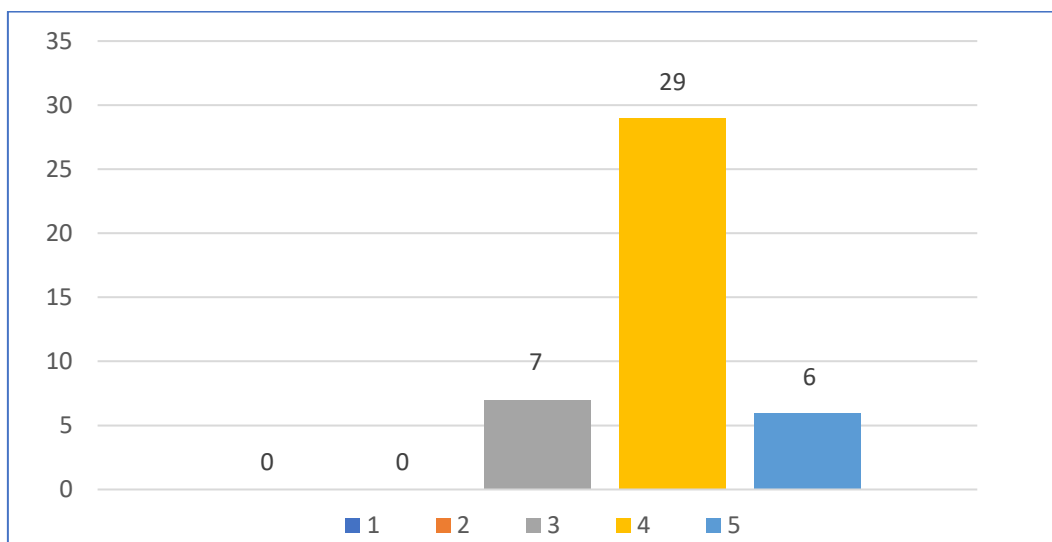


Figure 1. Peer Rating for the JAM Session Using the SpeakApp

From the findings of the peer evaluation, one can deduce that the students find the level of fluency of speaking of most of their peers to be above average at 4; relatively few in the average level of 3; and the least number for the perfect rating of 5. The reason for the results could be due to various factors but one of the plausible reasons could be on how interesting and varied the topics are in the topic-generating feature of the SpeakApp. It probably motivated the students to talk and share their ideas to their peers. Another factor could be the small number of listeners. Usually, a JAM session is done in front of the whole

class. For this activity, to save time, the students were made to JAM with an audience of just three or four, making speaking less intimidating and thus encouraging more sharing of ideas and thoughts with the rest of the group.

Figure 2 shows the rating given by the students on the first four questions in the survey for the SpeakApp application. Figure 3 shows the results for the second application used, Speaking English. These were the corresponding questions asked:

1. The helpfulness of the application in improving your skill(s) in the course.
2. The ease of use of the application.
3. How interesting the features of the application are.
4. Significance/value of content of the application to the course.

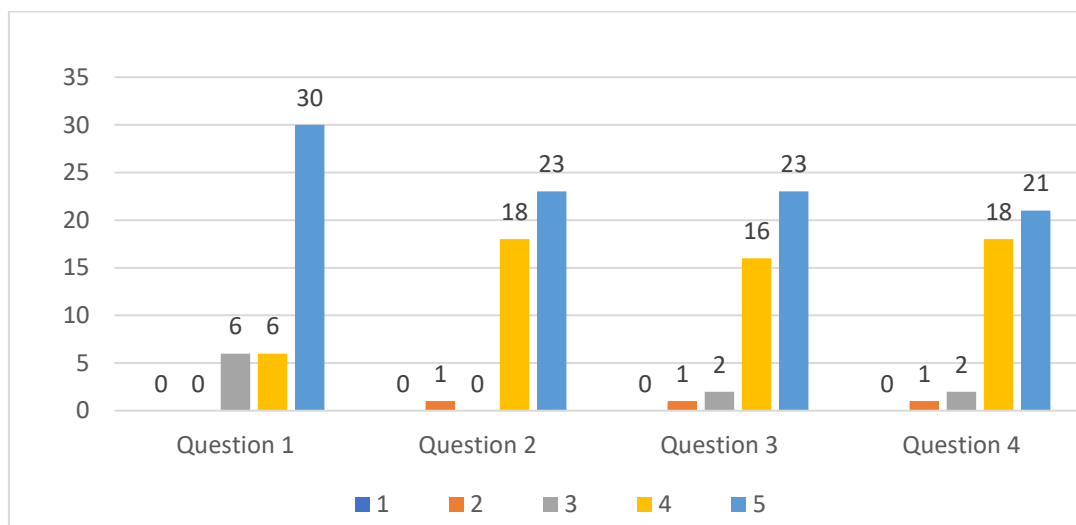


Figure 2. The Rating Given on SpeakApp for Questions 1-4

Findings from the survey questionnaire for Question 1 show that the majority of the students, 30 out of 42 or 71% rated the usefulness of the application to their course at 5, and 6 students or 14% each for the ratings of 3 and 4. Evidently the high rating given by the students shows the practicality of the use of the SpeakApp for the public speaking course. For Question 2, there is a minimal difference in the rating of 5 and 4, 23 or 55% and 18 or 43% respectively, but the highest is still at 5; while 1 student or 2% rated the ease of use of the application at 2. It seems from this tally that the students generally found it easy to the SpeakApp. For Question 3, the students deem the application to be interesting with 23 students or 55% rating it at 5, 16 students or 38% at 4, two or 5% at 3, and one or 2% at 2. Lastly for Question 4, the majority rated 5 with 21 students or 50%, next is the rating of 4 with 18 students or 43%, two or 5% for 3, and one or 2% for 2. Clearly, the majority found the content of the application significant to their course.

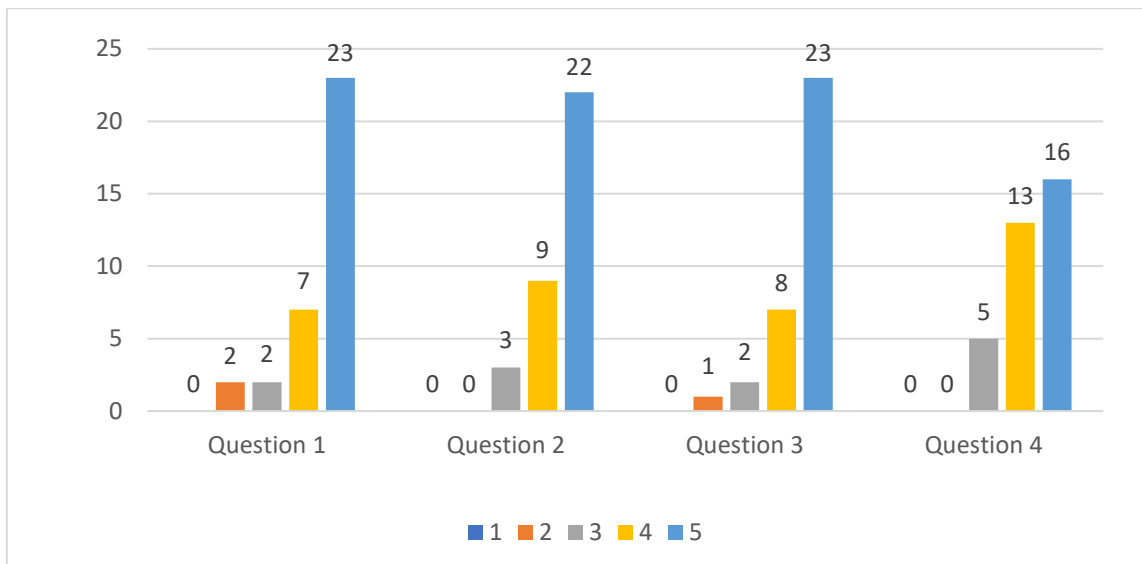


Figure 3. Showing the rating given on Speaking English for questions 1-4

The findings for the Speaking English application as shown in Figure 3 is generally positive, just like the first application. Results from the survey questionnaire for Question 1 show that the majority of the students, 23 out of 34 or 68%, rated the usefulness of the application to their course at 5, with seven or 20% at 4, two or 6% at 3, and two or 6% at 2. Clearly the high rating given by the students shows the practicality of the use of the application for the public speaking course. For Question 2, 22 students or 65% rated the ease of use of the application at 5, with 9 or 26% at 4, and with three or 9% at 3. Clearly, the tally shows that the students found it easy to use the application. For Question 3, the students deem the application to be interesting with 23 students or 68% rating it at 5, 8 students or 23% at 4, two or 6% at 3, and one or 3% at 2. Lastly for Question 4, the majority rated 5 with 16 students or 47%, next is the rating of 4 with 13 students or 38%, and five or 15% at 3. Evidently, the majority found the content of the application significant to their course.

The second set of questions also used a rating system. Figures 4 and 5, respectively, show the results for the two applications rated by the students based on the following questions:

1. How up-to-date the content of the application is.
2. Appeal of the design/layout of application.
3. Level of enjoyment/fun in using the application for learning.

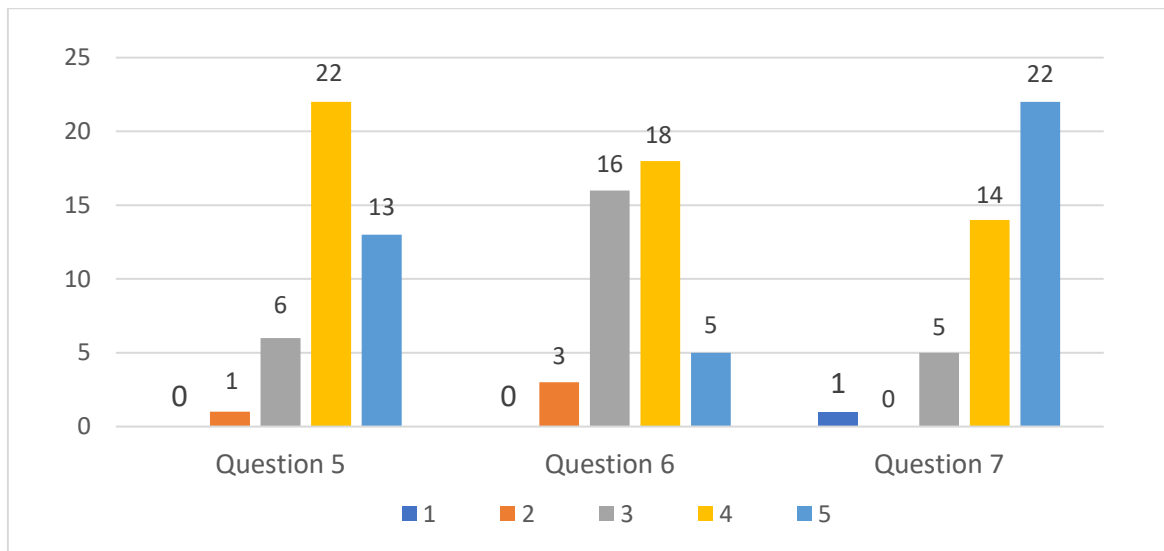


Figure 4. The Rating Given to SpeakApp for Questions 5-7

For Questions 5 and 6, it received relatively low rating compared to the first four questions. For Question 5, the rating of 4 received the highest with 22 or 52%, next is five with 13 or 32%, 3 at 6 or 14%, and 2 with one or 2%. This reflects that the majority of the students didn't feel that the content of the application was not as up to date as it should be. For Question 6, the rating was even lower, with only 5 students or 12% rating it at 5, 18 or 43% at 4, 16 or 38% at 3, and three or 7% at 2. The students were probably not too keen on the design and layout of the application. But on the upside for the application for Question 7, the students rated the enjoyment factor of it at 22 or 52% for the rating of 5, 14 or 33% at 4, five or 12% at 3, and one or 2% at 1.

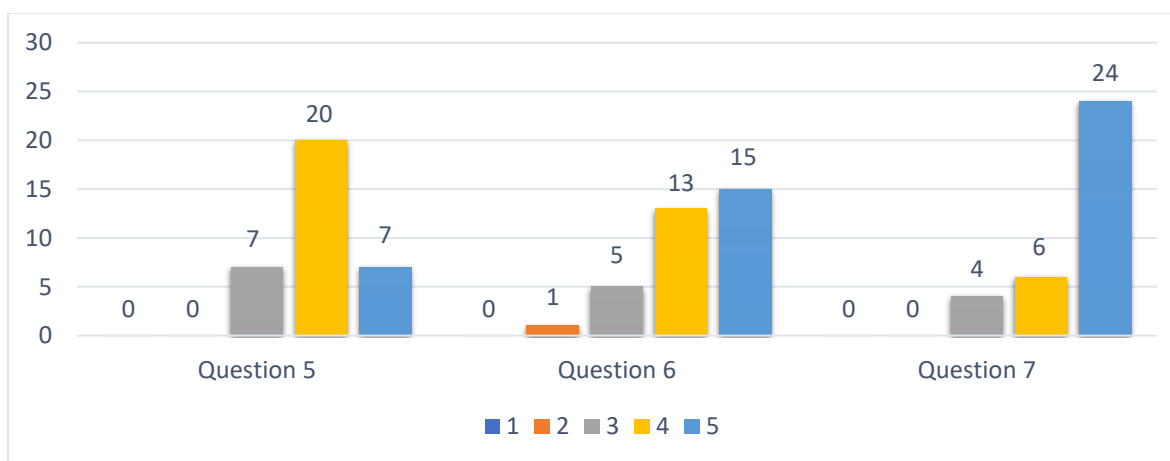


Figure 5. The Rating Given to SpeakApp for Questions 5-7

Figure 5 show that for Question 5, the students found the content of the application to be relatively outdated with only 7 or 20% students rating it at 5, 20 or 60% at 4, and 7 or 20% at 3. For Question 6, the feedback on the design and layout is quite positive with 15 students or 44% rating it at 5, 13 or 38% at 4, 5 or 15% at 3, and one or 3% at 2. Lastly for Question 7, the majority enjoyed using the application with 24 or 70% rating it at 5, 6 or 18% at 4, and four or 12% at 3. For the last set of questions, a rating system was not used. For question 8, a closed question of YES or NO was given. This was the question asked: Would you recommend using this application for the teaching of the course? Of the 41 students

asked, 98% answered YES, while a lone answer of NO, or 2%, was given. Likewise, the result for the Speaking English application was positive. 33 students or 97% answered YES and a single NO, or 3%, in recommending the mobile application. With such positive results from the students for both applications, it can be assumed that the use of MALL applications in courses like public speaking is recommendable. The last item in the survey questionnaire was an open-ended question. The majority of the students left this item un-answered and it could be interpreted as them being satisfied with the application and thus have no suggestions or recommendations for changes in the application.

For the Speaking English application, these were the suggestions given by the students (some gave similar answers): to have additional features/activities to make the application more interesting; for the demo mode to have more than 10 sentences; to change the face of the man in the application; to have a video of a real man speaking instead of the static cartoon character in the application; to include more difficult/advanced words; to improve the layout/design of the application; to have a corrector/error indicator for mispronounced words; to include a variety of speech rates for the spoken sentence samples; and to provide options for different native English accents, apart from the current British accent in the application (e.g., American, Australian, etc.).

DISCUSSION

Conveniently mobile applications provide a variety of skills to be targeted and the two mobile applications used focus on specific areas in speaking, with the SpeakApp on fluency and the Speaking English on pronunciation. Both applications allowed the students to practice their skills semi-independently and independently on two very important aspects of speaking and this is probably why the students found the applications useful and rated both highly. A range of studies have explored the use of mobile applications in English language learning, with a focus on speaking skills. Baron (2020) and Soparno and Tarjana (2021) both found positive student perceptions of specific applications, such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, YouTube, and Learn English Conversation, with students reporting enjoyment, ease of use, and enhanced learning experiences. These findings are consistent with the high satisfaction rates reported for SpeakApp and the Speaking English application (Baron, 2020). The use of mobile applications was also found to enhance participation and engagement in speaking activities, particularly for students struggling with English vocabulary (Hao et. al., 2019). These studies collectively suggest that mobile applications can be effective tools for improving English speaking skills and fostering positive attitudes towards language learning.

The learning curve for the students in adapting to the use of the applications was swift, likely due to their high technical savviness as a generation. Very little instruction was needed to prompt the students to independently start using the application. In fact, they were guided only once on how to use it, and thereafter, they were proficient in engaging with the mobile tools. The results indicate that the mobile applications are user-friendly for the students. It can be inferred from these findings that incorporating mobile applications into the classroom is unlikely to pose difficulty for the students in terms of usability.

Finally, concerning the last research question on the favorability of incorporating mobile application usage in language learning for the students, they demonstrated a strong inclination toward using both mobile applications in their public speaking course. These

figures unmistakably indicate the students' willingness to embrace modern and trendy tools for learning. Moreover, since the majority, if not all, are accustomed to using a mobile phone daily, the innovativeness of incorporating such tools in learning is well within their sphere of aptitude.

Integrating widely used communication tools of the current generation with easily downloadable learning applications should become a standard practice in all academic institutions. Educators can no longer overlook the profound impact that technological advancements have had on a generation of learners who have grown up immersed in this technology. As succinctly expressed by Bidin and Ziden (2013), "There is a need to make a leap in the education industry by tailoring teaching and learning to this generation's experience and abilities." Given this sense of urgency and the positive feedback provided by the respondents in this study regarding the utilization of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), it is imperative that such educational tools be incorporated into language classrooms.

Despite the perceived advantages of using Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in language classrooms, it is crucial to acknowledge the associated limitations. Similar to any other technological tool, the primary obstacle, as observed in this study, is the financial capability of learners to own a smartphone. In this research, some respondents had to share a mobile phone since approximately 60% of the class possessed smartphones, while the remaining students only had phones with basic call and text features. It is hopeful that in the future, smartphones will become more affordable, aligning with the trends seen in other technical devices. This would enable all students to share in the benefits of MALL usage both inside and outside the language classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study, focusing on a small group of university public speaking students, provides valuable insights into the potential use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications as supplements in the classroom and tools for reinforcing learning outside traditional settings. The positive student responses indicate the relevance of modernizing teaching methods. While many studies support the benefits of MALL tools, the location of this study has yet to adopt such practices. Therefore, a more extensive study, spanning a semester or academic year, across various English courses with a larger student and instructor pool, is recommended to assess the effectiveness of integrating mobile applications into language classrooms.

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Appendix

1. Self-developed Evaluation Form for the two Mobile Applications used by the Students in this Study.

Student Assessment of Mobile Application for English Learning

PERSONAL PROFILE		
Name:	Age:	Gender:
Major/Course/Degree:	Year level:	English Subject:

MOBILE APPLICATION	
Mobile application name: _____	
Rate the mobile application from 1-5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest) based on the following areas :	
1. Its helpfulness in improving your skill (s) in the course	_____
2. The ease of use of the application	_____
3. How interesting its features are.	_____
4. Significance/value of content of the application to the course	_____
5. How up-to-date the content pf the application is	_____
6. Appeal of the design/layout of application.	_____
7. Level of enjoyment/fun in using the application for learning	_____
Briefly answer the following questions:	
1. Would you recommend using this application in improving your reading comprehension skills?	
YES_____ NO_____	
2. What changes/improvements would you want to be made, if any, to the application?	