

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) TO FOSTER INDEPENDENT ENGLISH LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) offers significant potential for fostering learner autonomy, yet teachers' perceptions of its effectiveness remain underexplored, particularly in Indonesia. This qualitative study investigates how English teachers at SMK Swasta Pariwisata Medan perceive MALL as a tool to promote independent learning. Data from semi-structured interviews revealed that teachers value apps like Kamusku and Duolingo for vocabulary and listening practice but face challenges including technological disparities and student distractions. Findings suggest that strategic scaffolding and teacher training are critical to maximize MALL's benefits in low-resource contexts. The study contributes to debates on technology-mediated autonomy and offers practical insights for EFL educators in similar settings.

Keywords

Mobile-assisted Language Learning, Teacher Perception, Learner Autonomy, Independent Learning, English Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid integration of mobile technology into education has opened new avenues for fostering independent language learning, yet its effective implementation hinges on teachers' perceptions and pedagogical strategies. In Indonesia, where English proficiency remains a critical barrier to workforce competitiveness (Ministry of Education, 2023), vocational schools (SMKs) face urgent demands to cultivate learner autonomy. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) offers a promising solution by enabling flexible, personalized practice through tools like Duolingo and Kamusku (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). However, without teacher guidance, MALL risks becoming a passive or distracting activity rather than a catalyst for autonomy - a gap particularly understudied in low-resource contexts like Indonesian SMKs.

While prior research highlights MALL's benefits for vocabulary retention (Niño, 2015) and accessibility (Nasution et al., 2023), few studies examine how teachers perceive and scaffold these tools to promote independence. This is critical because teachers act as mediators (Vygotsky, 1978), translating technological potential into pedagogical reality. For instance, Indonesian educators often contend with disparities in device access and student digital literacy (Purwaningrum et al., 2024), yet their strategies to overcome these barriers remain undocumented.

This qualitative study addresses this gap by investigating two questions: 1. How do Indonesian vocational English teachers perceive MALL's role in fostering independent learning?, 2. What challenges and adaptations emerge when implementing MALL in lowresource classrooms?

Through semi-structured interviews with SMK Swasta Pariwisata Medan teachers, we identify key themes - strategic app selection (e.g., Kamusku over Google Translate), scaffolding techniques, and infrastructural hurdles. Our findings reveal that MALL's

success depends on context-sensitive teacher mediation, offering a framework for educators in similar settings. By bridging the divide between theoretical potential and classroom practice, this study contributes actionable insights to the fields of MALL, learner autonomy, and EFL teacher development.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative case study approach to deeply explore one English teacher's experiences with mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in an Indonesian vocational school context. The participant was purposefully selected as a key informant based on her five years of experience teaching English at SMK Swasta Pariwisata Medan and her active integration of MALL tools like Kamusku and Duolingo in daily instruction. This 38-year-old female teacher, anonymized as T1, represented a valuable case due to her extensive firsthand experience navigating both the potentials and challenges of implementing MALL in resource-constrained educational settings.

Primary data collection centered around a 90-minute semi-structured interview conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure nuanced expression. The interview protocol contained 15 open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about MALL tool selection criteria, implementation strategies, observed student behaviors, and encountered challenges. This indepth conversation was audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. To complement and triangulate the interview data, the researcher analyzed three of T1's recent lesson plans incorporating MALL activities and collected screenshots of student assignments completed through Duolingo and Kamusku. Additionally, two classroom observations were conducted, yielding rich field notes that documented actual MALL usage patterns and studentteacher interactions.

Thematic analysis served as the primary analytical approach, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The process began with repeated readings of the transcript to achieve immersion and familiarity with the data. Initial coding generated 28 descriptive codes that captured key concepts emerging from the interview, such as "app selection criteria" and "offline adaptation strategies." These codes were progressively refined and organized into three overarching themes that represented the study's core findings. Throughout the analysis, representative quotations were identified to ground the interpretations in the participant's own words. To enhance the study's trustworthiness, member checking was performed by sharing the preliminary findings with T1 for verification, and thick description was employed to provide contextual depth when reporting results.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 FINDINGS

The analysis of interview data, lesson plans, and classroom observations revealed three central themes regarding the teacher's perceptions and implementation of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) to foster independent English learning. Each theme is presented below with supporting qualitative evidence, including direct quotations and triangulated data from multiple sources.

a) Strategic Selection of MALL Tools

The teacher demonstrated a deliberate approach to selecting MALL applications, prioritizing tools that encouraged active cognitive engagement over passive translation. She explicitly avoided full-sentence translation apps like Google Translate, instead

mandating the use of Kamusku for word-by-word translation to promote deeper analysis. *"I require students to use Kamusku because it makes them think about context. If they use Google Translate for whole sentences, they become lazy,"* she explained.

Duolingo was frequently integrated into homework assignments, with the teacher leveraging its gamified elements (e.g., XP points and streaks) to motivate consistent practice. Lesson plans showed that Duolingo exercises were systematically aligned with classroom topics, creating continuity between inclass and independent learning. YouTube was also used selectively, with predownloaded videos serving as listening practice materials in classrooms with unstable internet access.

b) Infrastructure Limitations and Adaptive Strategies

A significant challenge was the disparity in students' access to technology. The teacher noted that approximately one-third of her students lacked smartphones capable of running MALL applications smoothly. *"Some students only have basic phones, so I have to modify tasks or pair them with classmates,"* she stated. Classroom observations confirmed this adaptation, with students frequently sharing devices during MALL-based activities.

Internet connectivity issues further complicated implementation. The teacher developed offline workarounds, such as downloading YouTube videos in advance and using language games that did not require constant connectivity (e.g., Wordwall). Field notes documented instances where planned online activities were abandoned mid-lesson due to sudden connection failures, requiring impromptu adjustments.

c) Balancing Autonomy and Guidance

While MALL tools were intended to promote independent learning, the teacher emphasized the need for structured guidance to prevent distractions and ensure meaningful engagement. She reported that students often switched to social media when using their phones for language tasks. To counter this, she implemented clear task instructions, progress checks, and occasional device monitoring during class. *"Without supervision, some students just browse Instagram instead of doing exercises,"* she observed.

The teacher also scaffolded MALL usage by breaking tasks into smaller steps and providing rubrics for self-assessment. For example, Duolingo assignments were accompanied by reflection sheets where students documented new vocabulary and self-rated their understanding. This approach balanced technological autonomy with pedagogical support, aligning with her belief that *"MALL works best when students have both freedom and accountability."*

3.2 DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study illuminate the complex interplay between technological tools and pedagogical expertise in fostering learner autonomy through mobile-assisted language learning. At its core, this research reveals that effective MALL implementation transcends mere technical proficiency, instead demanding thoughtful mediation by educators who understand both the potentials and limitations of these digital tools within their specific educational context.

Central to these findings is the teacher's strategic selection and adaptation of MALL applications to promote active cognitive engagement. The conscious preference for Kamusku over more automated translation tools exemplifies a pedagogical philosophy that values process over product, where the journey of deciphering language components proves more educationally valuable than obtaining immediate correct answers. This approach resonates with Vygotsky's concept of mediated learning, where tools serve as cognitive extensions only when employed with intentional instructional design. The teacher's implementation reflects an understanding that technology alone cannot foster

autonomy; rather, it is the careful structuring of technological use within a broader pedagogical framework that cultivates independent learning skills.

The study further highlights the creative adaptability required to implement MALL in resource-constrained environments. Faced with inconsistent internet connectivity and unequal device access among students, the teacher developed a repertoire of contingency strategies that transformed potential obstacles into opportunities for collaborative learning. These adaptive practices demonstrate how contextual constraints can spur pedagogical innovation, as seen in the implementation of device-sharing protocols and offline modifications of typically online activities. Such flexibility underscores the importance of viewing MALL not as a rigid system but as a flexible toolkit to be shaped by and for specific classroom realities.

Equally significant are the findings related to balancing technological autonomy with instructional support. While MALL tools theoretically empower self-directed learning, the teacher's experience reveals the ongoing need for structured guidance to ensure productive engagement. The implementation of progress monitoring systems and reflective exercises alongside MALL activities illustrates how autonomy develops gradually through supported

4. CONCLLUSSION

This study concludes that effective implementation of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in vocational education hinges on teachers' pedagogical mediation, where strategic tool selection, adaptive approaches to technological constraints, and balanced scaffolding of autonomy prove essential for fostering independent learning, offering critical insights for teacher development programs and policymakers while highlighting the need for further research on long-term impacts and cross-contextual applicability of such technology-enhanced learning strategies.

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