


Exploring the Influence of Mall on Academic Stress Affecting Students' English Speaking Skills

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A B S T R A C T

English speaking skill is important in the digital era, but many junior high school students still feel academic stress and anxiety when they have to speak English. Although Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has often been studied to improve language achievement, most research focuses on test results and numbers. Only a few studies discuss students' real experiences and how MALL affects their academic stress. This study aims to explore the influence of MALL on academic stress and English speaking skills of ninth-grade students at SMP Plus Tahdzibun Nasyiin. This research used a qualitative case study. Data were collected from 15 students through interviews, classroom observations, and speaking task documentation. The results show that MALL helps students practice more freely and confidently, improve pronunciation and vocabulary, and reduce anxiety, although technical problems and distractions can still cause stress.

Keywords: *MALL, Academic stress, Speaking skills*

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INTRODUCTION

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) refers to the use of mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets, and other portable technologies to support and enhance language learning processes. This approach allows learners to access learning materials anytime and anywhere, making the learning process more flexible, personalized, and interactive.

Students today are almost never separated from their smartphones. From scrolling through social media to watching short videos, mobile devices have become an inseparable part of daily life. Beyond entertainment, however, these small devices are quietly transforming the way students learn, especially in learning English. The rapid development of technology in the current era of globalization has significantly influenced the world of education and the way learning activities are conducted (Putri, 2021). Interestingly, the same device that often distracts students may also hold the potential to help them speak English more confidently.

In recent years, English speaking skills have become increasingly important for academic success and future careers. Speaking skills are often prioritized because the main function of English is communication in real-life interactions (Fithriyani & Fauzi, 2024). Speaking itself can be understood as the act of sharing meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols in various communicative situations (Kusumah, 2025). However, many students struggle with speaking English due to fear of making mistakes, lack of vocabulary, or limited practice opportunities. In learning speaking, students are expected to communicate with others in their daily activities without being overly worried about grammatical mistakes (Ferdiyanto & Kholili, 2022). At the same time, academic stress caused by exams, assignments, and performance pressure can make students even more anxious about speaking in a foreign language. According to the Academic Stress Theory proposed by Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984), cite in Gisela et al, Stress occurs when individuals perceive a situation as threatening to their well-being or beyond their coping ability (Gisela et al., 2025). This

combination of high expectations and limited confidence often results in students feeling overwhelmed.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) emerges as a modern approach that uses smartphones, tablets, and other portable devices to support language learning. This term refers to the use of mobile technology such as smartphones, tablets, and other portable devices to support and enhance the language learning process (Tegeh et al., 2025). The concept of MALL itself developed from Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), but it offers more flexibility because it relies on portable devices that are easy to access anytime and anywhere (Judijanto, 2025). According to Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008), Mobile-Assisted Language Learning enables language learning to become more flexible, personalized, and contextual compared to traditional learning environments (Kukulska-hulme & Shield, 2008). Through language learning apps, online speaking platforms, video-based lessons, and interactive exercises, MALL offers flexible and accessible learning opportunities. MALL applications utilize the features and functionalities of mobile devices to provide convenient and personalized learning experiences for students (Rachman et al., 2023). Unlike traditional classroom settings, MALL allows students to practice anytime and anywhere, often in a more relaxed and personalized environment. This flexibility may help reduce pressure and create a safer space for students to improve their speaking skills.

Previous studies on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) have primarily focused on quantitative outcomes such as students' test scores, vocabulary acquisition, and speaking performance. While these studies show that MALL can improve language achievement, they often overlook students' emotional experiences during the learning process. In particular, limited research has explored how MALL influences students' academic stress and speaking anxiety in real classroom contexts. Therefore, there is a need for more in-depth qualitative research that investigates students' lived experiences when using MALL, especially in relation to their speaking skills and academic stress. The use of MALL has significantly expanded learning opportunities and learning styles for students in different educational contexts (Bakri, 2023). In addition, MALL allows language learners to continue practicing outside the classroom using their own mobile devices (Widiawati, 2022). In the context of English education in Indonesia, the use of mobile learning has become increasingly relevant due to the widespread ownership of smartphones among students and the growing availability of internet connectivity (Rachmawati & Fadhilawati, 2025). Many researchers also argue that technology and digital media provide various opportunities that can be optimally utilized to support students' English language development (Delavari & Zainuddin, 2024).

Even though many studies have discussed Mobile Assisted Language Learning, most of them focus on learning results and often use quantitative methods. They usually talk about how MALL improves language skills, but do not deeply explore how students actually experience the learning process. Learning English as a foreign language is a complex process influenced by various factors such as teaching strategies, learning approaches, and the learning media used (Syamsuddin et al., 2022). There is still limited discussion about students' lived experiences, especially how they feel when using MALL for speaking activities. The emotional side, such as academic stress, anxiety, or confidence, is not always clearly examined. In addition, the integration of MALL into language learning is considered efficient and capable of addressing many challenges faced by students when learning English (Kartika et al., 2024). Because of this, more exploration is needed to understand how students personally experience mobile learning and how it influences both their stress and their speaking development.

This article aims to explore how MALL influences academic stress and how that stress, in turn, affects students' English speaking skills. It seeks to understand whether mobile-based learning can reduce anxiety and build confidence, or whether it may create different kinds of challenges for students. By examining this relationship, the article highlights the role of MALL not only as a learning tool but also as an approach that shapes students' emotional experiences in English learning.

To achieve this, the article will first discuss the concept of MALL and its role in language learning. Then, it will examine the nature of academic stress and its impact on

speaking performance. Finally, it will analyze the connection between mobile learning, stress levels, and students' speaking development, offering insights into how technology can be used more effectively to support English learners.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of MALL in learning English speaking. A case study was chosen because it allows the researcher to investigate a specific phenomenon in depth within its real-life context. The participants of this study were 15 ninth-grade students aged between 14–15 years old from SMP Plus Tahdzibun Nasyiin. They were selected using purposive sampling, meaning that only students who actively used MALL applications in English learning were chosen. This sampling technique was used to ensure that participants had sufficient experience to provide meaningful insights into the use of MALL, academic stress, and speaking activities.

A qualitative approach was chosen because the researcher wanted to understand students' real experiences, feelings, and perceptions in a deeper way. The main purpose of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Jailani, 2023). Instead of focusing only on numbers or test scores, this study tried to see how students experienced the learning process when using MALL. The research focused on the classroom context, how MALL was implemented during English lessons, and how it affected both students' speaking development and their academic stress. By using a case study design, the researcher was able to explore the situation in detail and describe what actually happened during the learning process.

The respondents of this study were 15 ninth-grade students of SMP Plus Tahdzibun Nasyiin. They were selected using purposive sampling, which means the researcher chose students who met certain criteria. These students actively used MALL applications in their English learning and had enough experience with the learning activities. They were considered able to provide clear and meaningful information about their experiences. The researcher believed that these students could explain how MALL influenced their speaking skills and how it affected their feelings, including stress or anxiety during English lessons. Their participation was important to gain detailed and relevant data for this study.

The instruments used in this study were semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and documentation. The interview questions were prepared in advance, but they were open-ended so students could answer freely and express their thoughts in their own words. This helped the researcher gain more detailed information about students' experiences and opinions. For classroom observation, the researcher used an observation checklist and field notes to record students' participation, confidence, interaction, and reactions during speaking activities. Documentation included students' speaking assignments, learning notes, and materials related to MALL activities. These instruments were used together to ensure the data were complete and reliable.

The research was conducted in several steps. First, the researcher selected the respondents based on the criteria that had been determined. After that, semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore students' experiences in using MALL, especially in speaking activities. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting so students could speak openly. Next, classroom observations were done to see directly how MALL was implemented during English lessons. The researcher paid attention to students' behavior, participation, and signs of confidence or stress. In addition, relevant documents such as speaking tasks and learning materials were collected to support the data. All interviews were recorded with the students' permission and later transcribed for analysis.

The data analysis began by transcribing the interview recordings carefully. After that, the researcher read the transcripts several times to understand the content clearly. The data were then coded to identify important themes related to MALL, academic stress, and speaking skills. Observation notes and documents were also reviewed and compared with the interview

data to ensure consistency. Finally, the findings were described in detail to explain how MALL influenced students' English speaking skills and their academic stress.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the data collected from interviews, observations, and documentation, it was found that the use of MALL gave a noticeable impact on students' speaking activities. Most students said that learning English through mobile applications felt more relaxed compared to usual classroom speaking tasks. They did not feel as tense as when they had to speak directly in front of the class. Some of them mentioned that holding their phone and practicing individually felt more comfortable. The situation in class also looked different when MALL was used. Students seemed less pressured and more willing to try.

From the interviews, many students admitted that they often feel nervous when asked to speak English spontaneously. This condition is understandable because speaking skills require confidence, direct interaction, and consistent practice in order to develop effectively (Andi & Hanna, 2025). However, when they used mobile applications, they had time to record and re-record their voices. They liked the fact that they could delete their mistakes and try again. A few students even said they practiced several times before submitting their task. This small habit made them feel more prepared. Gradually, their confidence started to grow.

During classroom observation, students looked more engaged in MALL-based speaking sessions. Some students who were usually quiet began to participate more actively. They interacted with the application first before speaking in front of others. The classroom atmosphere was not as tense as in regular speaking practice. There were still shy students, but fewer of them refused to speak. Overall, participation increased compared to previous meetings without MALL.

Students' speaking recordings also showed improvement over time. Their pronunciation became clearer, and they used more varied vocabulary. Even though not all students improved at the same level, most of them showed progress. They often replayed audio models from the application to imitate pronunciation. Some students said they practiced at home, especially before submitting assignments. Their fluency developed slowly, but the change was visible from one task to another.

In relation to academic stress, students shared that speaking tasks usually make them anxious, especially when they have to perform immediately. Previous studies indicate that academic stress can lead to negative effects such as anxiety, health problems, and poor academic performance (Deng et al., 2022). With MALL, they did not feel rushed. They could prepare their ideas first and organize what they wanted to say. Several students mentioned that they felt calmer during speaking assessments. They still felt nervous sometimes, but it was not as overwhelming as before. The pressure felt more manageable.

Another important finding is that MALL helped reduce students' academic stress and anxiety. Compared to traditional speaking activities, students felt less pressured because they were given more time to prepare their responses. They did not have to speak spontaneously in front of the class, which often caused nervousness. This more flexible learning environment made students feel calmer and more comfortable during speaking tasks.

However, the findings also show that MALL was not always smooth and stress-free. Some students complained about unstable internet connections. A few of them had limited phone storage, which made it difficult to install or update applications. There were also moments when students got distracted by notifications from social media. Research in educational psychology also suggests that academic stress is sometimes associated with problematic internet or smartphone use among students (Gu & Mao, n.d.). In some cases, they needed reminders from the teacher to stay focused. So, while MALL helped in many ways, it also brought small challenges.

Discussion

Looking at these findings, it seems that the flexibility offered by MALL played an important role in shaping students' experiences. When students are given space to practice on their own, they feel less exposed. They do not immediately worry about being judged by classmates. The chance to rehearse privately appears to make speaking activities feel less intimidating. This situation can also be understood through the perspective of Academic Stress Theory, which explains that stress depends on how individuals perceive and evaluate challenging situations in their environment. This may explain why more students were willing to participate during lessons.

Another interesting point is how MALL encouraged students to practice outside the classroom. Since the applications were already on their phones, they could access them anytime. Some students said they practiced while at home or during free time. This kind of habit slowly built their confidence. As they became more familiar with English expressions, speaking felt less frightening. Confidence and reduced stress seemed to grow together.

Peer interaction through mobile platforms also influenced students' comfort. Sharing recordings or responding to friends online felt different from speaking directly in front of the class. The digital space created a bit of distance, and that distance made students feel safer. They were more open to expressing their ideas without too much fear. Even simple feedback from friends gave encouragement. This shows that emotional support can come from small interactions.

At the same time, the role of the teacher cannot be ignored. Without clear instructions and supervision, mobile phones can easily become a distraction. Some students needed guidance to use the applications properly. Technology alone does not automatically reduce stress or improve skills. Research also suggests that good instructional quality can function as a protective factor that helps reduce students' academic stress and supports their mental well-being (Rubach et al., 2022). It works better when combined with structured activities and teacher support. Balance is still necessary.

These findings support previous studies which indicate that MALL can enhance students' motivation and confidence in speaking activities. Similar to earlier research, this study found that the flexibility of mobile learning allows students to practice more comfortably and reduces anxiety. In addition, previous studies on academic stress also confirm that a supportive learning environment can help students manage pressure more effectively. Therefore, the results of this study strengthen the idea that MALL not only improves language skills but also positively influences students' emotional experiences.

Overall, the study shows that MALL influenced both students' speaking skills and their academic stress in meaningful ways. The improvement did not happen instantly, and not every student experienced it in the same way. Some research also indicates that excessive academic stress may negatively influence students' attitudes toward academic activities and learning processes (Gao, 2023). Still, most students felt more comfortable speaking English after regularly using mobile applications. They were not completely free from nervousness, but the fear was no longer as strong as before. In this context, MALL can be seen as a helpful support system in English learning, especially for speaking practice.

CONCLUSIONS

This study found that the use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) positively influences students' English speaking skills and helps reduce academic stress. Students became more confident, improved their pronunciation and vocabulary, and felt more comfortable during speaking activities. The findings imply that teachers can integrate MALL into English learning as an effective strategy to create a more engaging and less stressful learning environment. MALL can serve as a supportive tool to enhance both students' language development and emotional well-being. For future research, it is recommended to involve a larger number of participants and different educational levels to gain more comprehensive results. Further studies can also explore the long-term impact of MALL on students' speaking performance and psychological factors such as anxiety and motivation.

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