AN EXPERIMENT ON APPLYING MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) IN TEACHING SPEAKING TO NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN OFFLINE CLASSES AT A UNIVERSITY IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: The quasi-experimental research focuses on impacts of applying mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in teaching speaking skills to non-English majors in offline classes at a university in Vietnam. The participants were 65 accounting-majored students in 2 classes - one was control group (CG) with 33 students and the other was experimental group (EG) with 32 students. After 8 weeks of experimenting in using MALL in speaking lessons, the researchers' observations and experimental group's survey results were analyzed in relation with the comparison of progress test results of the two groups in week 10. The findings revealed that MALL was effective in offline speaking classes, helped students not only improve their fluency and accuracy but also increase their non-verbal communication skills. The EG had better speaking test results and positive perception towards using MALL in speaking lessons.

Keywords: quasi-experimental research, MALL, speaking skills, offline classes

1. Introduction

Humans have witnessed how technology has transformed almost all walks of life in general, and education in particular. Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI), in response to the trends of technology epoch and employers' needs analysis, has applied blended learning for almost 10 years. In terms of English for non-majors, students are required to self-study vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading and writing skills on the university's LMS before attending on-campus face-to-face speaking lectures. It is likely that in offline classes, opportunities for participating in speaking activities and receiving teacher's feedback on students' performance are unevenly distributed with the dominance of so-called high achievers. Particularly, when receiving feedback on speaking practice, many students tend to fail to recall their performance, which prevents them from comprehensively understanding what and how they need to improve. Additionally, students may not hear the content of their peers' responses if they speak softly or if the students themselves are not attentive enough. Meanwhile, the researchers realise that Gen Z students are fairly good at technology and they all have mobile phones but this available resource has not been leveraged in their speaking lessons. Also, application of MALL in language teaching has been proved to be effective by Klimova (2017), Gonulal (2019) and Pham (2020). Therefore, the researchers carried out a quasi-experimental

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research on using MALL in offline speaking classes for non-English majors at HaUI in semester 1, academic year 2023-2024 with the high hope to help students at the research site to improve their speaking skills. The research aims at exploring the effectiveness of using MALL in speaking lessons. Specifically, in order to fulfill the study objectives, the following research questions are raised:

a) How do students perceive the effectiveness of applying MALL in learning speaking skills in on-site classes?

b) What are the impacts of MALL on students' speaking performance?

2. Literature

2.1. MALL

Despite different definitions, it can reach a consensus that MALL refers to language learning with the assistance of mobile devices. It is a useful tool to help language learners get progress in the 4 language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as improve their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and increase their motivation (Klimova, 2017). Alkhudair (2020) emphasizes that MALL is flexible, connected, easily accessible, and enables learners to study almost anytime and anywhere. In a study on students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language with the assistance of mobile devices, Pham (2020) suggests that Elsa and Google Translate are good for pronunciation practice. Despite its advantages, MALL also has drawbacks for learners. Some MALL applications are too complex and time-consuming to exploit for learning purposes (Taj et al., 2016).

2.2. Speaking Skills

As for Richards (2008), speaking is considered the most crucial skill. People who are able to speak English well can have more job opportunities and promotion (Rao, 2019). Two important aspects of speaking skills are accuracy and fluency. Accuracy means using the correct choice of words, grammar, and pronunciation, while fluency involves speaking smoothly, naturally, with few purposeful interruptions. Accuracy largely depends on language proficiency, while fluency is influenced mainly by factors such as anxiety, shyness, fear of making mistakes, and uncertainty about using correct structures (Dinh & Tran, 2020). To speak well, learners should have good vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, and be able to express themselves fluently and use appropriate non-verbal communication strategies like eye contact, gestures and facial expression to convey the message in the target language.

Teaching speaking involves instructing learners to generate sentences by choosing and using appropriate vocabulary, situational structures, organizing logical ideas, emphasizing stress, intonation, and achieving fluency (Mirkhodjaeva, 2019). This process can be divided into three stages. Stage 1 (or before-speaking phase) activates and provides learners with the language they will use in Stage 2 – while-speaking phase. This stage also helps learners become more confident, less anxious when carrying out activities in Stage 2, and speak more fluently and accurately (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). In Stage 3 (after-speaking phase), learners typically receive feedback on their performance in Stage 2. From this, learners can identify areas for improvement to progress further.

2.3. The Role of Video Recordings in Speaking Development

As one of typical built-in features of smart phones, video recording has been proved to be beneficial in developing speaking by various researchers. Dang et al. (2022) applied video

assignment of speaking activities, that is students were required to create a video of their talk or conversation on the given topic at home and submit via Google classroom, and found that students had positive attitude towards the application of video recording as they got improvement in speaking. As for Sánchez et al. (2022), the use of video recording to promote speaking tasks outside the class enables students to get more pronunciation practice and improvement in vocabulary. According to Sunardi et al. (2023), the application of video recording tasks for speaking lessons boosts students' fluency, vocabulary, grammatical structure and pronunciation.

2.4. Zalo

Zalo is a versatile application because its users are able to send text messages, photographs, and audio files. Particularly, it allows recording online talks of up-to-five minutes and facilitates the seamless sharing of these recordings among group members. According to Statista Research Department, in 2022, there were more than 73 million Zalo-users in Vietnam and Zalo is regarded as the most-used social media platform in Vietnam with usage rate of 87% and is becoming increasingly popular among gen Z (Cordon, 2023). As for Ly et al. (2021), this social networking site is regarded as one of helpful educational platforms.

2.5. Previous Related Studies

There have been a lot of studies about MALL in teaching and learning. Here are some typical international and Vietnamese studies.

In an action research on using smartphone recording video applications in four 90-minute English speaking sections with thirty-one 7th grade students in Chile, Soto and Zenteno (2019) used the results of pre-and post- speaking assessment as well as a focus group interview to collect data. The findings show that learners of English as a foreign language can improve their fluency, specifically in terms of pace criterion which could be considered as the speed of their speaking.

Abugohar et al. (2019) carried out research with 49 Arabian EFL learners from higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. The finding reveals that smartphone applications are regarded as a good source of authentic materials, helping shy and anxious learners towards better fluency, accuracy, and confidence.

Gonulal (2019) conducted a study on the use of Instagram platform for language learning with 97 English language learners. The results, based on both qualitative and quantitative analysis, indicate that Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has the potential to enhance all language skills, vocabulary and communication skills. Similarly, Kusmaryani and colleagues (2019) investigated the impact of mobile applications such as online dictionaries, Whatsapp, Google Chrome, YouTube, Weebly, and Gmail on improving English speaking skills and critical thinking. Thirty-eight university students in Indonesia participated in this research. The findings reveal improvements in learners' critical thinking, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and their interest in exploring mobile learning apps despite unstable network connections

In particular, based on the positive results of a study on the use of websites and mobile applications for foreign language learning involving 41 electrical and electronics engineering university students in India, Nanjundan et al. (2020) emphasized that MALL should be encouraged as it enhances learners' self-directed and autonomous learning

In the context of Vietnam, Ngo (2018) reviewed a selection of research on mobile

assisted collaborative language learning. The results show that MALL facilitates language learners' collaborative learning process, personalizes learning experience, improves linguistic achievement and enhances learning motivation/autonomy.

In addition, Lai and Le (2022) conducted a study on the perception of non-major students regarding the use of MALL in English language education with 219 first and second-year students. The data collection instruments of this research are survey and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that students showed improvement in pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and perceived ease of use.

It can be seen that there have been quite a lot of Vietnamese and foreign studies proving the effectiveness of applying MALL in English teaching and learning. However, in Vietnam specifically, research on MALL primarily focuses on social platforms like Facebook or Instagram, both inside and outside the classroom. It is likely that there has not been any experimental research on exploring the utilization of built-in features of mobile devices and Zalo - one of the friendliest-user applications being exploited for public administration in Vietnam - to support in-class speaking lessons. To fill part of this research gap, the researchers carried out a quasi-experimental research on applying MALL, specifically taking photos, video recording, and utilizing the Zalo platform as a means to audio record and upload photos and video clips, in a face-to-face Business English speaking class with 32 accounting-majored students at HaUI. The research is expected to benefit speaking teaching and learning for non-English majors at the research site in particular and learners of English at tertiary level in general.

3. Methods

3.1. Pedagogical Setting and Participants

The researchers conducted the quasi-experimental research with 65 Accounting-majored students in 2 classes (The 33-student class is CG and the other with 32 students is EG) in semester 1 of the academic year 2023-2024 at HaUI. In this semester, the participants learnt Business English 5 which lasted 10 weeks. Their English course included 35-period online and 40-period offline lessons. The online learning with various tasks of vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading and writing skills on the university's LMS was a must for students before they attended offline speaking classes with fluency-and-accuracy-based activities. There were two 100-minute speaking lessons per week. In week 10, they had a speaking progress test which accounted for 30% of their total speaking scores. Here is the course content:

Content	Time allocation	
	Online	Offline
Introduction: Course orientation Unit 1: Business Conversations	4	4
Unit 2: Business Correspondence	4	4
Unit 3: Business Meetings	4	4
Revision 1 Progress Test 1 (Written Test)	1	2
Unit 4: Marketing	4	4

Unit 5: Customer Service	4	4
Revision 2 Mid-term Test (Written Test)	1	2
Unit 6: Negotiation	4	4
Unit 7: Human Resources	4	4
Progress Test 2 (Speaking Test)	1	2
Unit 8: Business Plan	4	4
Revision 3		2
Total	**35**	**40**

There was almost no difference in speaking level between the two groups at the beginning of the course based on their English end-of-term test results in the previous semester. In more detail, the majority of them got grade D (4.0-4.6) (18 in the CG and 16 in the EG) or D+ (4.7-5.4) (12 students in each group). There were no students getting grade A (8.5-10), B+ (7.7-8.4) or B (7.0-7.6) in the two groups. Only one student in the EG achieved grade C+ (6.2-6.9) and each group had 3 students with grade C (5.5-6.1).

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

In order to address the research questions, the data collection tools were class observations, a survey questionnaire for EG, and a T-test to compare speaking progress test results of the two groups. The data collection procedure is detailed in the following four phases:

Phase one: In the 1st week of the semester, the researchers analyzed speaking level of the two groups based on their English end-of-term test results in the previous semester to identify if there were big differences between them.

Phase two: From the 2nd to the 9th week of the course, MALL was applied with the EG. In the pre-speaking phase, the participants were required to write the language they would use in the speaking practice activities (pair or individual speaking, depending on the content of each lesson) on paper, then take a photo, and send it to the class's Zalo group. Afterwards the teacher who was also the researcher checked if the language they wrote was acceptable or not. This activity took about 20 minutes. The researchers decided to ask them to write down instead of texting on Zalo to minimize their copying. During the self-practice speaking stage, the entire experimental students were asked to use the audio record function of the Zalo app to record their speeches and send them to their class's Zalo group for self-evaluation and peer feedback. Three audio records were then randomly chosen for the teacher's detailed feedback. Additionally, in each lesson, two different pairs of students (for conversation activity) or three students (for topic talk activity) were assigned to perform in front of the class for video-recording. These recorded video-clips were played back during the post-speaking practice session for the entire class and the teacher to provide feedback based on the speaking skill marking criteria designed by HaUI's teachers of English and applied as the standard rubric to evaluate the university's students' speaking skills for almost 10 years. The assessment criteria included: message content (*addressing the test questions and richness of ideas*), vocabulary and grammar range – (*use of appropriate words and phrases to make meaning clear and control of basic grammar - tenses, subject-verb agreement- and use of sentence patterns -simple and complex- to make meaning clear*), fluency and coherence (*frequency of pauses, short and long*

delays, and use of discourse organizing words, connectors), and attitude and comprehensibility (*confidence, willingness to communicate, volume, pronunciation, word stress, speech rhythm*). The researchers used the marking rubric so that students could understand their teacher's expectations, perform better and get their self- and peer assessment facilitated. Also, during the teaching process from the 2nd week to the end of the 9th week, in each lesson, the researchers observed and evaluated the performance of the students of the two groups based on the mentioned criteria to identify the effectiveness of students' speaking practice using MALL. Here are some pictures of experimental activities.

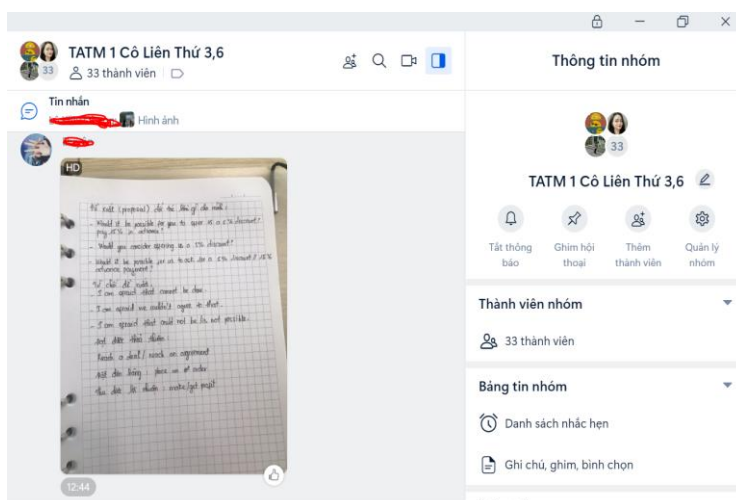**Figure 1**

Students' Pre-speaking Products
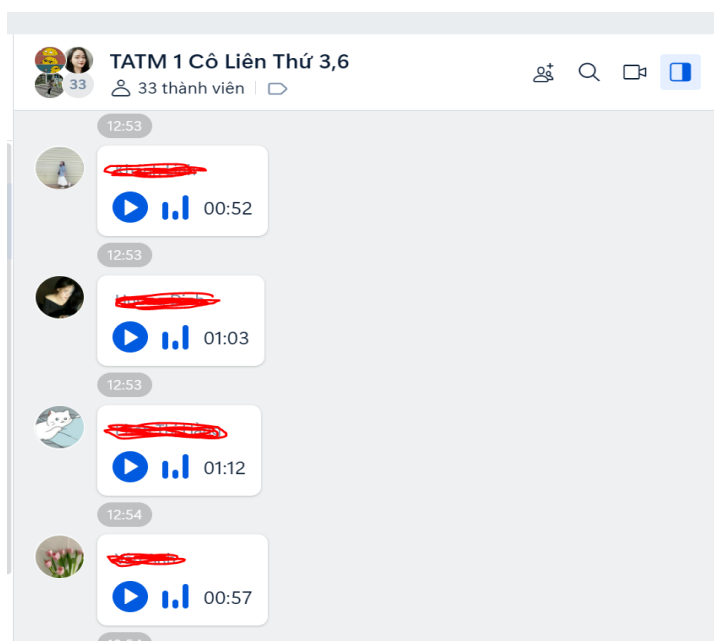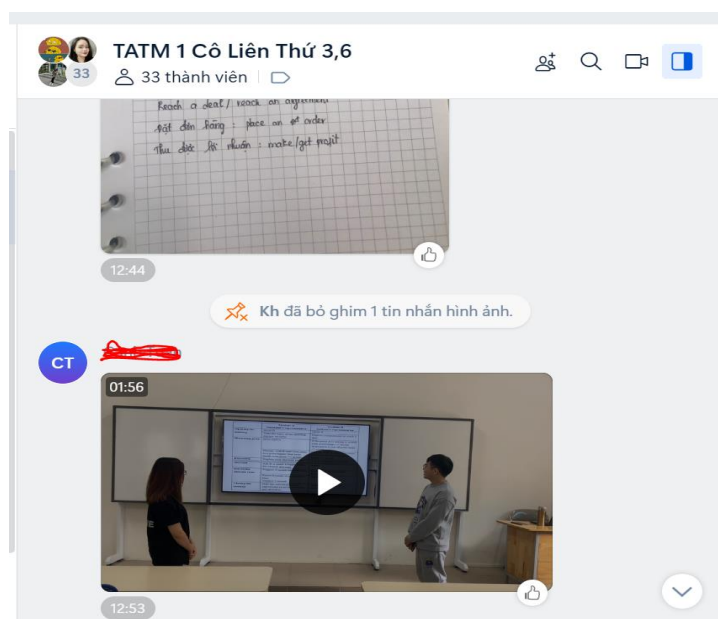

Figure 2

Students' Recordings on Zalo

Figure 3

Students' Video Recording

Phase three: After eight weeks of experiment, the researchers asked students of the experimental class to respond to the survey questionnaire which consisted of 3 questions designed on the Zalo voting application. The questions were designed with multiple choice questions and Likert's five-point scale from Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly agree about Students' perception on the effectiveness of utilizing MALL in learning speaking skills, derived from the questionnaire by Lai and Le (2022) and Lien et al (2023).

Phase four: In week 10, students did a progress test and the results of the two classes were compared utilizing T-test toolpak in Excel, which was then analyzed in relation to the results of researchers' observations and experimental group's survey questionnaires.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings from the experimental students' survey questionnaire and class observations are positive and relatively in line with those of T-test results, specifically as follows.

4.1. Students' Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Applying MALL in Learning Speaking Skills in On-Site Classes

Students' perceptions on the effectiveness of applying MALL in learning speaking skills in on-site classes collected from experimental survey questionnaires are shown in Figures 4, 5 and 6.

Figure 4

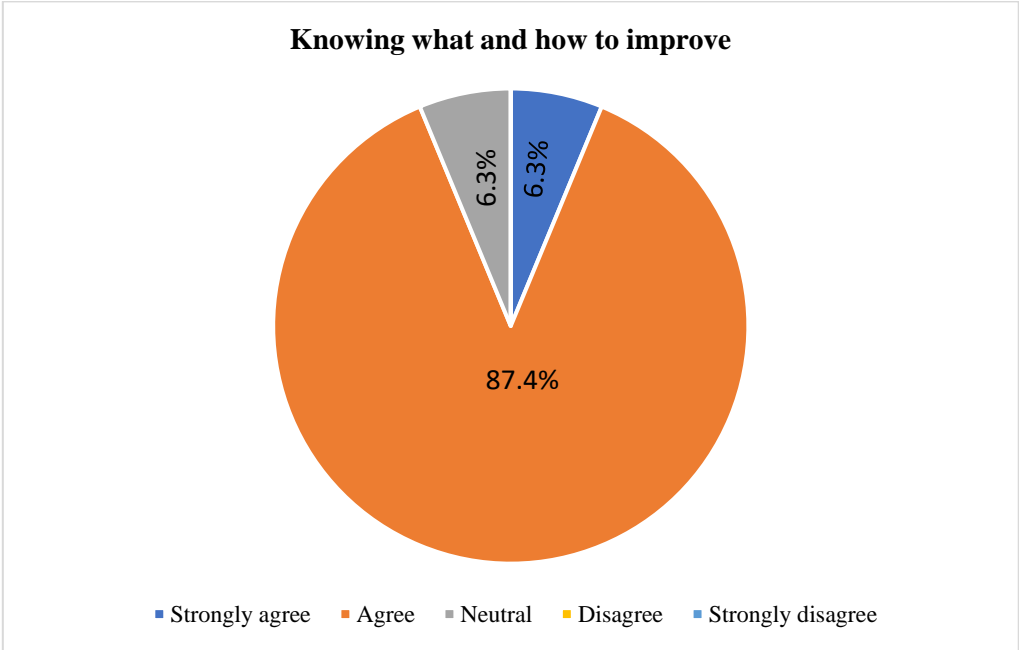*Students' Perception – Know What and How to Improve*

Knowing what and how to improve

6.3% 6.3% 87.4%

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Figure 5

Students' Perception – Have Improvements in Speaking

Have improvements in speaking

9.3% 3.1% 6.3% 81.3%

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Figure 6

Students' Perception – Improved Speaking Items
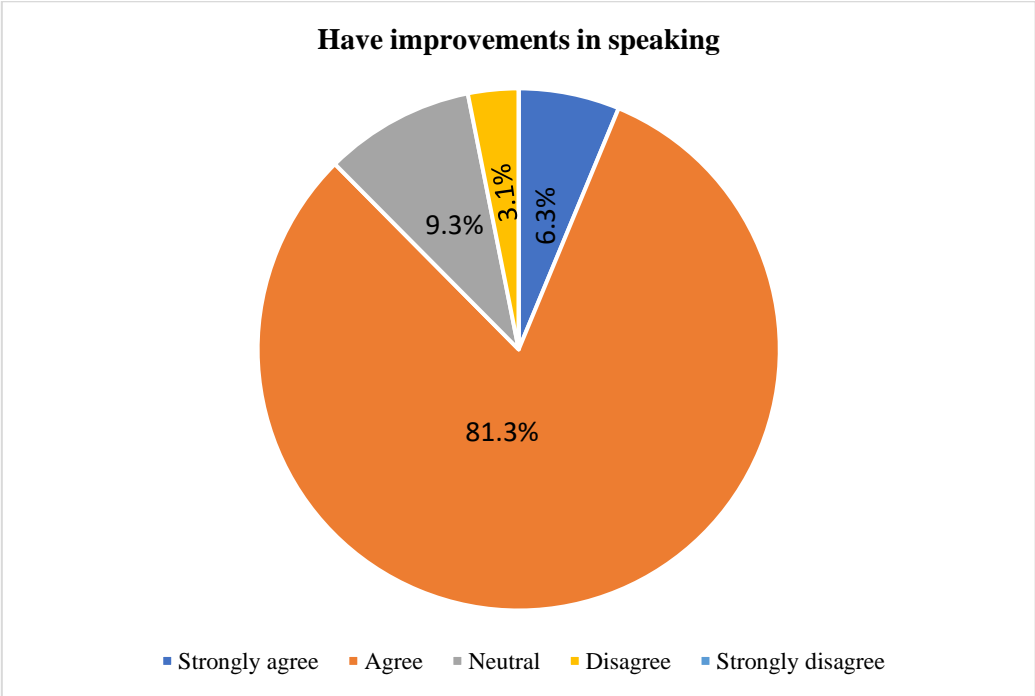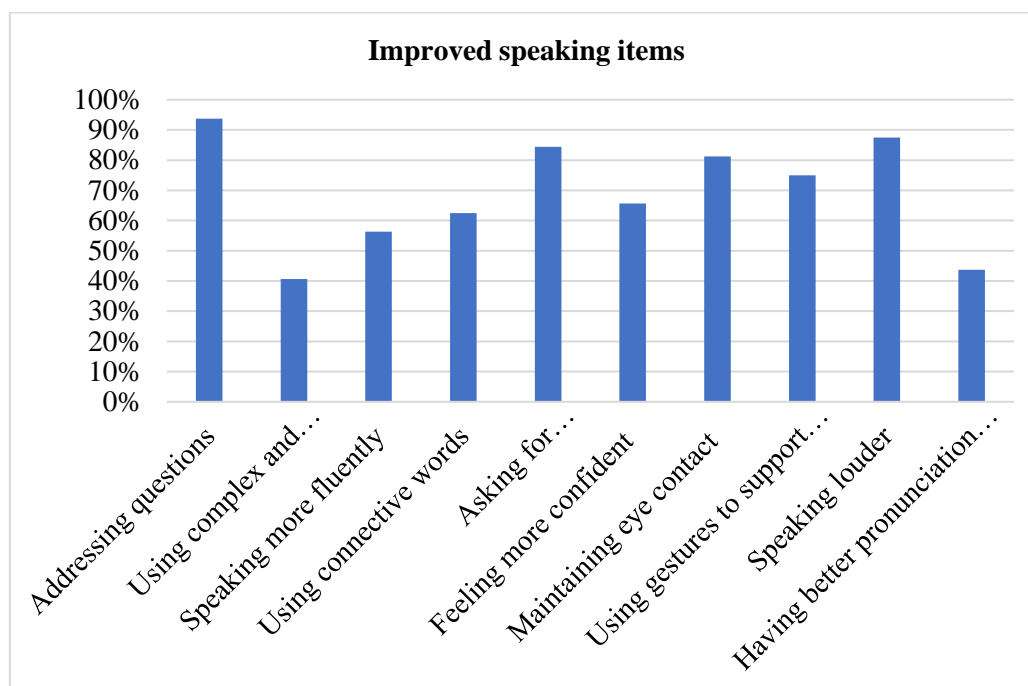

Improved speaking items

As can be seen from Figures 4 and 5, more than 80% of the experimental students said that they knew what and how to improve and had improvements in their speaking skills. A very small proportion of the surveyed students (3.1%) did not feel any improvements in speaking, and no one claimed that they did not know what and how to improve.

Figure 6 illustrates the aspects experimental students felt they performed better thanks to MALL exploitation in class. Addressing questions is subject to their most improvement (more than 90%), followed by speaking louder (87.5%), asking for repetition and clarification (84.4%) and maintaining eye contact (81.3%). Meanwhile, using complex and compound sentences when speaking and having better pronunciation (last consonant, word stress) were admitted to get the least improvement by less than 50% of the experimental students.

The findings of students' subjective perspectives on the effectiveness of applying MALL in learning speaking skills in on-site classes were supported by researchers' observations and objective evaluation of the impacts on speaking performance as analyzed below.

4.2. Impacts of MALL on Students' Speaking Performance

It was noted from the observations that MALL, though sometimes seemed to be a bit time-consuming because it was much dependent on Internet connection and file capacity, was overall proved to bring certain positive impacts on students' speaking performance.

Firstly, so-called low achievers in EG could memorize the language longer and felt more ready and confident to speak by writing down the target and useful language. Meanwhile, in the control group, because the students were just asked to speak out what they should say in each situation, mainly dominant students responded and so-called weak students were more likely to be hesitant to speak out in front of the whole class due to fear of making mistakes.

In addition, the students of EG generally could better address the questions, provide

more ideas, use relevant vocabulary, maintain eye contact, speak more fluently and accurately with louder volume and appropriate gestures than those of CG. More students could use compound and complex sentences as well as connective words to list ideas in their speaking. Especially, most of them could get involved in and develop their conversations by giving comments or asking for clarification, repetition and confirmation. Much better, many of the experimental students were able to self-correct their grammatical and pronunciation mistakes while speaking whereas only a few dominant students of CG could do this. Also, from the researcher's observations and analysis when giving detailed feedback on students' performance throughout the course, it was noted that while participants of the CG were likely to skip the last consonant in words and phrases such as "congratulations", "headquarters", "branch", "fully-equipped", "anything else", "reach a deal", "attendees" and mispronounced words like "apply", "negotiation", "spacious", "immediately", "representatives", "current", "strategy", "consider", "negotiation", "etiquette", "delivery", "advertisement", those of EG seemed to pay more attention to pronunciation of letter "s" in plural nouns and verbs with third person and pronounced 3-or-more syllable words better. In addition, it was realized that not only did audio and video recordings make it easier to give feedback because such activities allowed multiple listening and watching, but they also gradually engaged students despite some shyness at the beginning. Also, it was video playback that enabled students to deeply understand and remember how to apply non-verbal communication strategies like eye contact and gestures to support what they were saying.

The effectiveness of MALL application in on-site class is not only proven by the findings from class observations but also by the T-test results comparing progress test results of the experimental and control groups based on 4 marking criteria: message content (MC), vocabulary and grammar range (VGR), fluency and coherence (FC), and attitude and comprehensibility (AC) shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Summary of T-Test Comparing EG and CG

	MC		VGR		FC		AC	
	EG	*CG*	*EG*	*CG*	*EG*	*CG*	*EG*	*CG*
Mean	6.13	5.48	5.66	5.06	6.00	5.06	6.31	5.24
Variance	0.31	0.26	0.36	0.62	0.39	0.68	0.22	0.56
Observations	32	33	32	33	32	33	32	33
Pooled Variance	0.28		0.49		0.54		0.40	
df	63		63		63		63	
t Stat	4.86		3.42		5.16		6.86	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000		0.001		0.000		0.000	
t Critical one-tail	1.67		1.67		1.67		1.67	

P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000		0.001		0.000		0.000	
t Critical two-tail	2		2		2		2	

* Note: Alpha = 0.05, Hypothesized Mean Difference = 0

The data from Table 1 indicate a statistically significant difference between the means of EG and CG with the smallest disparity recorded at 0.6. The discrepancy is particularly notable when considering the FC and AC criteria (FC: mean EG = 6.00, mean CG = 5.06; AC: mean EG = 6.31, mean CG = 5.24). The results also show that the majority of calculated Ps is smaller than α and all t-statistic are relatively bigger than T-critical. It can be concluded that the observed difference between the means is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance. In other words, application of MALL in general and Zalo and built-in features in on-site speaking classes can help students improve their performance. It is also noted that MALL proves to be most effective in AC which mostly relates to eye contact, gestures, and volume and there seems to be room for improvement in VGR.

In summary, the comprehensive findings highlight that not only was MALL well-accepted by students but it also proved to contribute to improvements in students' various speaking skills in on-site classes. Despite occasional challenges like dependency on internet connection and file capacity, the overall positive impacts were noteworthy. Especially, there is potential for further enhancement, particularly in VGR.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, fundamentally, the use of MALL has demonstrated certain efficiency in English speaking classes for third-year Accounting majors at HaUI. The majority of the experimental students had a positive perception about its effectiveness. With MALL in general and mobile devices' built-in features together with Zalo platform in particular, students had better speaking performance with a lot of improvements in FC and AC. Therefore, it deserves the attention of language teachers, especially those at tertiary level. To make it more effective, the researchers have some suggestions as follows:

For students

The learners should make full use of the benefits of their mobile devices to cultivate their language skills. Though audio and video recordings are used for offline lessons, they should playback them at home for multiple listening and watching.

For teachers

Firstly, due to the positive impacts of MALL on students' speaking performance, it is necessary that teachers stay updated on new features, applications, and pedagogical approaches related to MALL to foster a dynamic and evolving learning environment. They need to undergo continuous professional development on MALL integration as well as actively update modern technology tools for educational purposes by joining learning communities and participating in conferences and seminars about digital tools in education.

In addition, because there is potential for further improvement in VGR, teachers should emphasize the integration of MALL tools to specifically target vocabulary and grammar development, ensuring a well-rounded enhancement of language skills.

Also, since the use of audio and video recordings, as highlighted in the study, plays a crucial role in giving feedback and engaging students, which contributes to students'

improvement, teachers should explore more multimedia-rich activities that enhance student engagement, such as interactive multimedia assignments, podcasts, or video discussions.

For educational institutions

Because MALL can be dependent on internet connection and file capacity, ensuring a stable internet connection and sufficient storage capacity for files will contribute to a smoother MALL experience. It is recommended that educational institutions and instructors provide adequate technical support and infrastructure to mitigate potential challenges. They should at least provide free strong wifi to facilitate teaching and learning.

In conclusion, the study contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on integrating technology into language learning environments. Its positive outcomes provide a solid foundation for further exploring and refining the integration of MALL in on-site language classes.

6. Limitations

Limitations are likely to be unavoidable in all research, and this is not exceptional.

Firstly, the research was conducted within a single educational institution, potentially limiting the applicability of results to broader contexts or diverse student populations.

The second limitation is that the study's sample size may have been relatively small, particularly if considering the number of students within each group. Therefore, the result may not be generalisable to other learning settings. A larger sample size would enhance the study's statistical power.

Also, the study may have been influenced by external factors beyond the researchers' control, such as students' external learning experiences outside the classroom. These factors could confound the interpretation of results and limit the study's internal validity.

In addition, the questionnaire just consisted of three questions, so the study may not fully capture the complexities of students' experiences and attitudes towards MALL in learning speaking skills.

Finally, the assessment criteria used for evaluating speaking skills were based on rubrics designed by teachers from HaUI. Despite having to engage in extensive research to design the rubrics, there is currently no official study documenting their rubric design process. This could affect the reliability and validity of the study's findings.

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

    1. MALL enables me to know what and how to improve my speaking skills.

- *Strongly agree*
- *Agree*
- *Neither agree nor disagree*
- *Disagree*
- *Strongly disagree*

    2. MALL helps me have improvement in my speaking skills.

- *Strongly agree*

o *Agree*
o *Neither agree nor disagree*
o *Disagree*
o *Strongly disagree*
3. Which speaking aspects have you made improvement in?
o *Addressing questions*
o *Using complex and compound sentences when speaking*
o *Speaking more fluently*
o *Using connective words*
o *Asking for repetition/clarification/confirmation*
o *Feeling more confident*
o *Maintaining eye contact*
o *Using gestures to support meaning*
o *Speaking louder*
o *Having better pronunciation (last consonant, word stress)*

NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ VIỆC ÁP DỤNG HỌC NGÔN NGỮ VỚI SỰ HỖ TRỢ CỦA THIẾT BỊ DI ĐỘNG (MALL) TRONG GIẢNG DẠY KỸ NĂNG NÓI CHO SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN TIẾNG ANH TRONG LỚP HỌC TRỰC TIẾP TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC Ở VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu bán thực nghiệm này tập trung vào tìm hiểu tác động của việc sử dụng MALL trong giảng dạy kỹ năng nói cho sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh ở các lớp học trực tiếp tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam. Có 65 sinh viên (tương ứng với 2 lớp) tham gia nghiên cứu, được chia thành 2 nhóm: nhóm kiểm soát (CG) gồm 33 sinh viên và nhóm thực nghiệm (EG) có 32 sinh viên. Sau 8 tuần thử nghiệm MALL trong giờ học nói với lớp có 32 sinh viên, kết quả quan sát của nhóm nghiên cứu và kết quả khảo sát nhóm thực nghiệm được phân tích và đối chiếu với kết quả so sánh điểm kiểm tra nói của hai nhóm ở tuần 10. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy việc sử dụng MALL trong lớp học nói trực tiếp thực sự hiệu quả, giúp sinh viên có tiến bộ về độ trôi chảy, chính xác và khả năng giao tiếp phi ngôn từ. Nhóm thực nghiệm có điểm trung bình kiểm tra nói cao hơn nhóm kiểm soát và đa số sinh viên trong nhóm thực nghiệm có phản hồi tích cực về việc sử dụng MALL trong lớp học trực tiếp.

Từ khóa: nghiên cứu bán thực nghiệm, MALL, kỹ năng nói, lớp học trực tiếp