
THE PERCEPTION OF EFL LEARNERS TOWARDS THE INCORPORATION OF MALL IN IMPROVING LISTENING ACHIEVEMENT: THE CASE OF FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH-MAJOR UNDERGRADUATES AT SUAN SUNANDHA RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This study aims to 1) examine undergraduates’ perceptions of the incorporation of MALL in enhancing listening achievements at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University and 2) explore challenges and suggestions for its integration. A purposive sample of 40 first-year English-major students participated. Data collection involved a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The findings reveal that undergraduates expressed high satisfaction, with overall satisfaction rated as “very satisfied” and achieving the highest mean score of 4.82 (s.d. = 0.49). However, technical difficulties, including app usability and navigation issues, were significant obstacles. To address these challenges, they recommended improvements such as more intuitive navigation and offline functionality to enhance their learning experience.

Keywords: Listening achievement, MALL, perceptions

Introduction

In Thailand, English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) and is compulsory from primary to tertiary education, as outlined in the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008. Despite this, Thai students’ English proficiency remains low, with most university students achieving only A1 to A2 levels on the CEFR scale, indicating struggles with basic communication, grammar, and pronunciation (Darasawang, 2007; Teng & Sinwongswat, 2015; Waluyo, 2019). Thailand ranks 20th out of 24 Asian countries in English proficiency (Tipprachaban, 2022), and studies highlight Thai EFL learners’ difficulty integrating all four language skills (Noom-ura, 2013). These challenges hinder progress toward the Ministry of Education’s goal for university graduates to reach B2 proficiency.

Listening comprehension, a fundamental receptive skill, is essential for effective communication and academic success. Listening plays a critical role in language acquisition, as evidenced by the natural progression of infant development. For instance, newborns begin distinguishing sounds and processing language-related cues within hours of birth (Bangor University, 2022). Similarly, Wahyuni (2020) highlights that listening is the first language skill humans develop before mastering other linguistic abilities, emphasizing the need to prioritize its development.

In the modern digital age, where the Internet is deeply integrated into students’ lives and education is heavily influenced by advanced technologies, numerous studies explore innovative approaches to teaching listening. These aim to equip EFL learners with the communication skills necessary in a globalized, technology-driven society. Many focus on

integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into English teaching, employing innovations that modernize traditional methods and foster positive digital learning environments. Examples include mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), computer-assisted language learning (CALL), augmented reality (AR) and mobile applications, mobile game-based learning, and online instruction, including hybrid, blended, and HyFlex courses.

The Thai National Education Act, Section 66, emphasizes that students should develop the skills and knowledge to use technology for self-directed learning. In alignment with this, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU) in Thailand has embraced strategies to enhance learning management systems, foster innovation, and align administrative practices with international standards. To support language learning, SSRU offers an English listening and speaking course that integrates ICTs and e-learning in a student-centered approach. As part of this effort, MALL has been incorporated into the teaching of listening—a foundational skill essential for mastering other language abilities. To assess its effectiveness, this study was conducted on the perceptions of first-year English-major SSRU undergraduates regarding the use of MALL in improving their listening achievements.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the first-year English-major SSRU undergraduates’ satisfaction with the incorporation of MALL in improving their listening achievements
2. To identify challenges and suggestions for the incorporation of MALL in improving their listening achievements

Scope of the Research

The population comprised 40 first-year English-major SSRU undergraduates, who had engaged in MALL-based learning for one semester and were chosen through purposive sampling.

Literature Review

In the modern, technology-driven era, advancements in digital tools have led to the development of innovative and engaging approaches in education. The integration of advanced technologies has particularly transformed the teaching and learning of listening skills in EFL. Recent studies have explored how ICTs can modernize traditional methods and create dynamic digital classroom environments. In Thailand, research has highlighted the role of ICT in teaching English listening skills, focusing on methods like CALL and MALL. These advancements have also driven the creation of interactive technologies such as computer-based instruction (CBI), intelligent tutoring systems (ITS), and computer-mediated communication. ICT is reshaping education by enabling teachers and students to integrate digital tools into daily practices. For example, mobile technologies are increasingly used in innovative ways, including mobile-assisted language learning (Kukulska-Hulme, 2006), offering exciting opportunities to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. When educators are digitally literate and capable of incorporating ICT into curricula, the impact on student learning can be profound.

The growing development and adoption of MALL has increasingly reinforced its integration into classrooms, as recognized by numerous researchers. Over the past decade, research on the effectiveness of MALL in enhancing EFL listening skills has surged dramatically. With over 80,000 educational apps available in the market, approximately 30,000 are specifically designed for language learning, particularly English. MALL addresses various

challenges faced by EFL learners in listening comprehension by offering several advantages, including ownership, mobility, and technology convergence (Kukulka-Hulme, 2006).

Additionally, previous research indicates that students generally express high levels of satisfaction with MALL, emphasizing its positive impact on their learning experiences, utility in EFL listening, willingness for continued use, and its role in fostering self-motivation and self-directed learning (Wang & Hsu, 2020; Xu, 2020).

Research Methodology

1. Research Instruments

The study utilized two research instruments: a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire aimed to assess the undergraduates' satisfaction with MALL and was divided into four sections, namely content, language, advantages of MALL, and overall satisfaction. Meanwhile, the semi-structured interview was conducted to gain deeper insights into their perceptions of integrating MALL to enhance their listening achievements. The interview included five questions focusing on general experiences, effectiveness, learning preferences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

2. Data Collection

Upon completing the MALL-based course, the undergraduates were first requested to fill out a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. Then, individual appointments were scheduled by the researcher to conduct semi-structured interviews with each undergraduate, which were audio-recorded for analysis.

3. Data Analysis

The data analysis for the study included two steps. First, quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Second, qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Research Results

1. The undergraduates' satisfaction with the incorporation of MALL in improving their listening achievements

The analysis revealed that among the four assessed areas—content, language, advantages, and overall satisfaction—the undergraduates rated their overall satisfaction at the highest level, categorized as “very satisfied.” This area achieved the highest mean score of 4.82 (s.d. = 0.49), indicating a strong positive response. Following this, the language aspect received a mean score of 4.74 (s.d. = 0.68). The content ranked third, with a mean score of 4.52 (s.d. = 0.69). Lastly, the advantages of MALL received the lowest mean score among the four areas, at 4.48 (s.d. = 0.77). These findings suggest that while all areas were rated positively, overall satisfaction and language stood out as the most appreciated aspects, highlighting their significant contribution to the learning experience.

2. Challenges and suggestions for the incorporation of MALL in improving the undergraduates' listening achievements

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews highlighted undergraduates' positive experiences with MALL, emphasizing its flexibility, convenience, and engaging nature. The mobile apps' interactive features and exposure to diverse accents enhanced listening comprehension and confidence in real-world conversations. The undergraduates valued the ability to repeat lessons at their own pace, making MALL an effective and

personalized tool. Additionally, they preferred MALL's adaptability over traditional teaching methods, which they found rigid and less aligned with their learning preferences.

Despite the three areas of positive attitudes above, the analysis also identified notable challenges. Technical difficulties were a significant barrier to seamless learning. The undergraduates reported issues such as app crashes, poor audio quality, internet connectivity problems, and challenges in navigating the apps. Frequent app updates often interrupted their learning, causing frustration and reducing engagement. Here, the undergraduates provided several suggestions for improvement to enhance their MALL experience. They recommended making the apps more user-friendly with intuitive navigation and offline functionality. Adding interactive features such as quizzes and games was also suggested to increase engagement. They expressed a desire for better audio quality, improved progress tracking, and diverse content that included exposure to real-life conversations and various accents to further enrich their learning journey.

Conclusion and Discussion

The study demonstrated that undergraduates held a highly positive view of integrating MALL to improve their listening achievements. They valued the overall learning experience and language aspects, highlighting MALL's flexibility, accessibility, and engaging features as key benefits. Interactive elements and exposure to diverse accents enhanced listening comprehension and boosted confidence in real-world communication. These findings align with prior research emphasizing students' favorable attitudes toward MALL. For example, Thedpitak and Somphong (2021) highlighted Thai EFL learners' appreciation for MALL's flexibility and support for independent learning, particularly in listening. Bhestari and Luthfiyyah (2021) also noted that MALL promotes learning autonomy by empowering students to manage their language development. These and other studies (e.g., Wang & Hsu, 2020; Xu, 2020) consistently affirm MALL's role in improving language learning by providing accessible, diverse, and self-directed learning opportunities.

Despite its benefits, the study identified challenges hindering MALL's effectiveness, including technical issues such as app crashes, poor audio quality, and internet connectivity problems. Students suggested improvements like enhanced usability, offline functionality, interactive features, better progress tracking, and diverse, high-quality content to enrich the learning experience. Further, research highlights the importance of teacher involvement in providing guidance, feedback, and motivation (Demirtas, 2010, as cited in Bhestari & Luthfiyyah, 2021; Lu, 2023). Effective teacher training is essential to help students navigate MALL and address challenges, ensuring its full potential as a learning tool (Thedpitak & Somphong, 2021).

Recommendations

The findings of this study provide valuable recommendations for implementation, future research, and policy to create a robust framework for advancing MALL in language learning. Effective implementation should prioritize usability, diverse and engaging content, offline functionality, and active teacher involvement. Future research could investigate the long-term impacts of MALL, its potential for personalization, its effects on diverse learner populations, and its integration with other emerging technologies. Lastly, policies should focus on supporting institutional investment in MALL, curriculum design, teacher training, and equitable access, ensuring that mobile learning reaches its full potential in enhancing language acquisition.

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