

# Improving English Speaking Proficiency Among Non-English Major Learners in Malaysia Through Mobile Language Learning Applications

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## ABSTRACT

The proliferation of mobile technology has revolutionised language learning, particularly with the advent of mobile language learning applications. This qualitative study investigates the motivations, preferences, and challenges of non-English major learners in Malaysia using mobile language learning apps to improve English speaking proficiency. This study is motivated by the persistent challenge Malaysian non-English major learners encounter in attaining English-speaking proficiency due to limited practice and classroom constraints. Mobile language apps offer versatile platforms with live sessions and personalised learning, addressing these obstacles. Drawing upon the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) 3, the research explores the participants' perceptions of usefulness, ease of use, and psychological factors influencing their acceptance of interactive language apps like Duolingo and specialised speaking-focused platforms such as Tandem. Through in-depth interviews with 20 non-English major university students, findings reveal diverse motivations driving app usage, ranging from career prospects to personal enrichment and cultural curiosity. While participants report positive impacts on pronunciation, vocabulary

acquisition, and fluency, they also encounter challenges related to pronunciation feedback accuracy, self-discipline, and the limitations of app-based instruction. Recommendations include customising app content to align with individual motivations, enhancing app features to address pronunciation feedback accuracy and motivation issues, and integrating traditional classroom instruction with mobile app-based learning for a more comprehensive language learning

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experience. This study highlights the importance of accommodating non-English majors' needs in mobile language learning apps.

*Keywords:* Language learning applications, mobile language learning, non-English major, speaking proficiency, second language acquisition

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## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of English language education among non-English majors presents several pressing challenges, particularly in speaking skills acquisition. Traditional approaches often struggle to engage learners effectively, resulting in limited opportunities for authentic practice and interaction. Moreover, learners may encounter barriers such as limited access to language resources, insufficient opportunities for real-world communication, and a lack of personalised learning experiences tailored to their individual needs and preferences. In this context, mobile language learning applications are a promising solution to address these challenges and enhance the learning experience. By leveraging the ubiquity and versatility of mobile technologies, educators can overcome geographical and temporal constraints, offering learners continuous access to language learning materials and opportunities for immersive language practice. Mobile apps can provide personalised feedback, scaffolded support, and interactive learning experiences tailored to learners' proficiency levels and learning objectives. Moreover, these language learning apps facilitate self-

directed learning, empowering learners to take ownership of their learning journey and progress at their own pace. Therefore, by integrating mobile language learning apps into English language instruction, educators can create a more dynamic, engaging, and effective learning environment that fosters the development of proficient speaking skills among non-English majors.

In an age marked by the growing prevalence of mobile technology, language learning has undergone a significant transformation. The introduction of mobile language learning applications has given rise to a new era of convenience and accessibility, empowering learners to interact with foreign languages in unprecedented ways (Figueiredo, 2023; Hsu & Liu, 2023). The integration of mobile learning, which involves education through software applications, programmes, websites, or resources accessible through electronic devices, has progressively become a vital aspect of language education. It has demonstrated its efficacy in improving learners' cognitive capacity, motivation, engagement, learner autonomy, and confidence. Studies indicate that teachers extensively integrate technological tools accessible through mobile devices to motivate and engage learners (Hinze et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2023; Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler, 2019; Sung et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, access to mobile technologies is not exclusive to teachers, as learners also possess these technologies. They can effortlessly access limitless information, including online learning

materials, tutorials, or classes. In terms of speaking tasks and presentations, mobile technologies can aid learners in various ways. For example, learners can use online dictionaries to find word definitions, translate sentences into the target language, or search for information about speaking topics. Mobile technologies appear to aid second language learners in situations where formal support from a teacher is unavailable, particularly for speaking, which demands linguistic expertise in diverse aspects. With the availability of Wi-Fi access, mobile phones have exceeded their primary communication function and evolved into intelligent devices. One has the capability to transform one's smartphone into a valuable learning resource. Grant (2019) emphasised that mobile learning serves as an umbrella term encompassing learning linked with mobility. Various terms such as mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), apps, and games or gaming were introduced in the reviewed literature (Jeon, 2022).

According to Kukulska-Hulme (2010), mobile learning "is no longer in the preserve of technical experts and researchers with specialist knowledge" (p.1190). Mobile apps seamlessly integrate language with technology, offering both learners and teachers the potential benefits promised by mobile learning. This extension of learning beyond classrooms is easily accessible. As per the terms used in Kukulska-Hulme's study (2010, p. 1190), mobile apps "will contribute to the establishment of more just and equitable societies" by providing individuals with lifelong learning

opportunities, regardless of their location. In spite of the growing interest and popularity of mobile technologies in teaching and learning a second language (L2), research on m-learning's impact on speaking skills has been limited (Lin & Lin, 2019). Additionally, English language learners' choices, actual practices, and thoughts regarding mobile technologies supporting their L2 speaking remain largely unknown (Zhou & Wei, 2018). While teachers can be highly selective in choosing technologies suitable for language teaching, learners may be less skilled in choosing what is appropriate. This study acknowledges that understanding learners' current practices and perceptions of mobile technologies will promote a culture of listening to learners, enabling teachers and educators to retain their role as facilitators, offering guidance both within and outside the classroom.

Despite the increasing integration of mobile technologies into language learning contexts, there remains a conspicuous dearth of comprehensive studies focusing on the efficacy of these tools, specifically in enhancing speaking proficiency. This gap is particularly pronounced in the realm of second language acquisition, where effective communication skills are paramount. Furthermore, while there is a burgeoning interest in leveraging mobile apps for language learning, a notable disparity exists between the perspectives of educators and learners regarding the suitability and effectiveness of these tools. Thus, elucidating learners' current practices and perceptions concerning

mobile technologies is crucial in bridging this gap and fostering a more learner-centric approach to language education. By addressing these critical research gaps, this study not only aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge but also provides valuable insights for educators and practitioners to optimise the integration of mobile learning technologies in language pedagogy. Therefore, to investigate learners' real-world usage of mobile technologies for speaking purposes, the following questions were posed:

1. What specific types of mobile language learning applications did non-English major learners in listening and speaking courses utilise to enhance their speaking skills?
2. What were the perceptions and attitudes of non-English major learners regarding the effectiveness and utility of mobile language learning applications employed as supplementary support for improving their speaking proficiency in listening and speaking courses?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Mobile Learning for Speaking Skills

Mobile learning, often referred to as m-learning, has emerged as a powerful and flexible tool for language acquisition, particularly for developing speaking skills. With the availability of smartphones and the emergence of mobile applications designed for language learning, researchers and

educators have increasingly turned their attention to the potential benefits of mobile technology in the language learning process. Primarily, mobile learning (m-learning) enhances mobility across various spaces (workplace, home, leisure venues), life domains (work, self-improvement, leisure), and timeframes (day, night, weekends) (Palalas & Wark, 2020; Sarrab et al., 2018). Hence, learners can engage in learning anytime and anywhere through handheld devices.

The second advantage of mobile learning is its commonness, being widespread and accessible when required (Al-Emran et al., 2020). Learners can personalise their learning experiences with mobile learning in their unique environments, catering to their learning needs or interests and revising as often as necessary (Kacetyl & Klímova, 2019). Furthermore, mobile learning also fosters opportunities for collaborative learning, enabling learners to interact, irrespective of time and location, with each other or with the teacher (Lin et al., 2023). Research investigating the effectiveness of mobile learning applications in improving speaking proficiency has produced encouraging results. In a comprehensive study, Hwang and Fu (2019) concluded that mobile language learning applications can significantly contribute to developing speaking skills. Mobile apps frequently provide an array of interactive exercises and speaking opportunities, allowing learners to practice pronunciation, fluency, and conversational skills. Moreover, the incorporation of

technology-enhanced feedback and speech recognition features has the potential to offer immediate and personalised guidance to learners, proving advantageous in enhancing speaking accuracy (Shadiev & Wang, 2022). Motivation plays a crucial role in language learning, and mobile learning applications hold the potential to improve learner engagement and motivation. By offering learners the ability to set goals, monitor their progress, and access language materials on the move, mobile apps can contribute to sustaining learners' enthusiasm for language acquisition (Rafiq et al., 2021).

Elements of gamification, such as rewards and leaderboards integrated into numerous language learning apps, can boost learner motivation by transforming the learning process into an enjoyable and competitive experience (Karakaya & Bozkurt, 2022; Saleem et al., 2022). This facet of mobile learning is especially relevant to developing speaking skills, as sustained motivation can result in more consistent and effective practice. Mobile learning applications possess the potential to overcome some of the common barriers to language acquisition. For non-English major learners, as examined in this research, issues such as time constraints and limited access to language classes may present substantial challenges. Mobile learning facilitates flexible, self-paced study, empowering learners to incorporate language practice into their daily routines and tailor their learning to individual schedules (Karakaya & Bozkurt, 2022; Kukulska-Hulme, 2018).

Moreover, these applications frequently provide a range of language options, addressing learners' diverse interests and needs, thereby making language acquisition more inclusive and personalised (Zhang & Zou, 2022). The literature review underscores the significant potential of mobile learning applications in improving speaking skills among language learners. These applications have the potential to render language learning more effective, engaging, and accessible, concurrently addressing concerns related to motivation and individualised learning. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the effectiveness of mobile learning for speaking skills may be influenced by factors such as the quality of applications, learner characteristics, and the degree to which they are integrated into learners' language learning routines. This study seeks to enhance the existing literature by delving into a more profound understanding of the experiences and perspectives of non-English major learners utilising mobile language learning apps for speaking proficiency.

### **Studies of Mobile Language Learning Apps for English-speaking Proficiency**

Over the previous year, an increasing amount of research has concentrated on mobile language learning applications and their impact on improving speaking proficiency, especially among non-English major learners (Chen et al., 2020; Elaish et al., 2019; Morgana & Kukulska-Hulme, 2021; Onal et al., 2022; Qiao & Zhao, 2023; Yeh et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2023). A noteworthy

study underscored the varied motivations prompting individuals to embrace these applications for language learning (Yu et al., 2023). The study offers insights into how career prospects, personal enrichment, cultural curiosity, and the aspiration to connect with English-speaking communities motivate learners. It underscored the importance of mobile language learning applications in accommodating this range of motivations, emphasising app developers' need to customise their offerings to resonate with individual aspirations and interests (Yu et al., 2023).

This study highlights the changing nature of language learning in the digital era and emphasises the significance of addressing diverse learner motivations. A recent investigation explored the inclinations of non-English major learners regarding mobile language learning applications and the perceived influence on their speaking skills (Qiao & Zhao, 2023). The findings demonstrated that these learners exhibited diverse preferences, encompassing gamified applications such as Duolingo to specialised platforms focusing on speaking, such as Tandem. Qiao and Zhao's (2023) study emphasised the influence of user-friendliness, gamification, and peer interaction in shaping these preferences. Furthermore, the study emphasised the favourable results communicated by learners, including enhanced pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and speaking fluency. Nonetheless, it also highlighted the challenges they encountered, underscoring

the necessity for ongoing development and customisation of apps to address the particular demands and preferences of learners not majoring in English.

Finally, recent research has exposed the challenges faced by learners not majoring in English in their language learning journey through mobile applications (Klimova & Polakova, 2020). The investigation recognised pronunciation as a notable obstacle, expressing concerns regarding the authenticity and accuracy of pronunciation feedback provided by mobile apps. Moreover, issues of self-discipline and motivation were pinpointed as crucial, underscoring the challenge of sustaining consistent practice and motivation when solely depending on mobile apps. The research also stressed that mobile applications cannot completely substitute traditional classroom instruction, as they might lack the depth and interactive elements provided by in-person classes (Shi, 2023). The study has emphasised the significance of offering support and resources to assist learners in overcoming these challenges, aiming for a more effective and comprehensive language learning experience for non-English major learners utilising mobile language learning apps. This study will focus specifically on the mobile language learning applications Duolingo and Tandem. These apps have been chosen due to their popularity and distinct approaches to enhancing English-speaking proficiency, providing a comprehensive understanding of their effectiveness and user experiences.

### Theoretical Background

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) 3, depicted in Figure 1 below, serves as a theoretical framework to understand and predict users' acceptance and adoption of technology, particularly in the context of mobile language learning applications among non-English major learners in Malaysia. This model extends the original TAM by incorporating additional constructs to provide a more comprehensive

understanding of technology acceptance behaviour. The core constructs of TAM 3 include Perceived Usefulness (PU), Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Social Influence (SI), Facilitating Conditions (FC), Perceived Enjoyment (PE), and Behavioural Intention to Use (BIU).

Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) are central to TAM 3, representing the user's perceptions of the utility and ease of use of mobile

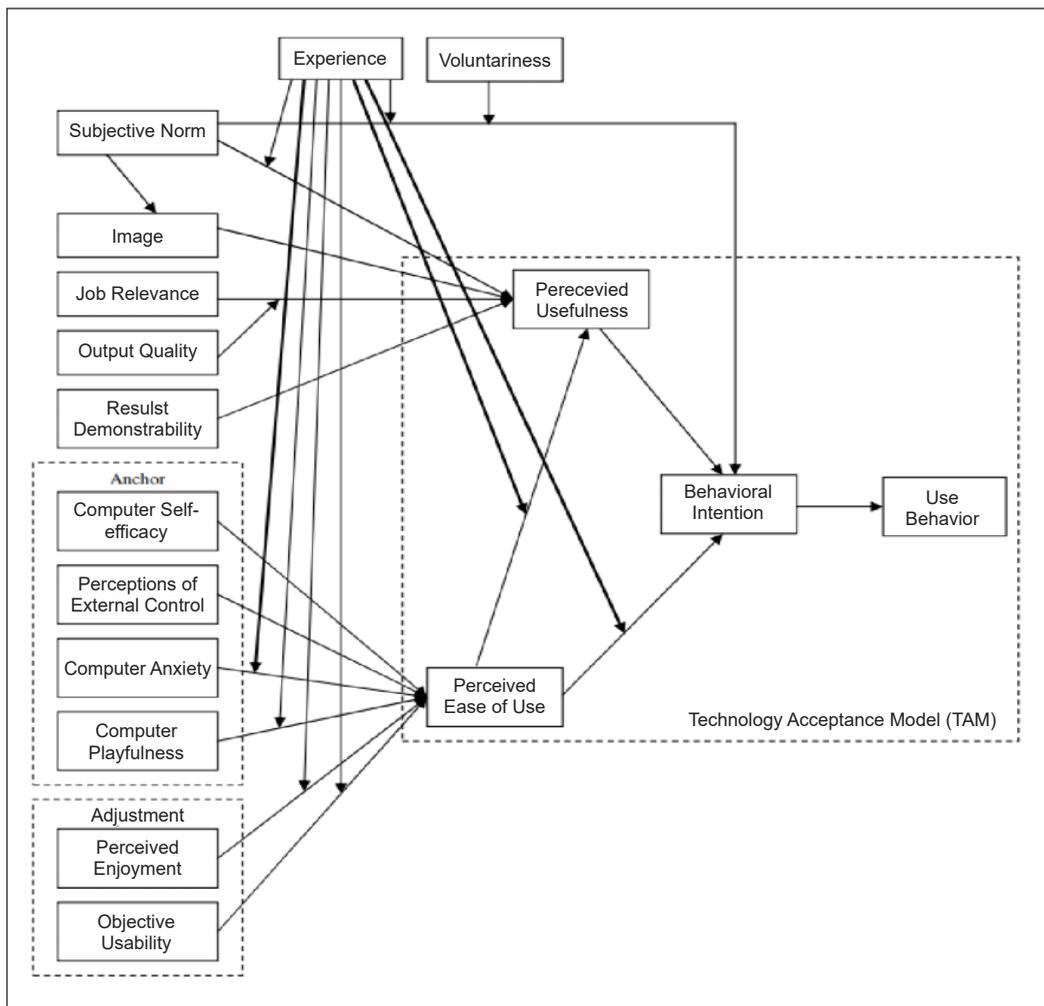


Figure 1. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) 3  
 Source: Venkatesh & Bala (2008)

language learning applications. These perceptions significantly influence the user's intention to adopt and use the technology. Social Influence (SI) refers to the impact of social factors such as peers, family, and instructors on an individual's decision to use the technology. Facilitating Conditions (FC) encompass the external factors that facilitate or hinder technology usage, such as access to resources and technical support.

However, existing literature on technology acceptance among non-English major learners in Malaysia using mobile language learning applications may have gaps in understanding the influence of cultural factors, language proficiency levels, and pedagogical strategies on technology adoption. Therefore, this theoretical framework guides the development of research questions, hypotheses, and methodologies to address these gaps by exploring the relationships between the constructs of TAM 3 within the specific context of English language learning in Malaysia. By investigating these relationships, researchers can develop insights into effective strategies for improving English speaking proficiency among non-English major learners using mobile language learning applications, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of language education practices in Malaysia.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This qualitative research study adopts an ethnographic approach, employing in-depth interviews as the primary research method

to delve into the experiences and attitudes of learners not majoring in English towards using mobile language learning applications. Through ethnographic exploration, we aim to immerse ourselves in the cultural context of these learners, capturing rich insights into their motivations, app usage patterns, and perceived impacts on speaking proficiency. An ethnographic approach is most suitable for this study as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the social and cultural factors influencing learners' interactions with mobile language learning applications. Moreover, ethnography enables the researchers to uncover nuanced insights into the challenges and obstacles faced by participants, providing a holistic view of their experiences within their natural environment (Corbett, 2022). Additionally, the research aims to pinpoint the challenges and obstacles encountered by learners not majoring in English as they engage with mobile language learning applications. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the efficacy of these apps in improving speaking skills among this particular group of learners. The findings will also identify the factors influencing their choices. Hence, the study strives to educate educators, application developers, and learners on how to customise these tools to better align with the needs and preferences of non-English major learners, ultimately enhancing their language acquisition and communication skills.

### **Research Context**

This qualitative study was carried out within the university environment of Malaysia,

which is recognised for its cultural diversity and multilingual setting. In this context, a varied student population, especially those not majoring in English or related fields, actively employs mobile language learning applications to improve their proficiency in English speaking. The study was undertaken within a dynamic educational environment where integration in language learning has become progressively widespread and significant. Data for this study were gathered from undergraduate students not majoring in English enrolled in a listening and speaking course during the second semester of the academic year 2022/2023. This specific course constitutes a vital element of the university's curriculum, designed to enhance students' oral communication skills in English. The selection of participants from this course aligns with the study's relevance to the institution's educational goals.

It underscores the emphasis placed on English language proficiency across various academic disciplines. Moreover, the 2022/2023 academic year offers a contemporary context for investigating the utilisation of mobile language learning applications. Given the widespread use of smartphones and convenient access to language learning apps, this study captures the latest trends in how non-English major learners leverage technology to improve their speaking abilities. By concentrating on the experiences and perspectives of these students, the study seeks to determine the motivations and challenges encountered by learners engaging with mobile language learning tools in this specific academic

setting. Our investigation delves into the diverse array of mobile language learning tools available to participants, encompassing popular platforms such as Duolingo and specialised speaking-focused apps like Tandem. By explicitly delineating our focus on these prominent examples, we aim to examine learners' motivations and challenges within the dynamic landscape of mobile learning applications. The outcomes of this study will add to the comprehensive comprehension of language education in the digital age and guide future endeavours to create language learning applications that are more effective and centred on the learner.

### **Research Participants**

In this qualitative research study, a total of 20 university students from a Malaysian university were chosen as research participants (see Table 1). Table 1 below showcases the diversity of participants selected, representing various genders, ages, academic backgrounds, fields of study, and disciplines within a Malaysian university. The selection of these students was deliberate, utilising a purposive sampling method to guarantee representation from diverse academic backgrounds, specifically emphasising those not majoring in English or related fields. This intentional selection process facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of learners not majoring in English who utilise mobile language learning applications. The participants comprised individuals pursuing degrees in engineering, business, and sciences. The

Table 1  
*Demographics of the participants*

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Academic Background	Field of Study
Lee	Female	21	Engineering	Mechanical Engineering
Alice	Female	22	Business	Marketing
Fatin	Female	20	Sciences	Biology
Ahmad	Male	23	Engineering	Electrical Engineering
Wei	Male	24	Business	Finance
Alysa	Female	21	Sciences	Chemistry
Amir	Male	22	Engineering	Civil Engineering
Fatima	Female	20	Business	International Business
Raj	Male	21	Sciences	Physics
Mei-Ling	Female	22	Engineering	Computer Science
Aisha	Female	23	Business	Management
Lin	Female	24	Sciences	Environmental Science
Muhammad	Male	21	Engineering	Chemical Engineering
Sofia	Female	22	Business	Entrepreneurship
Kai	Male	20	Sciences	Mathematics
Aditya	Male	21	Engineering	Industrial Engineering
Jun	Male	22	Business	Accounting
Leila	Female	23	Sciences	Geology
Wong	Male	24	Engineering	Electrical Engineering
Tan	Male	20	Business	Economics

*Source:* Authors' work

inclusion of this diverse representation across various academic fields was vital in capturing the heterogeneous nature of the student population in a Malaysian university. By incorporating participants from different academic backgrounds, the research sought to investigate how non-English major learners from various fields interact with mobile language learning apps and whether their motivations, preferences, and challenges differ based on their respective disciplines. Each participant underwent two interview sessions, conducted at different points in time. The dual-interview approach was adopted to offer a longitudinal perspective on the participants' experiences and attitudes

toward using mobile language learning applications. The first interview sought to capture initial impressions and motivations, while the second interview aimed to provide insights into any changes in attitudes and experiences over time. This design was selected to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the participants' utilisation of these apps to enhance their speaking proficiency in English.

### **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol employed in this qualitative research study was designed to collect comprehensive insights from university students in Malaysia, specifically

those not majoring in English or related fields, regarding their utilisation and attitudes toward using mobile language learning applications for enhancing speaking proficiency in English. Prior to its implementation in the study, the interview protocol underwent a rigorous validation process to ensure its content relevance, suitability, validity, and reliability. It is imperative to elucidate that the interview protocol underwent meticulous scrutiny by two other seasoned supervisors who were actively supervising PhD students. These supervisors, though not affiliated with this particular research project or serving as co-supervisors, lent their expertise to critically assess the protocol's design, ensuring it aligns with established qualitative research methodologies and effectively captures the nuanced experiences and perspectives of the target participants. The validation process involved a comprehensive review of the interview questions to ascertain their appropriateness in eliciting in-depth responses pertinent to the research objectives. Through iterative discussions and feedback exchanges, potential ambiguities or biases were meticulously addressed, thereby enhancing the protocol's content validity. The instrument incorporated open-ended questions intended to delve into the participants' motivations for using these applications, the frequency of their use, their preferred applications, and their perceptions of the impact on their speaking abilities. Furthermore, it delved into participants' challenges and obstacles while interacting with these mobile language learning tools. The questions were meticulously developed

to extract rich and detailed responses, facilitating a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. The interview instrument, tailored specifically for this research, is crucial in collecting data contributing to the study's objectives.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this qualitative research study comprised in-depth interviews with university students in Malaysia who were not majoring in English but were avid users of mobile language learning applications to improve their English-speaking proficiency. The data collected through these interviews was methodically transcribed and subsequently subjected to thematic analysis. The analysis centred on identifying recurrent themes and patterns in participants' responses pertaining to their motivations, frequency of app usage, preferred mobile language learning applications, perceived impacts on speaking abilities, and the challenges faced during their language learning journey. The qualitative data analysis process for thematic analysis followed established guidelines, including data coding, categorisation, and interpretation, to derive meaningful insights and draw conclusions regarding the efficacy and limitations of mobile language learning apps for non-English major learners in the Malaysian university context.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to the study's commencement, informed consent was obtained from all the participants. They were also assured

of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. In order to protect their privacy and confidentiality, the participants' identities were anonymised. Data collected during the interviews were securely stored and accessible only to the research team. Additionally, the research adhered to ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence by ensuring that participants' well-being and psychological comfort were prioritised throughout the study. Any potential emotional distress resulting from discussions regarding language learning challenges or difficulties was addressed through a debriefing process. The participants were also provided with information on available support resources if needed. The research also sought to minimise potential power imbalances by fostering a collaborative and open dialogue with the participants, enabling them to freely share their perspectives.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

The trustworthiness of this qualitative study is established through a rigorous methodological approach and adherence to ethical considerations, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. The deliberate selection of participants through purposive sampling, encompassing a diverse range of academic backgrounds, enhances the study's credibility by comprehensively understanding non-English major learners' perspectives on mobile language learning applications within a Malaysian university context. The dual-interview approach

further strengthens the trustworthiness by offering a longitudinal perspective on participants' experiences, thus enabling a thorough exploration of their motivations, preferences, and challenges over time. The interview instrument, meticulously designed to extract rich and detailed responses, contributes to the study's dependability by facilitating comprehensive data collection aligned with the research objectives. Moreover, the systematic data analysis employing thematic analysis ensures the reliability of the findings through the identification of recurrent themes and patterns in participants' responses. Member checking is another method to ensure trustworthiness, involving participants validating or clarifying the collected data (Flick, 2006). In this study, the supervisor summarised the data and had it reviewed by the participants to ensure accuracy. A peer debriefing strategy was utilised throughout the data collection process to address any potential emotional impact on the supervisor. Additionally, two other seasoned supervisors actively supervising PhD students (not affiliated as supervisors or co-supervisors for this research) assisted in the reflection process to uncover any biases. This approach involved exploring the supervisor's emotions and biases, examining meanings, and clarifying interpretations. Overall, the trustworthiness of this study is upheld through its robust methodology, ethical conduct, and thorough analysis, consolidating the validity and credibility of the insights generated regarding the efficacy of mobile language learning applications for

non-English major learners in a Malaysian university setting.

## FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed three key insights that provide a comprehensive understanding of the utilisation and attitudes of non-English major learners towards using mobile language learning applications for improving speaking proficiency. These findings are (1) perceived motivation towards mobile language learning apps, (2) preferred applications and perceived positive impact on speaking skills, and (3) challenges encountered during the language learning journey. The findings shed light on the motivations, preferences, and challenges these Malaysian university students face as they engage with these language learning tools. Each of the findings makes a substantial contribution to the wider discussion on language acquisition and communication skills among learners not majoring in English, providing valuable insights for educators, application developers, and learners alike.

### Perceived Motivations Towards Using Mobile Language Learning Apps

The initial substantial discovery of this qualitative research study underscores the diverse and multifaceted motivations encouraging non-English major learners to adopt mobile language learning applications to enhance their English-speaking abilities. The participants exhibited various motivations, indicating the dynamic nature of language learning in the digital age. Some

participants were primarily motivated by career prospects and the global significance of English proficiency. For example, one student said, “I saw improving my English as crucial for my future career opportunities, especially in the international job market.”

How students utilised mobile language learning applications like Duolingo and Tandem played a crucial role in fostering these career-oriented motivations. With its gamified learning approach, Duolingo transforms language learning into an engaging and interactive experience through features such as streaks, points, and levels. This approach encourages consistent practice by rewarding users for daily activity and progress. For instance, earning points for completing lessons and maintaining streaks for consecutive days of practice makes the learning process feel like a game, which keeps students motivated and committed. One participant highlighted, “The game-like features of Duolingo kept me motivated and made learning English feel like a fun challenge rather than a chore”. This gamification made learning enjoyable and facilitated regular practice, which is crucial for language acquisition. By completing various exercises, students were able to enhance their vocabulary and grammar skills effectively. The instant feedback provided by the app helped them correct mistakes and improve progressively, making the learning journey both fun and productive.

Similarly, Tandem provided a platform for real-time language exchange with native speakers by offering features such

as text, audio, and video chat options. These tools allowed students to practice speaking English in a natural and immersive environment, helping them to enhance their conversational skills and gain cultural insights directly from native speakers. It was particularly beneficial for those aiming to work in global environments where cultural competence is as important as English language proficiency. Another student mentioned, “Interacting with native speakers on Tandem through video calls not only improved my English-speaking skills but also gave me the confidence to engage in real-world English conversations, which I know is invaluable for my career aspirations.”

By facilitating direct communication with native speakers, Tandem enabled students to receive immediate feedback, correct their mistakes in real-time, and build a more authentic and practical understanding of the language. In contrast, others pointed to personal enrichment, cultural curiosity, and the desire to connect with individuals from English-speaking backgrounds as their driving forces: “I’ve always been fascinated by different cultures and learning English through apps allows me to explore various cultural nuances.”

The findings underscore the crucial role played by mobile language learning apps in accommodating this variety of motivations, offering a flexible and accessible platform for learners from diverse academic backgrounds to pursue their speaking proficiency goals. Moreover, these motivations highlight the importance of customising language

learning applications to align with non-English major learners’ aspirations and interests, enhancing their engagement and persistence in the language learning journey.

### **Preferred Applications and Perceived Impact on Speaking Skills**

The second pivotal finding of this study explores the favoured mobile language learning applications among non-English major learners and their perceived impact on speaking skills. Participant preferences varied, with some favouring interactive language apps, such as Duolingo, while others leaned towards more specialised speaking-focus platforms, such as Tandem. For instance, Duolingo, renowned for its gamified learning approach, emerged as a preferred choice for many. Its interactive nature, bite-sized lessons, and engaging challenges resonated with learners seeking a dynamic and enjoyable language learning experience. One participant highlighted, “I find Duolingo really easy to use, and the competitive aspects make it fun to practice regularly.”

On the other hand, platforms like Tandem, renowned for their focus on real-time language exchange, were lauded for their unique ability to enhance fluency through direct interaction with native speakers. By facilitating authentic conversations, Tandem provided learners with invaluable opportunities to apply their language skills in practical contexts and receive immediate feedback. A participant attested to this, stating, “Tandem is great because I get to practice speaking with

native speakers, which has really improved my fluency. The feedback and corrections I receive during these interactions have significantly boosted my confidence in speaking English.” User-friendliness, gamified elements, and the availability of peer interaction influenced these preferences. Participants also reported positive outcomes from their usage, emphasising improved pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and speaking fluency. Nevertheless, they faced challenges such as maintaining consistency and needing more personalised content. They noted, “Sometimes I struggle to stay consistent with using the apps because of my busy schedule.” This finding underscores the importance of ongoing development and customisation of mobile language learning apps to meet the specific demands and preferences of non-English major learners, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of these tools in fostering speaking proficiency.

### **Challenges Encountered During Language Learning Journey**

The third significant finding of this study explored the challenges encountered by non-English major learners in Malaysia as they navigate their language learning journey using mobile applications. The study revealed a range of obstacles that these learners face, encompassing pronunciation, self-discipline, and the limitations of app-based language instruction. Pronunciation emerged as a significant challenge, with participants expressing concerns regarding the authenticity and accuracy of pronunciation feedback provided by

mobile apps. For example, “Sometimes, the pronunciation feedback feels unnatural, and I doubt its accuracy.” Self-discipline and motivation were identified as critical issues, as learners often grapple with maintaining consistent practice and motivation when relying solely on mobile apps for language learning: “It’s challenging to stay motivated when practising alone with the app, especially without the structure of a classroom setting.” Furthermore, the study indicated that mobile applications can only partially replace traditional classroom instruction, as they may lack the depth and interactive elements of in-person classes. Another student remarked that mobile apps lack the interactive elements and depth of in-person classes, making it challenging to grasp certain concepts.” This discovery highlights the necessity of offering extra support and resources to assist learners in overcoming these hurdles, ensuring a language learning experience that is more comprehensive and effective.

### **DISCUSSION**

The research sheds light on non-English major learners’ diverse motivations and preferences for using mobile language learning apps to improve their English-speaking proficiency. Motivations ranging from career goals to personal curiosity and cultural interests highlight the need for app developers and educators to consider the varied nature of language learning. By customising content to meet individual motivations, engagement and persistence in learning can be enhanced (Rafiq et al.,

2021). The varied preferences for different apps also suggest that a diverse range of tools should be available to cater to different learning styles (Karakaya & Bozkurt, 2022; Kukulska-Hulme, 2018; Saleem et al., 2022). While participants reported improved pronunciation and fluency, pronunciation accuracy and self-discipline were significant obstacles. These difficulties point to the need for app developers to enhance features such as pronunciation feedback and integrate elements that support learner motivation and consistency. Mobile apps offer flexible, independent learning opportunities but should not replace traditional classroom instruction entirely. A blended approach, integrating mobile learning with in-person classes, may provide a more effective learning experience.

## CONCLUSION

The study's findings underscore the significance of comprehending and accommodating the diverse motivations, preferences, and challenges encountered by non-English major learners utilising mobile language learning apps. Customisation, diversity, and support emerge as pivotal elements in ensuring the effectiveness of these tools in fostering speaking proficiency. By attending to these aspects, both educators and app developers can contribute to a more efficient and engaging language learning experience for non-English major learners, ultimately aiding them in achieving their language learning goals. In the theoretical realm, our study contributes to the ongoing discourse

on technology adoption in education by advocating for the integration of contemporary frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) 3. By embracing a holistic understanding of technology acceptance, we pave the way for future researchers to explore the intricate interplay between perceived usefulness, ease of use, and psychological factors in the context of language learning. The findings underscore the need for personalised app content, improved features addressing pronunciation feedback, and the integration of traditional instruction to enhance speaking proficiency among non-English major learners using mobile language learning applications. From the findings obtained in this study, we affirm that mobile language learning applications offer unparalleled flexibility, allowing learners to engage with language materials anytime and anywhere, catering to diverse schedules and learning preferences. Their interactive and personalised features provide learners immediate feedback and adaptive learning experiences, fostering motivation and retention. Furthermore, the integration of multimedia resources and gamified elements enhances engagement. It facilitates immersive language acquisition, making it a valuable tool for teachers and researchers seeking innovative approaches to language education. It is, therefore, an approach to consider by teachers and researchers when dealing with speaking, even more so considering that mobile language learning applications will have a growing role in the future educational landscape.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of our study concerning its small sample size, comprising 20 non-English major university students, potentially limiting the generalisability of the findings to a broader population of language learners. Despite this limitation, our study lays a solid groundwork for future investigations, reaffirming the importance and the transformative potential of mobile language learning applications in revolutionising language education and equipping learners with the skills they need to thrive in today's globalised society.

### Recommendations

Several key recommendations should be implemented to improve the effectiveness of mobile language learning applications for non-English major learners. First, customisation and personalisation of content is essential. Mobile apps should align with individual learners' motivations for career advancement, personal enrichment, or cultural curiosity. Tailoring the learning experience can significantly enhance user engagement and long-term persistence in language acquisition (Rafiq et al., 2021). Second, improving pronunciation feedback is crucial. Many learners face challenges with pronunciation accuracy, a common issue in language learning apps. App developers should focus on refining this feature to provide more authentic and reliable feedback. Enhancing pronunciation tools will help learners correct mistakes more effectively and build greater confidence in speaking (Saleem et al., 2022).

Furthermore, motivational features such as gamification or progress tracking should be incorporated into apps. These elements can help learners stay committed and disciplined in their learning routines. Given the self-regulated nature of mobile learning, integrating features that encourage consistent use will improve overall outcomes (Karakaya & Bozkurt, 2022). Lastly, a blended learning approach is recommended, combining the flexibility of mobile learning with the structure of traditional classroom instruction. This hybrid model offers a more holistic learning experience and addresses the limitations of app-based instruction. Educators and institutions should guide learners in selecting the most suitable apps and provide additional support, such as pronunciation workshops or peer study groups, to help overcome challenges and enhance learning.

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