

## Utilizing Mobile Apps and Games to Implement MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) during Covid-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly changed the field of education, prompting a shift toward remote and online learning. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has emerged as an innovative method of language acquisition, that is focusing on the widespread availability of mobile devices and applications. Regarding the benefits of implementing MALL during the pandemic, this study aims to discuss further on how English teachers in Indonesia utilized mobile apps and games to implement MALL during the pandemic as well as the benefits and the challenges. A comprehensive search approach will be utilized for discovering relevant research published in academic journals and conference proceedings. The selected research will go through a rigorous screening procedure to guarantee their relevance and quality. The result of the study showed that teachers commonly used WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Zoom, and Kahoot! to facilitate students' language learning. In addition, the previous studies mentioned that the benefits of utilizing mobile apps and games in teaching English are including learning flexibility, individuality, and practical use of them. Meanwhile, the challenges faced by the learners are an unstable internet connection as well as the difficulty in controlling the classroom experienced by the teacher.

**Keywords:** *covid-19; language learning; MALL; mobile apps; mobile games.*

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## INTRODUCTION

As technology and internet-based service continue to develop, the world of education also shifted from the conventional to the modern method by incorporating technology and internet-based service into the teaching-learning process. Ever since mobile phones developed into one of the most dependable technologies for humans in everyday life, many creators made a breakthrough innovation by releasing various mobile apps and games specifically addressed to facilitate the teaching-learning process in a more entertaining way. Since then, there is a new genre in the education field referred to as mobile learning and what is emphasized in the emergence of this method is that it should not substitute the existing or primary learning devices, rather it should be complementary to the primary teaching devices. In language teaching, mobile learning is also referred to as MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) with the characteristic to be informal, spontaneous, personalized, and universal (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012). MALL was first introduced by Twarog & Pereszlenyi-Pinter in the 80s through their study on how teachers utilized telephones to assist language learning. The telephone was used to overcome the distance between students and teachers during language learning, mainly used by the teachers to give feedback and assistance to the students. Considering the rapid development of technology nowadays, devices used in MALL are no longer limited to

conventional phones but also include smartphones (Hashim, Md. Yunus, Amin Embi, & Mohamed Ozir, 2017).

By the time, the use of MALL is becoming more common, even more, when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in late 2019, schools and institutions had no choice but to depend on online technology to provide education to the students. More teachers ended up adopting MALL to classroom activity to support the implementation of online learning. The implementation of MALL gives some advantages for both teachers and students. First, MALL allows the students to learn a language without being worried about distance. Students can attend classroom activities even when they are not in the classroom. Second, MALL offers portability, individuality, and connectivity. Portability means that students can bring their mobile devices anywhere they go. Individuality means that they can access the device personally without having to share with others. Connectivity refers to how MALL facilitates everyone in the classroom to connect with each other without having to physically meet each other (Krishna, 2019). With these advantages, MALL becomes one of the prominent solutions to overcome obstacles in language learning during the pandemic.

In such a case, despite the greater interest in using mobile apps and games for Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) during the Covid-19, there is a gap in the literature for a comprehensive systematic evaluation of existing research

in this field on how English teachers in Indonesia utilized mobile apps and games to implement MALL during the pandemic. While a number of researchers have investigated the efficacy of various mobile apps or games for language learning, a systematic review is required to synthesize the current evidence and provide a comprehensive grasp of the subject. In addition, the discussion includes any challenges that teachers and students had from the implementation of MALL during the pandemic. The review is expected to provide insights on the use of MALL in overcoming teaching-learning problems during the pandemic which can be a practical recommendation for anyone to innovate better approaches or media to improve online learning environment.

## **METHOD**

This study is a literature study which means that the discussion presented is based on previous research and publication that are relevant to the focus on the study. The study chose previous research and publication which were published in the past 10 years, from 2012 to 2022. The discussion is presented in descriptive qualitative which means that all data are delivered through written words instead of numbers. Regarding the procedure for writing the research, the researcher carried out several stages to collect the data. The first step is narrowing the discussion by highlighting the term MALL as the most common method used during the pandemic. After that, the

researcher needs to gather data about mobile applications and games used by English teachers in conducting online classes. The researcher also needs to focus on the benefits and the challenges of using applications and games in teaching English.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Utilizing Mobile Apps to Implement MALL during COVID-19**

The implementation of MALL nowadays also includes the utilization of smartphones and their features which also include the apps released for smartphone uses, such as social media, language learning apps, utility, and productivity apps. A recent study was conducted to investigate how teachers implemented MALL by incorporating some mobile apps in online classrooms during the pandemic. It was reported that the teacher chose to start the class by using Whatsapp, a messaging app for smartphones. Teachers used Whatsapp to greet the students, check their attendance, and share the classroom link for online activity. After sharing the invitation link, teachers and students moved to another mobile app called Google Classroom. Teachers utilized Google Classroom to share learning materials and homework with the students. Although the teachers used only two to three different mobile apps, they admitted that there were still challenges she needed to face. One of them is related to students' internet access because most of the time, students would only have access to Whatsapp but did not have enough balance to access other apps.

Even though the government gave some free internet balance for students to support their learning activities during the pandemic, some students mentioned that their devices are not compatible and thus they could not claim the free balance from the government (Febriyanti, Putra, & Santosa, 2021). Another study also reported that teachers also faced challenges in implementing MALL during the pandemic mainly because issues on an internet connection, unfamiliarity with mobile apps or new features, and the lack of motivation and interest from the students during online learning (Lestari, Zumrudiana, Fatoni, Nahdlatul, & Sunan, 2022).

Similarly, another study conducted in another high school in Indonesia also reported that the teachers chose to utilize Google Classroom to teach English via online during the pandemic. The coordination regarding the access to Google Classroom was also shared by Whatsapp group to the students. The teachers would usually deliver PPT and Youtube video links as learning materials and questionnaires as students' homework through Google Classroom. In return, the students will submit their assignments through Google Classroom and check on the attendance list. When it comes to the challenge in utilizing mobile apps to facilitate MALL during the pandemic, the teachers mentioned that the main issue was about time management. Although the teacher had tried their best to deliver the materials on time, some students would miss the class and access the materials late.

Teachers did not have control over students' punctuality in attending the class since it is conducted online and there were just too many factors affecting students' attendance in the classroom (Setiawan & Entusiastik, 2022).

Besides Google Classroom and Whatsapp, another mobile app that emerged to facilitate MALL during the pandemic is known to be Zoom which is also widely used by many schools and institutions for online learning. A study revealed that teachers chose to utilize Zoom instead of Whatsapp and Google Classroom in their teaching due to some reasons. First, students seemed reluctant and not confident to be active in the group discussion platform from Google Classroom, not many of them actively participated in the discussion board. Students who participated in the interview of this study admitted that they had no confidence to send their questions and responses to the discussion board. Second, using Whatsapp for MALL during the pandemic often resulted in bad time management. The case was about teachers who had another activity besides teaching, who had to reply to anything students' asked on Whatsapp, which was mostly sent outside the teaching hours and disrupted the teacher's private life, making the daily time management seem dysfunctional. When it comes to the utilization of Zoom, teachers mostly used it as a platform to give lectures to students and open a virtual discussion with the class. The benefits of utilizing Zoom include practical control on

students' engagement during classroom activity and a better environment to implement games and other interactive learning method. However, slow internet speed and poor internet connection were still huge issues when it comes to online learning and MALL (Mu'awanah, Sumardi, & Suparno, 2022). Another study explained that Zoom is indeed effective to implement MALL during the pandemic which was proven by statistical data on students' academic performance. The teacher utilized Zoom to give lectures on writing skills and shared learning materials with students. Among 30 students who participated in the study, 26 of them produced a good-quality of writing, meaning only 4 students scored below average. Thus, the study concluded that Zoom can be considered as one of the success factors in students' academic achievement. With a good platform, teachers provide good explanations which make it easier for students to learn optimally. Based on the questionnaire result, 90% of the students agreed that the utilization of Zoom helped them to understand the materials easily, 90% of them also agreed that the presentation of materials in Zoom became entertaining since the app has some additional features, and 85% also agreed that using Zoom created a conducive learning process (Erna, Asriani, Genisa, Muslaini, & Suhartini, 2022).

Of course, the implementation of MALL is not limited to the use of mobile utility or productivity apps, such as Google Classroom, Whatsapp, and Zoom, but also

includes the use of apps specifically designed for language learning, such as Duolingo. A study was also conducted to investigate the use of Duolingo in facilitating students' language learning during the pandemic. The teacher encouraged students to use Duolingo to practice their English outside school hours. Students could practice their English by answering quizzes and completing the challenges provided by the app. The result of this implementation was divided into two responses, the positive and the negative ones. On the positive side, students mentioned that Duolingo helped them to learn English in a simple way beginners can understand. Even more, Duolingo helped them to learn and master new vocabulary as well. However, the utilization of language apps like Duolingo also had its challenges. For students in the intermediate level, Duolingo appeared to be boring. The reason might be related to the quiz content in the app, which might not be suitable and intriguing enough for intermediate learners. Moreover, language apps do not offer discussion boards with other users so students cannot have discussions with their friends in the app (Nadhifah & Puspitasari, 2021).

Another language app utilized to implement MALL is known to be Hello, a mobile app designed to help users to learn various languages all over the world, including English. It has interactive lesson materials for users which mainly focus on grammar and vocabulary learning. A study revealed how teachers utilized Hello to

implement MALL during the pandemic and expected improvement in students' vocabulary knowledge. Teachers used the Hello app to teach new vocabulary to the students during online learning. The study delivered a pre-and post-test to investigate how effective the Hello app is in improving students' vocabulary during online learning. The result showed that students scored better in the post-test, indicating that the Hello app was significantly useful to help students learn new vocabulary amidst the pandemic. The study also emphasized the importance of seeking an entertaining alternative to help learners learn English during the pandemic (Sudarmaji, Forsia, Permata, Siregar, & Yusuf, 2022).

### **Utilizing Mobile Games to Implement MALL during COVID-19**

Besides mobile apps, teachers can also use mobile games to implement MALL during the pandemic. There are many mobile games released to specifically help mobile users to learn a language in an entertaining way. Some of the games are also designed for educational purposes, such as Kahoot! and Quizziz, a game-based platform specifically designed for educational purposes. Some studies had also investigated how teachers utilized mobile games to implement MALL during the pandemic. One of the studies was conducted to examine how teachers utilize Kahoot! specifically, as a platform to teach high school students and delivered a formative assessment of the use of Kahoot!. The study mentioned that the participants

were intellectually homogeneous and had a predominantly visual learning style. The teacher incorporated Kahoot! in the classroom activity through three different phases. In phase 1, the teacher focused on using Kahoot! to create an interactive exercise and give feedback on students' performance for five weeks. Phase 2 consisted of a standardized and final review of students' assessments which was also delivered through Kahoot!. In the last phase, teachers gave the chance for researchers to deliver questionnaires and obtain research data from the students. The result of the study showed that students had a positive perception of the use of Kahoot! in online learning during the pandemic. Using Kahoot! helped students to stay motivated while doing their assignments as well as facilitated students to learn English in an entertaining yet understandable interface (Toma, Diaconu, & Popescu, 2021).

Another study even reported that Kahoot! can also function well to help students with special needs learn English, especially in gaining and mastering new vocabulary. In general, students with special needs are grouped into different categories, which are students with mental retardation, students with learning disabilities, students with developmental impairment, students with behavioral and emotional disorders, hyperactive students, children with visual impairment, deaf speech students, students with special talents and gifted, students who are physically handicapped, and autistic

students. In order to help these students to learn English effectively, the teacher used Kahoot! in online learning during the pandemic. Whenever the students showed signs of struggle, the teacher jumped in to help the student in need. The result of utilizing Kahoot! showed that the students demonstrated high motivation to participate in using Kahoot! and answered all the questions in the app. Students showed that they understand the meaning of the new vocabulary they have learned by using Kahoot!. Even though students seemed to be reluctant in the first meeting, they became more active and motivated in the second meeting. They even delivered immediate responses regarding their participation in answering all the questions in the game. However, the implementation also had some issues such as when some students could not access Kahoot! from their device and there were some questions were inaccessible in Kahoot! and it seems to be a system error the teacher cannot solve (Anandha, Anggraheni, & Yogatama, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Through the discussion above, it can be summed up that MALL implementation during the pandemic can depend on various mobile apps and games, such as utility or productivity apps and some apps that have been developed specifically to help the users to learn English. Some common mobile apps used by English teachers include Whatsapp, Google Classroom and Zoom. While Kahoot!

became a popular option to use when it comes to mobile games to learn English. The benefits in utilizing mobile apps and games to implement MALL during the pandemic clearly relate to the flexibility of mobile apps and games, the individuality, and the ease of use which is practical to many. However, it also has its own challenges. First, teachers and students might struggle with low and unstable internet connection which would disrupt the use of the apps and the learning process. Second, the difficulty to control students' engagement and participation during online learning, and the compatibility of students' devices with the apps. For further research, the researcher hopes that further researchers can explore more on how effective the application is in developing each students' English skills. In addition, further researchers can also add several other applications or games that can support EFL learners in learning English during a pandemic.

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