EFL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE USE OF MALL TO PROMOTE STUDENTS’ LEARNING AUTONOMY

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Abstract
The emergence of internet connections and digital mobile apps has caused a massive integration of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in English language teaching. Learners are fond to use MALL to practice their English proficiency inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, with the assistance of MALL features, learners can enhance their English competence as well as their learning autonomy. In this study, we intend to investigate the perceptions of EFL students toward the use of MALL in English learning to promote their learning autonomy. Situated in a private university in Cirebon, this study voluntarily recruited four EFL students who have fulfilled a set of criteria to be involved in interview sessions and self-reflection. They are English students who have positive perceptions of technology acceptance and learning autonomy based on the data of a preliminary study. The findings show that participants perceived the ease of use and the usefulness of MALL applications in English learning. Besides, this study also reveals that participants agreed that MALL can support their learning autonomy outside the classroom. Some implications of the study are discussed further in this paper.

Keywords: EFL Students, learning autonomy, Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

INTRODUCTION
In this digital era, the educational process has been changed by technological developments. One of the strategies that can be applied to support is the use of mobile learning strategies. It is a learning strategy that can be implemented using mobile devices and carried out anywhere and anytime. Concerning language learning, mobile learning has further developed into the term Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL).

Abdelraheem & Ahmed (2015) stated that the use of Mobile Assisted Language Learning has an advantage in language learning. Krivoruchko et al. (2015) stated that the implementation of MALL facilitates students learning their target language anywhere and anytime. As supported by Dehkordi & Taki (2018), they found that students perceive positively the use of MALL in the EFL learning process. MALL has the potential to improve language learning by providing opportunities for students to have access to educational
materials and self-regulate their learning as well. It means that mobile learning has an opportunity to foster learner autonomy in their language learning activity.

Learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one’s learning and a potential capacity to act in a learning situation. Hermagustiana & Anggriyani (2020) stated that “Autonomy is currently viewed as a prerequisite for success in language learning”. It has become one of the most important themes in the field of foreign language learning and teaching. Holec (1981) and Little’s (1991) definitions of learner autonomy are strongly echoed by Littlewood (1996) who defines an autonomous learner as someone who has an independent capacity to make and carry out the choices which govern his or her actions. In addition, autonomous learning is the best way of learning which is applied by an individual due to his ability to find out their own learning needs, set their own learning goals, set the most appropriate way for their own.

Darsih & Asikin (2020) stated that almost all participants apply MALL by downloading and using English mobile applications to help their learning. This study also showed that students’ perceptions toward the use of MALL are considered to be useful and helped their learning, besides it was overall easy to use. Swatevacharkul & Boonma (2020) showed that the participants appeared to hold positive attitudes toward the concept of learner autonomy. Moosavi et al. (2019) found that learners use their mobile phones mainly for entertainment and communication rather than for learning purposes.

From those statements, the use of MALL in language learning strongly supports the students-centered methodology that is now being applied. The wealth of information sources and various supporting applications for language learning from mobile users can make it easier for students to find out the material they need autonomously. Despite those benefits, little is known about the factors that will affect learner acceptance of mobile learning. Therefore, many of them failed to notice that MALL has a great potential to be exploited in compliance with the student-centered methodology which leads to learner autonomy.

Investigating students’ perceived benefits toward language learning platforms and apps is determinant in understanding students’ self-directed learning out of the classroom (Nielson, 2011; Steel, 2012). Based on the theory of TAM (Technology Acceptance Model), two determinants are causes people to accept or reject the technology as well as to find out students’ perceived benefits on the use of mobile-assisted language learning (Davis, 1989). First is perceived usefulness, people tend to use or not use an application to the extent they believe it will help them perform their work better. Second is perceived ease of use, even if potential users believe that a given application is useful, they may, at the same time, believe that the system is too hard to use and that the performance benefits of usage are outweighed by the effort of using the application. What students’ perceived about the benefits of technology such as MALL is also related to autonomous learning that they can carry out which consists of several dimensions such as motivation, self-management, and self-monitoring.

Learner autonomy is defined as students who can be responsible for their learning activities (García Botero et al., 2019). In education, self-direction is seen as a method of organizing instruction (e.g. Harrison, 1978; Fisher, King, & Tague, 2001) as well as the learning process (Candy, 1991) with cognitive and motivational dimensions (Garrison, 1997). Garrison (1997) presents a comprehensive theoretical approach that integrates cognitive-motivational and social aspects in educational settings through three dimensions, motivation, self-management, and self-monitoring.
Purwaningrum & Yusuf (2019) concluded that many students showed positive attitudes toward the integration of MALL to foster learner autonomy. Swatevacharkul & Boonma (2020) showed that the participants appeared to hold positive attitudes toward the concept of learner autonomy. Based on those previous studies above, practically all understudies apply MALL by downloading and utilizing English mobile applications to help their language learning, but there were not a few students who utilized their mobile phones principally for entertainment and communication only instead of for learning purposes. On the other hand, many students show positive results and attitudes towards the implementation of MALL to foster their autonomous learning in English learning and the concept of learner autonomy itself.

Consequently, this present study attempts to find out the answer to these research questions: 1) What are the EFL students’ perceptions on the use of MALL in English learning?; 2) What are the EFL students’ perceptions on the use of MALL in learning autonomy? The objectives of this study are to find out EFL students’ perceptions towards the use of MALL in English learning and to explore EFL students’ perceptions towards the use of MALL in learning autonomy.

METHOD

In this study, the writer intends to find out students' perceptions of the use of MALL to increase learning independence by using qualitative methods. In qualitative studies, both theory development, selection of study questions, data collection, and analysis, all influence each other (Mehdiyev, 2020).

The research design used in this study is a case study design. A case study is an in-depth study of a specific research problem rather than a comprehensive statistical survey or a comprehensive comparative investigation. It is an approach ‘in which a particular instance or a few carefully selected cases are studied intensively’ (Gilbert 2008: 36). It is often used to narrow a very broad area of research to one or more easily researchable examples. Case study research designs are also useful for testing whether a particular theory or model applies to real phenomena (Kumar, 2011).

In this study, the writers use English Department students of a private university in Cirebon as participants. Participants have been determined by the purposive sampling method which is the most preferred method in qualitative research. Purposive sampling is a sample that is taken from the certain reflection that has been notorious before (Zainal Arifin 2011:221). The writer purposively recruited four EFL students who have fulfilled a set of criteria to be involved in interview sessions and self-reflection. They are English students who have positive perceptions of technology acceptance and learning autonomy based on the data of a preliminary questionnaire.

| Participant Name | Gender | Year | Interview | TAM | AL | Total Score |
|------------------|--------|------|-----------|-----|----|-------------|
| P1               | Male   | 3rd  | Yes       | 49  | 94 | 143         |
| P2               | Female | 3rd  | Yes       | 52  | 87 | 139         |
| P3               | Female | 4th  | Yes       | 45  | 93 | 138         |
| P4               | Female | 3rd  | Yes       | 46  | 90 | 136         |

The study will take multiple data sources, are interviews and self-reflection. The interview involved taking the following research questions. Kumar (2011, p. 123) stated that the use
of multiple methods to collect data is an important aspect of a case study, namely in-depth interviewing, obtaining information from questionnaires, gathering data through observations, collecting information through focus groups, and group interviews. The interview will be asked to the four (4) participants who had participated in the preliminary questionnaire before which was selected by the writer. Before the interview, each participant was asked to give their self-reflection of autonomous use of technology for language learning.

This study uses descriptive analysis. Based on the Wolcott Approach (1994), data analysis is the presentation of the collected data as accurately as possible to its original form and, if necessary, present it to the reader by quoting directly from what the individual said. It is very similar to the “descriptive analysis” approach is well known in the literature (Miles & Huberman 1994; Weitzman, 2000). Data analysis involves working with the data, organizing them into manageable coding units, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns (Bogdan 1982: 169).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

In the results of this study, the explanation of the results of interviews and self-reflection is divided into two themes, namely about the perception of EFL MALL students in learning English and the perception of EFL MALL students about learning independence. To make it easier for readers, the author provides the following code, P1 as Participant 1, P2 as Participant 2, P3 as Participant 3, and P4 as Participant 4.

EFL Students’ Perceptions of MALL in Learning English

In general, all participants in this study stated that they had used mobile in learning English. The sources and the applications they use are different from each other. Some participants use applications to learn English, such as the Duolingo App and English Grammar Expert, then others use common platforms, such as YouTube. Participants found it easy to use mobile. This can be seen from the freedom and flexibility in accessing mobile applications to learn English. It can be accessed anytime and anywhere as long as there is an internet connection.

“…learn by using apps. It's free, anytime and anywhere. It is also easy. I also use free applications, not paid ones, but they are quite complete.”(P2)

Participants stated that learning using mobile is clear and understandable. The mobile application helps participants to learn and practice as much English as possible. The availability of practice questions with complete explanations makes participants understand the English material they are learning.

“…it can help me to understand my English learning in the university right now.”(P1)

“YouTube is really helpful for me to learn English as much as possible.”(P2)

Participants can determine for themselves what they want to know and want to learn through the mobile application. Participants use mobile in their spare time to learn English well outside of class. They love to learn to use mobile with a variety of interesting content and features. They can set their learning targets to help improve their English skills.

“We can set ourselves when we want to learn, when we can improve our skills when others don’t know but we have the opportunity to learn more than that because we
have our own access on YouTube and it’s just better because we can determine ourselves.”(P3)

Participants admitted that the application they used was very easy to use and helped improve their English skills. Participants stated that mobile-based language learning is easy and free to use anywhere at any time. It also helps them learn as much English material as possible. It is provided exercises per material. Participants can decide for themselves when to access it, whether in their spare time or at least 4 days a week. They can be accessed freely according to what the participants want to know and learn.

In addition, participants also certainly feel the benefits of using mobile-based language learning devices. This can be seen by the availability of features that support learning English.

“The features of YouTube are not complicated so it is easy to use. It provides a lot of different kinds of videos that can be used to learn English.”(P3)

In addition to features, MALL also provides English content from basic to advanced levels that can help them to practice and practice the English skills they want to achieve. MALL also provides various kinds of content with a fairly broad scope.

“I prefer YouTube for my English learning, because there are many contents for English learning, especially about an informal language that I really want to learn.”(P2)

The next benefit of using MALL that participants felt was improving learning productivity. MALL provides complete English learning activities including English skills practices. In addition, MALL also provides many exercises with a focus on discussion according to the English skills that participants want to master.

“In the English Grammar Expert application, there are many exercises which are more focused on structure, what articles are used, what nouns and adjectives are, so it’s more about writing.” (P4)

Participants admitted that MALL provides fun learning. The MALL application provides a variety of content that is not only focused on learning but can also be enjoyed with entertainment content that is still related to learning English. MALL also provides game-based exercises that attract the attention of participants to continue learning English.

“English Grammar Expert application provides game-based exercises so it doesn’t get boring.”(P4)

Participants emphasized that using MALL was useful to improve and evaluate their English skills. Learning English about vocabulary, learning through videos, and doing exercises using MALL can help participants to improve the English skills they want to achieve. In addition, the various English learning contents beyond the classroom provided by MALL have a wide scope, which can add more knowledge of new English material.

“I tried to find English learning from YouTube so that I felt improvement and found it easy to speak English. In my opinion, I feel I have improved more in speaking and listening skills, I also feel there is progress in my listening skill because I feel that when I take TOEFL, I can do well compared to the first semester.”(P3)

The perceptions of participants towards the ease of use and the usefulness of MALL applications are relatively in line. They consider that the use of MALL is very easy to use and help them to learn English besides in the classroom. As in underlined, the availability
of features and contents that support learning English. Then, the easy and flexible use of MALL allows participants to determine by themselves what they want to know and want to learn through the MALL applications. As well as providing clear and understandable learning. It can improve learning productivity. MALL provides fun learning which is useful for improving and evaluating English skills.

**EFL Students’ Perceptions of MALL for Learning Autonomy**

All participants agreed that MALL helps them to implement autonomous learning outside the classroom. Participants stated that MALL provides many features with attractive and fun appearances. Those features can motivate them to learn English independently anywhere and anytime. Besides, the participants can access English content easily and determine self-management as well as self-monitoring in learning independently.

“They think the use of MALL can be more useful and helpful for learning independently outside the classroom. It is because it has a lot of kinds of features or displays that can motivate me to learn English well. Besides that, the learning applications sometimes have many kinds of questions so that we have many chances to practice. Moreover, we can use learning applications anytime and anywhere.”(P4)

**Motivation**

Overall, participants perceived that MALL motivated them to develop their English skills to be better than before. Participants stated that the features, content, and exercises available at MALL motivated them to improve their English skills. MALL provides features in the form of a weekly/monthly ranking system and a time management system that can be set by yourself as a reminder of study time. The many of the features and attractive displays of MALL applications motivate them to learn English which can be done anywhere and anytime.

“Duolingo really makes me want to improve my English skill to be better than before and also can evaluate my learning by the ranking system. Weekly rankings are very helpful in motivating us to increase our enthusiasm for learning and opening applications.”(P1)

The availability of many contents motivates participants to learn English as much as possible. The content can be in the form of shows, films, or the learning video itself. It helps them recheck their understanding of English from basic to advanced levels, also helping to enrich the vocabulary they didn’t get in class. In addition, it also evaluates their English skills. MALL is very motivating to learn because there is a lot of content to learn English.

“YouTube is really helpful for me to learn English as much as possible. Because there are many contents for English learning, especially about an informal language that I really want to learn” (P2)

In addition, there are many exercises in various contexts according to the English skills they want to achieve. Learning English using MALL can be done whenever the participant wants. Also, the form of game-based exercises makes participants not easily bored and motivates them to continue practicing.

“In the English Grammar Expert, there are many exercises which made me keep trying the exercises and also reading the material until the score I got was perfect. And the question can be tried again and again, but even if it’s repeated, maybe later the order of the number will change. So there is motivation to learn.”(P4)
As underlined, MALL encourages the participants to learn English material continuously. The interesting features and game-based exercises in MALL motivated the participants to study English independently.

**Self-Management**

Participants perceived that MALL allowed them to be independent in language learning. Participants had integrated MALL applications to want to learn more about English material and improving their English skill. Participants used it depending on the mood of the participants. It can be once a week, twice a week or more, several times in a month, every day, or whenever there is free time, participants can freely learn and practice.

“I open it when I'm free. I just don't want to be pressured by a schedule that requires regular practice, at least 1 day 5 minutes, but sometimes it only works 4 days a week”(P1)

But besides that, participants also felt that there was a difference between learning in using MALL and learning with the teacher directly, the limitations of feedback and explanation of the material in the application made participants have to look to other sources which often got even more confused.

“The limitation of learning autonomously using MALL is there is no mentor that can guide us to explain it more about the material or something, or maybe just give us motivation directly. Moreover, no matter how sophisticated technology in education is, it cannot replace the role of teachers in the teaching and learning process.”(P4)

In this view, participants actively do their learning process with the MALL applications available and get feedback during their autonomous learning. As underlined, the participants used the MALL applications as their learning resources. They used it based on their mood, it can be every day or several times in a month. But besides that, the participants also need a teacher role as a mentor who can guide them to explain more about the material and provide feedback as well as motivation for their autonomous learning activities.

**Self-Monitoring**

The integration of MALL in learning English using applications such as Duolingo, YouTube, and English Grammar Expert, allow participants to improve their English skills. It can improve writing, speaking, listening, and reading skills as well.

“Now, I can speak English better even though just talking to myself, because I used to have some difficulties when it comes to speaking. My listening also got better and I have proven myself by getting quite high scores in my listening test recently, meanwhile in the past I always suffered in my listening class because I misheard a lot due to the lack of vocabulary and its pronunciation.”(P3)

The participants are responsible for understanding personal abilities, which is integrating new ideas and understanding with prior knowledge. As underlined, they realized that there was an increase in their English skills such as speaking, reading, listening, writing, grammar and vocabulary. This showed their ability to be reflective and think critically.

**Discussions**

In the findings section, students' perceptions of mobile devices in learning English, it was revealed that students are very aware of the usefulness and ease of use that mobile applications currently provide to support their English learning. In line with the theory of TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) which suggests that there are two determining
factors that cause a person to realize the advantages of technology, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989).

Students’ perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of technology in this study cannot be avoided from the presence of MALL which they can use to learn English independently. The finding showed that all participants in this study use MALL apps like Duolingo, YouTube, and English Grammar Expert for English learning. In line with Darsih & Asikin (2020), the findings showed that almost all participants apply to MALL by downloading and using English mobile applications to help their learning. It gives students the ability and also the opportunity to use learning resources outside the classroom with MALL using applications with features and content that support learning English as they want and provide a broad learning scope. White (2015) indicates students’ ability and opportunity to get other sources for their language learning included as one of the technology use benefits.

Through using MALL applications, the participants in this study admitted that it can improve their English skills in accordance with the ease of accessing it anywhere and anytime through the available internet connection. According to participants, the freedom and convenience of the MALL application that they use in learning English allows them to determine for themselves what they want to know and want to learn. In addition, Lai & Gu (2013) points out that the use of MALL plays a dominant role in student performance in learning language autonomously.

The findings revealed that students used MALL applications in their learning such as Duolingo, YouTube, and English Grammar Expert. They use the application outside of the classroom to find out and learn the material they want to learn or the material they do not get during learning in the classroom. It can be seen that EFL students have a positive perception of the integration of MALL in their autonomous learning. In line with Purwaningrum & Yusuf (2019), found that many students showed positive attitudes toward the integration of MALL to foster learner autonomy. Students’ autonomous learning activities themselves are divided into three domains, they are Motivation, Self-Management, and Self-Monitoring according to a comprehensive theoretical approach that integrates cognitive-motivational and social aspects in educational settings (Garrison, 1997).

The findings show that the interesting features and game-based exercises provided by MALL encourages students to be motivated in learning English material. This can be regarded as an indication that learners hesitate to learn autonomously (Mehdiyev, 2020). For example, by using those applications, students are motivated to improve their English skills and learn English as much as possible. Presenting game-based learning, a ranking system, and many video contents make students enjoy learning. It can be seen that MALL motivates students to study autonomously through their mobile devices by using free apps in MALL to practice English and learn the English language that is not available in the classroom, they like the fun exercises and learning that available, especially the kind of game-like methodology, overall it can satisfy their English learning needs.

Garrison (1997) points out that students must proactively do their learning process, and choose available material resources, and get feedback during learning. It can be seen that students actively seek out, study, and evaluate English material that they feel they are still lacking or have not even learned yet through the applications they use. They learn English by using the app in any spare time they have or even every day, depending on their mood. Walsh, R (2019) points out that MALL provides opportunities to implement a communicative approach more successfully. It means that students can learn their target language anywhere and anytime.
The improvement of English language skills is felt by students while learning to use MALL, including in writing, speaking, and listening. Also, it’s improving vocabulary and even daily language such as idioms and slang. Chiu et al. (2015) points out that the use of mobile devices in language learning could improve students’ language skills through some features and applications that support language learners to improve their language skills. Students realize the lack of English language skills that they previously had and then use the MALL application to do a lot of practice and study the material they want to learn to get an improvement in the English skills they can feel today.

Students who can make their study plans, are aware of the abilities that must be developed, set goals in their learning, and organize learning to realize their learning goals, and organize and evaluate their learning activities can become basic abilities in independent learning. Demirtas (2010) argues that students with these abilities can direct their learning from beginning to end. However, the existence of independence in learning does not make all learning activities fully the responsibility of students, the role of the teacher here is also needed to support students' independent learning. Students need teachers as mentors who can guide them to provide immediate feedback and motivation.

**CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study shows that EFL students have a positive perception of the use of MALL in learning English. EFL students recognize the ease of use and usefulness they get while using MALL in learning English. First, for the perceived ease of using MALL, they are as follows, which are flexible to use anywhere, clear and understandable, and can determine the learning according to what they want to learn. Second, regarding the perceived usefulness by EFL students while using MALL in learning English, including the following, providing interesting features with varied content, providing lots of exercises, providing fun learning, and being able to improve their English skills.

Then, another conclusion obtained in this study is that the perception of EFL students on the use of MALL for learning autonomy is quite good. EFL students agreed that MALL helps them to implement autonomous learning outside the classroom. This can be seen from the three domains that support the ability to learn independently using MALL, there are motivation, self-management, and self-monitoring. In the motivation domain, EFL students stated the interesting features and game-based exercises in MALL motivated the participants to study English independently. Then, self-management shows that EFL students actively do their learning process with the MALL application available and get feedback during their autonomous learning. They are still requiring a teacher role as a mentor who can guide them to explain more about the material and provide feedback as well as motivation for their autonomous learning activities. And for self-monitoring, shows that EFL students are responsible for understanding personal abilities, which is integrating new ideas and understanding with prior knowledge. They realized that there was an improvement in their English skills such as speaking, reading, listening, writing, grammar and vocabulary.

Although this study found that EFL students showed a positive attitude towards the integration of MALL to foster student learning autonomy, it was only limited to the students' point of view. A question that remains to be resolved in future studies is related to how teachers put this strategy into practice. This is because not only students are the center of autonomous learning development, but teachers also have an important role in integrating mobile learning into autonomous language learning. Future studies could consider research.
on how teachers can use this platform as a tool to encourage independent language learning by focusing on improving specific English skills.

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