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## Computer-Mediated Communication in Vocational EFL Classrooms: Exploring the Effectiveness of HelloTalk on Speaking Competence

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### ABSTRACT

Writing descriptive texts remains a persistent challenge for EFL junior secondary students due to limited idea development, inadequate vocabulary mastery, and weak understanding of text structure. These difficulties indicate the need for instructional media that can provide concrete context and meaningful input to support writing development. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of tourism brochures as authentic visual media in improving students' descriptive writing skills and to identify factors influencing the improvement. The research employed Classroom Action Research, involving 16 Grade VIII students of SMP Da'wah Pekanbaru. Data were collected through writing tests, classroom observations, field notes, and interviews, and were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The findings reveal a significant improvement in students' writing achievement, as reflected in the increase of the mean score from 58.71 in the baseline assessment to 79.06 after the implementation cycle, exceeding the minimum mastery criterion. Qualitative data further indicate that tourism brochures facilitated idea generation, enhanced vocabulary use, and improved students' understanding of the generic structure of descriptive texts through engaging and familiar content. In conclusion, tourism brochures are effective instructional media for enhancing descriptive writing skills in EFL classrooms. It is suggested that English teachers integrate authentic visual materials systematically to foster students' writing competence and learning motivation.

**Key Words:** Tourism Brochure; Descriptive Writing; Authentic Media; Classroom Action Research

### ABSTRAK

Menulis teks deskriptif masih menjadi tantangan yang terus berlanjut bagi siswa sekolah menengah pertama EFL karena pengembangan ide yang terbatas, penguasaan kosakata yang tidak memadai, dan pemahaman yang lemah tentang struktur teks. Kesulitan-kesulitan ini menunjukkan perlunya media pembelajaran yang dapat memberikan konteks konkret dan masukan yang bermakna untuk

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mendukung pengembangan menulis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji keefektifan brosur pariwisata sebagai media visual otentik dalam meningkatkan kemampuan menulis deskriptif siswa dan mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi peningkatan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK), yang melibatkan 16 siswa kelas VIII SMP Da'wah Pekanbaru. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes menulis, observasi kelas, catatan lapangan, dan wawancara, dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan dalam prestasi menulis siswa, sebagaimana tercermin dalam peningkatan nilai rata-rata dari 58,71 pada penilaian awal menjadi 79,06 setelah siklus implementasi, melebihi kriteria ketuntasan minimal. Data kualitatif lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa brosur pariwisata memfasilitasi pemunculan ide, meningkatkan penggunaan kosakata, dan meningkatkan pemahaman siswa tentang struktur umum teks deskriptif melalui konten yang menarik dan familiar. Kesimpulannya, brosur pariwisata merupakan media pembelajaran yang efektif untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menulis deskriptif di kelas EFL. Disarankan agar guru bahasa Inggris mengintegrasikan materi visual otentik secara sistematis untuk menumbuhkan kompetensi menulis dan motivasi belajar siswa.

**Kata Kunci:** Brosur Pariwisata; Penulisan Deskriptif; Media Otentik; Penelitian Tindakan Kelas

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## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as a central productive skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it requires the simultaneous integration of several linguistic and cognitive components, including accurate pronunciation, grammatical control, lexical choice, fluency, and pragmatic comprehension. Unlike receptive skills, speaking demands real-time language processing and immediate interaction, which makes it particularly complex for learners in vocational high school contexts. Established theories of communicative competence emphasize that effective oral communication is not merely the production of correct linguistic forms, but the ability to use language appropriately and fluently in meaningful situations. Previous studies have consistently shown that EFL learners at the secondary and vocational levels often struggle with speaking due to limited opportunities for authentic interaction and an instructional focus that prioritizes written examinations over oral practice (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2021; Bozkurt et al., 2024). As a result, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills to master, especially for learners who require functional English for future workplace communication.

Empirical classroom observations conducted at SMKN 3 Pekanbaru further confirm these theoretical insights. The data reveal that students demonstrate low levels of speaking proficiency, characterized by hesitant speech, restricted vocabulary use, frequent grammatical inaccuracies, and unclear pronunciation. In addition to linguistic limitations, affective factors such as low self-confidence and high anxiety significantly hinder students' willingness to speak in English. This condition is exacerbated by minimal exposure to authentic English interaction both inside and outside the classroom, where learning activities tend to rely on teacher-centered instruction and textbook-based dialogues (Putra et al., 2024; Suryani, 2016). Similar findings have been reported in earlier EFL research, which highlights that insufficient communicative practice and limited exposure to real-life language use contribute to poor oral performance among vocational students. Therefore, the speaking difficulties observed at SMKN 3 Pekanbaru reflect a broader systemic issue in EFL instruction, underscoring the urgent need for empirically grounded pedagogical interventions that can enhance students'

confidence, interactional competence, and overall speaking performance in vocational education settings.

Recent advances in mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) have fundamentally reshaped how second and foreign languages are learned, particularly in contexts where learners have limited access to authentic communicative environments (Meshkat & Mohammadpour, 2019). The widespread adoption of smartphones and stable mobile internet has enabled language learning to extend beyond formal classrooms into daily social interactions, allowing learners to engage in continuous, context-rich practice. Empirical studies have consistently shown that MALL supports learner autonomy, increases exposure to target language input, and reduces affective barriers such as anxiety by offering flexible and personalized learning spaces (Greenhow et al., 2021; Li et al., 2025). These affordances are especially relevant for developing communicative competence, as learners can participate in real-time exchanges that mirror natural language use rather than rehearsed classroom dialogues.

Within this evolving MALL landscape, opportunities for authentic interaction with both native and non-native speakers have become a central pedagogical advantage. Interactionist theories of second language acquisition argue that language development is significantly driven by negotiation of meaning, feedback, and modified output during interaction (Bansal & Choudhary, 2024). Mobile platforms that support synchronous and asynchronous communication enable learners to experience these interactional processes in situ, responding to communicative breakdowns and receiving immediate linguistic input. Recent empirical evidence indicates that such mobile-mediated interactions contribute to improved fluency, pragmatic awareness, and lexical development, particularly when learners are engaged in goal-oriented conversations (Pangrazio et al., 2020).

According to Yang & Yang (2025), HelloTalk exemplifies how computer-mediated communication (CMC) applications can operationalize these theoretical principles in practical learning contexts. As a language exchange platform, HelloTalk facilitates text, voice, and multimodal interaction with a global community of users, creating authentic communicative conditions that are rarely attainable in conventional classrooms. Its features, such as instant messaging, voice notes, and corrective feedback tools, align closely with communicative language teaching, which prioritizes meaningful use of language over form-focused drills (Zhuang, 2023). Through repeated interaction, learners are encouraged to co-construct meaning, experiment with linguistic forms, and develop communicative confidence in real-world contexts.

Moreover, the pedagogical relevance of HelloTalk is strengthened by its compatibility with contemporary views on socially mediated learning. Sociocultural theory emphasizes that language learning occurs through social interaction and scaffolding provided by more competent interlocutors (Vygotsky, 1978). In HelloTalk, learners are not passive recipients of content but active participants in reciprocal exchanges, where feedback and support emerge organically from interaction with diverse users. Recent studies have reported that such CMC-based exchanges foster sustained engagement and intercultural awareness, positioning HelloTalk as a viable MALL tool for addressing persistent challenges in developing communicative competence in EFL and ESL contexts (Klimova & Zamborova, 2020).

A growing body of research has demonstrated that online chat environments play a significant role in enhancing learners' oral fluency, autonomy, and motivation in second and foreign language learning. Grounded in sociocultural theory and interactionist perspectives, these studies emphasize that language development is facilitated through meaningful

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interaction, negotiation of meaning, and exposure to authentic input. Empirical evidence from computer-mediated communication (CMC) research shows that synchronous and asynchronous chat platforms provide learners with extended opportunities to practice speaking without the immediate pressure commonly found in face-to-face classrooms. Studies by Abbas Shah et al., (2024); Brunetti et al., (2020) & Timotheou et al., (2023) confirm that digital interaction encourages learners to take more initiative, experiment with language forms, and sustain longer stretches of discourse, which are key indicators of oral fluency development. Additionally, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) research highlights that applications integrating real-time communication with native or proficient speakers can foster learner autonomy by allowing students to control the pace, topic, and frequency of their interactions.

Despite these promising findings, empirical investigations situated in vocational EFL classrooms remain relatively scarce. Most existing studies have focused on general secondary or tertiary education contexts, often overlooking the unique characteristics of vocational learners, whose communicative needs are closely tied to workplace demands and practical oral proficiency. Vocational students typically require functional speaking skills for professional interaction rather than purely academic communication, which necessitates contextualized and authentic learning environments. Previous research has suggested that instructional approaches effective in general EFL settings may not automatically transfer to vocational contexts due to differences in learner motivation, curriculum orientation, and exposure to real-world language use (Hyland, 2021). Consequently, there is a clear research gap regarding how mobile chat applications function as pedagogical tools within vocational education, particularly when integrated into classroom-based instructional cycles.

Responding to this gap, the present study examines the use of the HelloTalk application as a medium for improving students' speaking skills in a vocational EFL context. HelloTalk is a mobile-based language exchange platform that enables learners to interact with global users through voice messages, text chat, and corrective feedback features. Drawing on principles of communicative language teaching and experiential learning, this study employs Classroom Action Research to systematically investigate both the extent of students' speaking improvement and the pedagogical factors contributing to that improvement. Classroom Action Research is particularly suitable for this inquiry because it allows iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, thereby generating empirical evidence directly rooted in classroom practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2006). By combining observational data, speaking performance measures, and reflective analysis, this study not only evaluates learning outcomes but also identifies how learner engagement, interaction patterns, and technological affordances mediate speaking development. In doing so, the research contributes context-specific evidence to the growing literature on mobile-assisted speaking instruction and offers practical implications for vocational EFL pedagogy.

## **METHODS**

### *Research design*

This study adopted Classroom Action Research (CAR) as the methodological framework to address concrete instructional challenges in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking instruction and to generate systematic improvement through reflective practice. CAR was selected because it emphasizes cyclical inquiry grounded in real classroom contexts, allowing teachers to diagnose problems, implement targeted interventions, and

refine instructional strategies based on observed outcomes (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2006). In this research, the CAR cycle consisted of four interrelated stages such as planning, action, observation, and reflection that are implemented in an integrated manner across five classroom meetings. This single-cycle design was considered sufficient, as preliminary observations indicated that the primary instructional issue was specific and well-defined, namely limited authentic speaking opportunities. The reflective nature of CAR enabled continuous alignment between pedagogical decisions and empirical classroom evidence, ensuring that the intervention remained responsive to learners' needs and contextual constraints.

### ***Research site and participants***

The research was conducted at SMKN 3 Pekanbaru, a public vocational high school where English instruction is oriented toward functional communication skills relevant to students' future professions. The participants were 20 eleventh-grade students from class XI Tata Boga 1, a culinary arts program, selected through purposive sampling to represent a typical vocational EFL classroom. The class exhibited heterogeneous speaking proficiency, ranging from low-confidence speakers with limited fluency to students with moderate communicative ability. Such diversity aligns with previous findings that vocational EFL classrooms often present mixed proficiency profiles due to varied linguistic exposure and learning motivation (Cummins, 1979). The selection of this group was pedagogically justified, as speaking competence is essential for vocational students who may interact with international clients or work environments. Therefore, the participants provided a relevant and authentic context for examining the effectiveness of mobile-assisted speaking instruction.

### ***Data collection and analysis***

Data collection employed a mixed-methods approach to capture both measurable learning outcomes and the qualitative dynamics of the instructional process. Quantitative data were obtained through speaking tests administered before and after the instructional intervention to assess changes in students' speaking performance, particularly in fluency, pronunciation, and communicative responsiveness. These scores were analyzed using mean score comparison to identify patterns of improvement, a method commonly applied in classroom-based language research to detect instructional impact (Fang & Abdullah, 2024). Complementing the quantitative data, qualitative evidence was gathered through structured observation checklists, detailed field notes, and semi-structured interviews. These instruments documented students' engagement, interaction patterns, and affective responses during the guided use of the HelloTalk application, which facilitated real-time interaction with foreign users via text messages, voice notes, and discussion-based tasks. Qualitative data were systematically coded and thematically interpreted to reveal recurring behaviors and perceptions, following established qualitative analysis procedures (Miles et al., 2020). Triangulation across data sources strengthened the validity of the findings by ensuring consistency between performance gains and observed learning processes, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of how mobile-assisted interaction influenced students' speaking development.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Findings***

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The baseline assessment conducted prior to the instructional intervention demonstrated that students' average speaking achievement remained below the institutional minimum mastery criterion. This finding empirically indicates that learners entered the learning process with limited oral English proficiency, particularly in fluency, vocabulary use, and interactive competence. From a theoretical perspective, this condition aligns with communicative language teaching and input-interaction theories, which emphasize that insufficient exposure to authentic interaction constrains the development of speaking skills (Bozkurt et al., 2024). The low initial performance therefore reflects not only individual learner limitations but also a learning context that had not yet provided adequate opportunities for meaningful spoken communication.

After the implementation of HelloTalk as a mobile-assisted language learning tool, a substantial increase in students' mean speaking scores was observed. The post-intervention results exceeded the institutional passing standard, indicating a statistically and pedagogically meaningful improvement. This outcome supports established research on mobile-assisted language learning, which argues that technology-mediated interaction can extend language exposure beyond the classroom and promote more frequent practice. By enabling real-time communication with diverse interlocutors, HelloTalk appears to have functioned as an authentic communicative environment, reinforcing learners' confidence and accuracy in spoken English.

In addition to the rise in mean scores, the number of students achieving satisfactory speaking performance increased markedly. This pattern suggests that the intervention did not benefit only high-achieving learners but contributed to a more evenly distributed improvement across the class. Gains were evident across key speaking components, including pronunciation, fluency, grammatical accuracy, and interactional responsiveness. Such comprehensive improvement is consistent with sociocultural theory, which posits that language development emerges through social interaction and collaborative meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978). The interactive features of HelloTalk appear to have supported this process by situating learners within a socially meaningful communicative context.

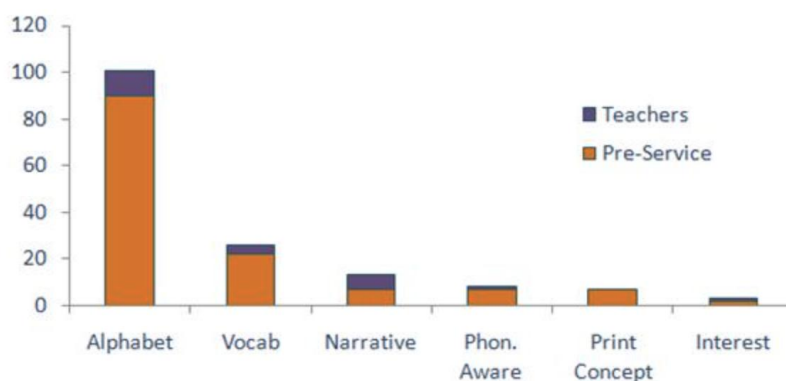
Classroom observation data further corroborated the quantitative findings. During learning activities, students demonstrated higher participation levels, increased use of English, and greater willingness to initiate and sustain communication. Learners who had previously been passive became more engaged, indicating a shift in affective factors such as anxiety and motivation. This behavioral change aligns with the affective filter hypothesis, which suggests that lowered anxiety and increased motivation facilitate language acquisition (Krashen, 2003). The integration of a familiar mobile application may have reduced psychological barriers and fostered a supportive learning atmosphere conducive to speaking practice.

Interview findings reinforced these observations by revealing consistently positive student perceptions toward the use of HelloTalk. Learners reported that the platform made speaking practice more engaging, relevant, and practical, as it allowed them to use English in real-life communicative situations rather than simulated classroom tasks. These perceptions echo previous studies highlighting that learners value technology-enhanced instruction when it provides authenticity and learner autonomy. Collectively, the quantitative and qualitative evidence indicates that HelloTalk effectively enhanced students' speaking proficiency by addressing both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning, thereby affirming its relevance as an empirically grounded instructional strategy in contemporary EFL contexts.

**Table 1 Title**

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme one: The comprehensive overview of the bilingual education program	Status Accreditation Admission policy Student body Curriculum Teachers Language policy Teaching materials Student assessment

**Figure 1** Numbers of Teachers and Pre-Service



## Discussion

The observed improvement in students' speaking performance provides strong empirical support for interactionist theories of second language acquisition, which argue that language development is fundamentally shaped by meaningful interaction and negotiation of meaning. From this perspective, oral proficiency does not emerge solely from internal cognitive processing but is gradually constructed through communicative exchanges that require learners to respond, clarify, and adjust their language use in real time. The findings of this study align with Long's Interaction Hypothesis, which posits that interactional modifications, such as feedback and clarification requests, facilitate comprehensible input and promote language development. When learners are engaged in authentic communicative situations, they are more likely to notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge and actively attempt to resolve them through speech, leading to measurable gains in fluency, accuracy, and pragmatic competence.

The role of HelloTalk as a computer-mediated communication (CMC) platform further reinforces the interactionist view by situating learners within authentic communicative contexts that closely resemble natural language use. Unlike classroom-based speaking activities that often rely on simulated dialogues, HelloTalk connects learners with real interlocutors who possess diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This exposure enables students to experience spontaneous conversational turns, varied accents, and natural discourse patterns, all of which are critical components of oral proficiency development.

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Previous studies on CMC-based language learning have consistently shown that interaction with native or proficient speakers enhances learners' communicative competence by providing rich input and opportunities for output in low-pressure environments (Byram et al., 2013).

Moreover, the effectiveness of HelloTalk can be partially explained through the lens of affective theories in second language learning, particularly Krashen's (2003) Affective Filter Hypothesis. The platform's informal and socially oriented design appears to reduce learners' speaking anxiety, which is a well-documented barrier to oral participation in traditional classroom settings. By allowing learners to communicate asynchronously or synchronously at their own pace, HelloTalk lowers psychological pressure and encourages experimentation with language forms. As a result, learners become more willing to take risks, initiate conversations, and sustain interaction, which are essential behaviors for developing speaking confidence and competence. Empirical evidence from recent studies indicates that mobile-assisted language learning environments can significantly decrease communication apprehension while increasing learners' motivation to speak (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021; Panagiotidis, 2018).

In addition, the encouragement of risk-taking in spoken English observed in this study reflects the Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of producing language as a catalyst for learning. Through repeated interactions on HelloTalk, learners are pushed to articulate their ideas clearly and respond to interlocutors' messages, thereby transforming passive knowledge into active communicative ability. Feedback from conversation partners, whether explicit or implicit, serves as a valuable source of corrective input that guides learners toward more accurate and appropriate language use. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that HelloTalk is not merely a technological tool but a pedagogically meaningful medium that operationalizes established theories of second language acquisition, confirming its relevance for improving students' speaking performance in contemporary EFL contexts.

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate a clear consistency with earlier scholarly work that positions text- and voice-based online interaction as a significant catalyst for improving language fluency and lexical retrieval. In digitally mediated learning environments, learners are provided with extended opportunities to process input and produce output in ways that are both cognitively manageable and socially meaningful. Text-based interaction, in particular, allows learners to slow down their production process, giving them time to access lexical items, organize syntactic structures, and self-monitor their language use. This condition supports the automatization of vocabulary retrieval, a process that has been theoretically grounded in information-processing models of second language acquisition, which emphasize repeated access to lexical forms as a prerequisite for fluency development (Cheng & Zhang, 2021).

In parallel, voice-based online interaction contributes a complementary dimension by simulating real-time communicative pressure while still offering a lower affective barrier compared to face-to-face interaction. Prior studies have shown that synchronous voice communication enhances oral fluency by encouraging spontaneous language production and fostering rapid lexical access under time constraints (Putra et al., 2024). The present findings reinforce this perspective, indicating that learners exposed to voice-mediated interaction gradually reduce hesitation phenomena and demonstrate more efficient word retrieval. This outcome is consistent with Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis, which argues that meaningful language production pushes learners to notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge and actively

seek appropriate lexical forms to convey meaning effectively.

Moreover, the convergence of text- and voice-based modalities appears to create a synergistic learning environment that strengthens both controlled and automatic lexical processing. Research by Argudo-Serrano et al., (2023) & Golzar et al., (2024) suggest that multimodal online interaction supports deeper lexical engagement by combining reflective written exchanges with spontaneous spoken practice. The findings of this study extend this line of inquiry by empirically demonstrating that learners who engage in both modalities show greater consistency in lexical retrieval across communicative contexts. From a sociocultural perspective, this interactional richness aligns with Vygotskian theory, where language development is mediated through social interaction and scaffolded communication, even within digital spaces (Alamsyah & Sagama, 2024).

The findings demonstrate that affective variables particularly learners' confidence, enjoyment, and motivation play a decisive mediating role in the development of speaking proficiency. Empirical evidence from this study indicates that students who reported higher levels of confidence were more willing to take risks in oral communication, resulting in more frequent and sustained speaking practice. This pattern aligns with established affective theories in second language acquisition, which emphasize that reduced anxiety and increased self-efficacy lower the affective filter and facilitate language intake and output (Krashen, 2003). Enjoyment further reinforced this process by creating positive emotional engagement, enabling learners to perceive speaking tasks not as evaluative threats but as meaningful communicative opportunities. Consistent with recent empirical studies, motivated learners tend to invest greater cognitive and behavioral effort in speaking activities, which directly contributes to fluency and accuracy development (Cheng & Zhang, 2021; Sato, 2022).

Beyond individual affective gains, the results underscore the transformative potential of mobile applications in speaking instruction when they are integrated through sound pedagogical guidance. Rather than functioning as supplementary tools, mobile applications in this context acted as structured learning environments that promoted interaction, autonomy, and immediate feedback. This supports constructivist and learner-centered learning theories, which argue that technology becomes educationally meaningful only when aligned with instructional objectives and learning scaffolds (Vygotsky, 1978). Guided mobile-based speaking tasks encouraged learners to engage in repeated oral practice, self-monitor performance, and collaborate with peers, thereby shifting instruction away from teacher-dominated drills toward interactive and participatory learning processes.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the effectiveness of mobile-assisted speaking instruction lies not merely in technological novelty but in its capacity to foster positive affective conditions and learner agency. When mobile applications are pedagogically designed and implemented, they create a supportive learning ecology that enhances motivation, enjoyment, and confidence, which in turn accelerates speaking development. This conclusion is consistent with recent mobile-assisted language learning research that emphasizes the synergy between affective engagement and instructional design in achieving sustainable speaking improvement (Chen et al., 2023). Consequently, integrating mobile applications into speaking pedagogy should be viewed as a strategic instructional approach grounded in theory and empirical evidence, rather than as an isolated technological intervention.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

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This study provides empirical evidence that integrating the HelloTalk application into EFL instruction significantly enhances students' speaking skills in a vocational high school setting. Grounded in mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) theory, the findings indicate that authentic interaction with real language users through computer-mediated communication (CMC) creates meaningful opportunities for comprehensible input and output, which are essential for oral language development. Importantly, the improvement observed in this study was not limited to post-test scores. Qualitative classroom observations revealed notable growth in students' confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate actively in speaking activities. These affective gains align with socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and learner agency in language acquisition. Similarly, in the vocational context, such affective development is particularly relevant, as students require practical communicative competence for future workplace demands.

Overall, the findings affirm the pedagogical value of mobile-assisted and CMC-based instruction for enhancing EFL speaking competence. By extending learning spaces and facilitating authentic language use, applications like HelloTalk function effectively as supplementary tools that complement classroom instruction. This study therefore recommends the strategic integration of language exchange applications into EFL speaking curricula, with careful guidance to align activities with learning objectives. To strengthen external validity and generalizability, further research is encouraged across diverse educational levels, regions, and learner profiles, as well as through longitudinal designs that examine long-term impacts on speaking proficiency (Stockwell, 2013; Godwin-Jones, 2017)..

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