

## The Role of HelloTalk in English Education Students' Autonomous Speaking

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### Abstract

Fluent English speaking is essential for English Education students, especially for academic and professional success in global contexts. However, learners often face limited real-life interaction, a lack of feedback, and weak autonomous learning habits. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) tools like HelloTalk are increasingly used, yet their specific role in promoting autonomous speaking practice at the university level remains underexplored. This study investigates students' attitudes toward using HelloTalk to develop autonomous speaking skills and identifies the benefits and challenges they experience. A qualitative descriptive method was used, collecting data through closed-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with English Education students at Ma'soem University who used HelloTalk for at least one month. The findings reveal positive attitudes across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Students found HelloTalk motivating, user-friendly, and effective for speaking practice. Key benefits included increased speaking confidence, flexibility, authentic language exposure, and timely feedback from peers and AI. Reported challenges included limited access to premium features, difficulty finding conversation partners, and fluctuating motivation. Overall, HelloTalk supports learner autonomy by providing a flexible, interactive space for language use beyond the classroom. These findings suggest that the integration of MALL tools like HelloTalk into formal curricula can enhance students' speaking fluency and self-directed learning.

**Keywords:** *Autonomous Learning; HelloTalk; MALL (Mobile Assited Language Learning); Speaking Skill*

### Abstract

*Kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris secara lancar merupakan keterampilan penting bagi mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, terutama untuk kebutuhan akademik dan profesional dalam konteks global. Namun, banyak mahasiswa menghadapi keterbatasan interaksi nyata, minimnya umpan balik, serta kurangnya strategi belajar mandiri. Meskipun aplikasi Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) seperti HelloTalk semakin populer, perannya dalam mendukung latihan berbicara mandiri di tingkat universitas belum banyak diteliti. Studi ini mengeksplorasi sikap mahasiswa terhadap penggunaan HelloTalk untuk pengembangan keterampilan berbicara secara mandiri serta manfaat dan tantangan yang mereka hadapi. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner tertutup dan wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Ma'soem yang telah menggunakan HelloTalk selama minimal satu bulan. Hasil menunjukkan sikap positif dari aspek kognitif, afektif, dan perilaku. Mahasiswa menganggap HelloTalk mudah digunakan, memotivasi, dan bermanfaat untuk latihan berbicara. Manfaat utama meliputi peningkatan kepercayaan diri, fleksibilitas waktu, paparan bahasa otentik, dan umpan balik langsung dari pengguna lain maupun AI. Tantangan yang dilaporkan meliputi akses terbatas ke fitur VIP, kesulitan menemukan mitra bicara yang cocok, serta motivasi yang tidak konsisten. HelloTalk terbukti mendukung kemandirian belajar*

*dengan menyediakan lingkungan interaktif dan fleksibel di luar kelas. Temuan ini mendukung integrasi MALL dalam kurikulum formal untuk meningkatkan kelancaran berbicara dan pembelajaran mandiri mahasiswa.*

**Kata Kunci:** Pembelajaran Mandiri; HelloTalk; MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning); Keterampilan Berbicara

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## INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital communication, the ability to speak English fluently has become a critical skill for English Education students who are preparing to operate as future teachers and professional communicators. The expectation of high spoken proficiency in academic and workplace settings is well documented, yet a persistent gap remains between program standards and actual student performance (Zhou, 2021). This gap matters because teacher candidates must model accurate pronunciation, interactive discourse skills, and pragmatic appropriacy for their learners.

However, a persistent discrepancy remains between the expected speaking competence and the actual capabilities exhibited by many university students. Factors such as limited access to real-time interaction, lack of immediate feedback, and low learner confidence contribute to the underdevelopment of speaking skills (Lin & Hwang, 2018; Zhang, 2024). In this context, autonomous learning is not a luxury but a mechanism for increasing time-on-task, diversifying input–output opportunities, and scaffolding self-regulation, especially when supported by digital resources (Benson, 2013; Holec, 1979; Lai, 2023).

Traditional language learning tends to provide less space for independent speaking practice, but in today's technological era, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) technology has helped revolutionize the way languages are learned. MALL provides learners with the opportunity to practice speaking in a flexible, informal, and interactive environment, which can improve the quality and quantity of speaking opportunities outside the classroom (Alexiadou, 2022). Reviews of MALL indicate that this method has advantages for improving oral skills, such as multimodal interaction, instant feedback, and authentic audiences, which can accelerate speaking ability through the use of deliberate strategies. Therefore, MALL can be an effective tool for developing speaking fluency in language learning.

HelloTalk as a learning environment. It allows students to engage in real-time language exchanges with native speakers through text, voice messages, voice/video calls, and community “rooms.” The platform also offers interactive features such as instant corrections, translation tools, and AI-based grammar feedback to support speaking development. Learners can initiate exchanges with target-language partners, negotiate meaning in real time, and archive interactions for reflection, creating conditions conducive to self-directed practice cycles (Alexiadou, 2022). In short, the app supplies a learner-controlled space where practice intensity, partner choice, and feedback type can be personalized as key levers for autonomy.

Despite the growing use of HelloTalk, relatively few studies have examined its role in fostering speaking autonomy among university students. Existing research has largely emphasized vocabulary acquisition, writing enhancement, or test-oriented outcomes (Silma, 2024; Taufan & Wicaksono, 2022), while investigations into speaking skills remain limited. Even when oral proficiency is addressed, key aspects such as learner motivation, strategy use, and sustained engagement patterns are often overlooked (Lai, 2023; Sadeghi & Chalak, 2023). Other studies on digital language learning tools have primarily explored classroom-integrated applications like Duolingo or Google Classroom (e.g., Burston, 2014; Godwin-Jones, 2016), leaving learner-controlled, extra-curricular environments

underexplored. Collectively, this narrow scope underscores the need for further inquiry into how HelloTalk, as a mobile, interactive, and learner-driven platform, supports autonomous speaking development outside formal classroom contexts.

This study is anchored in four complementary frameworks that together map adoption, motivation, ecology, and affordances in mobile speaking practice. As posited by Venkatesh et al., (2016) UTAUT2 offers an explanation for technology uptake through the following factors: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, price value, and habit. These factors are linked to behavioural intention and actual use. According to Ryan & Deci (2023) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a psychological theory that explains how autonomy, competence, and relatedness influence the internalisation and sustained engagement with speaking practice. Digital Language Learning Ecologies (DLLE) are defined as the location of learning across personal, social and material resources, with the subsequent clarification of how learners orchestrate applications, partners and contexts over time (Lai et al., 2016). The MALL framework is a theoretical model that specifies mobile affordances, i.e. the capabilities of mobility, authenticity, personalisation and multimodality, which, according to Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, (2008), can enable iterative speaking practice. The conceptual structure to be illustrated is as follows: UTAUT2 drivers → HelloTalk use behaviour → SDT motivational processes → DLLE orchestration of autonomous strategies → MALL-enabled speaking outcomes, with potential moderators (e.g., prior proficiency, anxiety, access) and constraints at each stage.

The purpose of this research is: (1) to explore the attitudes of English Education students toward using HelloTalk as a medium for autonomous speaking practice, and (2) to identify the benefits and challenges students experience when using HelloTalk to improve their English-speaking skills. By investigating these dimensions, the study contributes to the understanding of mobile-based learner autonomy and the ways in which digital platforms can be used to personalize speaking development.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of modern learning theories with empirical data from university students actively engaged in autonomous practice. Unlike prior studies, this research highlights not just language improvement but also learner strategies, emotional responses, and patterns of technology adoption. The findings are expected to inform educators, curriculum designers, and app developers on how to effectively integrate MALL platforms into learning environments that foster autonomy, motivation, and speaking proficiency.

## **METHODS**

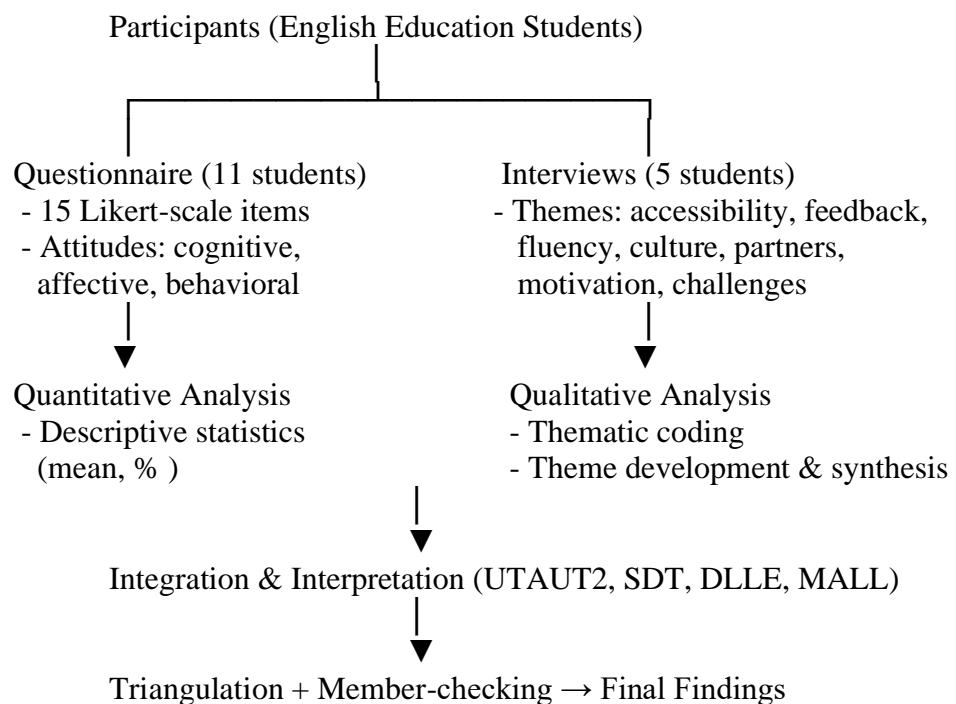
This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring students' attitudes, experiences, and challenges in using the HelloTalk application for autonomous English-speaking skill development. The design was chosen because it aligns closely with the research objectives, which seek to understand how students perceive and experience HelloTalk rather than to measure predetermined variables or test hypotheses. A qualitative approach was also suitable for capturing non-numerical data that reflect the complex process of self-directed learning and technology use.

The research was conducted at a private university in West Java, Indonesia, which offers an undergraduate English Education program. This site was chosen because its students are required to develop advanced English-speaking competence as future educators, yet they often have limited access to authentic practice outside the classroom. A total of 11 students from the second, fourth, and sixth semesters completed the questionnaire, and 5 students participated in semi-structured interviews. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they had sufficient experience with HelloTalk and could provide meaningful insights into autonomous speaking practices.

Data collection involved two primary instruments: a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire, adapted from Sadeghi & Chalak (2023), contained 15 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale and was used to examine students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitudes toward HelloTalk. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with five selected students to provide deeper insights into the perceived benefits and challenges. Interview themes included accessibility, feedback, fluency, cultural exposure, technical limitations, partner selection, and motivation.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. Quantitative responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean scores and percentages). Qualitative interview data were processed using thematic analysis, including initial open coding, theme development, and synthesis. The findings were interpreted through four theoretical lenses: UTAUT2, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Digital Language Learning Ecologies (DLLE), and the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) framework. Triangulation was employed to validate consistency between data sources, and member-checking was conducted to ensure interpretative credibility.

**Figure1. Data Collection Process**



## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

This section presents both findings and theoretical interpretations regarding students' attitudes toward the use of HelloTalk in developing their English-speaking skills, along with benefits and challenges experienced. The discussion is based on data from questionnaires and interviews and interpreted through four theoretical lenses: UTAUT2, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Digital Language Learning Ecologies (DLLE), and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL). All tables and figures referenced are included and discussed in context.

### Students' Attitudes Toward HelloTalk

In response to the first research question, this study analyzed students' attitudes using a 15-item questionnaire adapted from Sadeghi & Chalak (2023). Table 1 presents the summary of questionnaire results categorized by attitudinal components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral.

**Table 1. Summary of Questionnaire Results by Attitudinal Components**

Attitudinal Component	Item Numbers	Average Score	Percentage (%)
Cognitive	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11	3.70	74.0%
Affective	12, 13, 14, 15	3.52	70.4%
Behavioral	7, 8	3.45	69.0%

From Table 1, it can be seen that all three attitudinal components, cognitive, affective, and behavioral, are present in students' responses, and all fall within the "Agree" range (around 70%), indicating a generally positive perception of HelloTalk.

The cognitive component showed the highest average score (3.70 or 74%), which means that students strongly believe HelloTalk is useful, easy to use, and supportive for their language learning process. This supports the concept of performance expectancy and effort expectancy in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) by Venkatesh et al. (2012), which states that users are more likely to adopt a technology if they believe it helps them perform better and is not too difficult to use. The positive cognitive attitude found in this study reflects that most students view HelloTalk as a practical tool for developing their English-speaking skills.

Meanwhile, the affective component scored an average of 3.52 (70.4%). This indicates that students generally feel motivated, enjoy the experience, and build confidence while using HelloTalk. Although the scores are not extremely high, they still show a solid level of emotional engagement. This aligns with the principles of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Ryan & Deci (2020), particularly the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Students in this study often mentioned that HelloTalk gave them freedom to choose when and how to practice, helped them feel more capable, and allowed them to connect with other learners, which are all key aspects of SDT.

The behavioral component received the lowest average score (3.45 or 69%), meaning that while students show an intention to keep using HelloTalk, their long-term habit or regular usage is still developing. This reflects the idea of habit formation and hedonic motivation in UTAUT2, where continued use often depends on enjoyment and integration into daily routines. In this context, some students may still be exploring how HelloTalk fits into their personal learning habits. Additionally, this finding relates to the concept of Digital Language Learning Ecologies (DLLE) by Hoerudin (2025), which highlights that learners build their own digital environments over time. In other words, consistent use of HelloTalk may improve as students become more familiar and comfortable with using it as part of their everyday learning toolkit.

Finally, all three components support the ideas found in the Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) framework by Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008), which explains how mobile apps like HelloTalk can create flexible, interactive, and learner-centered environments. Students reported enjoying the convenience and accessibility of HelloTalk, which allowed them to practice speaking anytime and anywhere. This flexibility plays a major role in shaping learners' motivation, engagement, and confidence, especially for those who prefer informal and self-paced practice.

In conclusion, the findings reflect how HelloTalk is not only accepted as a helpful tool (UTAUT2), but also supports students' motivation and self-confidence (SDT), fits into their personalized learning space (DLLE), and enables accessible, mobile-based language practice (MALL). These four theories together help explain why students respond positively to HelloTalk and how it can support the development of their English-speaking skills in a more autonomous and modern way.

### Benefits and Challenges of Using HelloTalk

This section addresses the second research question of the study which are identifying the benefits and challenges encountered by English education students when using HelloTalk to enhance their English-speaking skills. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with English Education students, providing in-depth insight into their experiences with autonomous speaking practice using HelloTalk. From the analysis, five key benefits and four major challenges emerged. These themes reflect not only students' practical experiences but also their cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement with the platform. As such, the findings are best understood through the lens of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which highlights mobility and flexibility; Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), which emphasizes learner initiative and strategy use; and affective engagement theories, which explain the role of motivation, confidence, and emotional safety in speaking development. These are summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 2. Summary of Benefits and Challenges Reported by Students**

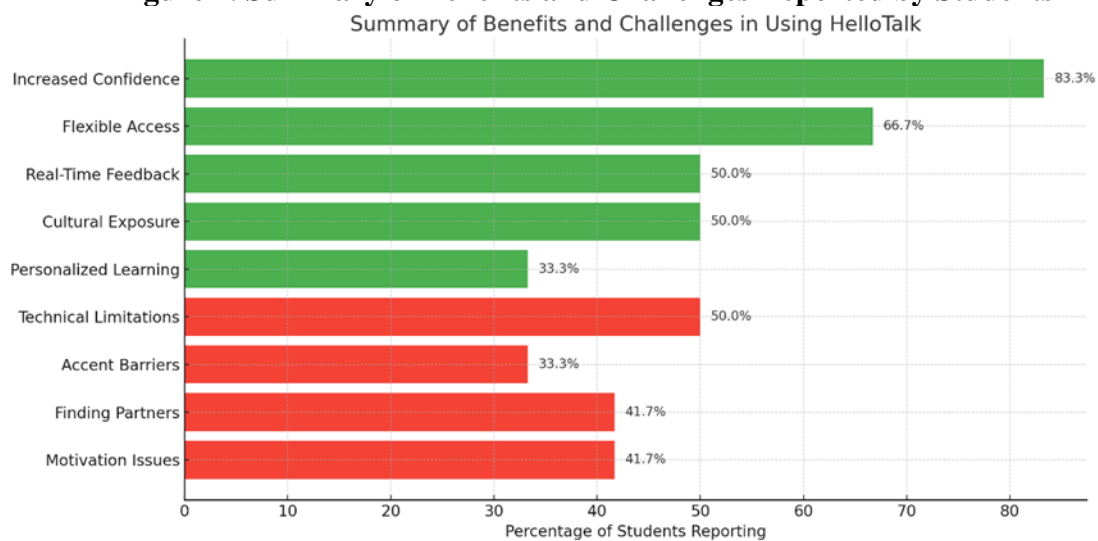


Figure 1 presents a visual summary of the most frequently reported benefits and challenges experienced by students while using HelloTalk for autonomous English-speaking practice. The data was synthesized from the interview responses and categorized according to recurring themes. These insights frame the more detailed analysis discussed in the following subsections.

### Detailed Discussion of Benefits

The discussion refers to the interpretation of the findings in accordance with the theory used and it is not just explaining the findings. The discussion must be enriched by referring to or comparing the results of the previous studies that have been published in reputable journals. The discussion refers to the interpretation of the findings in accordance with the theory used, and it is not

just explaining the findings. The discussion must be enriched by referring to or comparing the results of the previous studies that have been published in reputable journals.

### **Increased Confidence**

As shown in Figure 1, 83.3% of students identified increased speaking confidence as the most significant benefit of using HelloTalk. Many attributed this to the platform's informal and low-pressure environment, which provided emotional safety and reduced anxiety. One student described it as "easy to access and practice anytime," while another noted feeling "less embarrassed" due to the lack of face-to-face interaction.

#### **Excerpt 1**

*I feel more confident because it's easy to access and practice speaking any time.* (student 01)

#### **Excerpt 2**

*Since we never actually meet in person, I don't feel too embarrassed if I make mistakes.* (student 04)

These remarks illustrate how the app's structure minimizes affective barriers, creating conditions that promote intrinsic motivation and risk-taking in speaking. This outcome aligns with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), as the platform fulfills learners' psychological needs for autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2020). By feeling emotionally safe, students are more likely to engage in speaking without fear of negative judgment, fostering intrinsic motivation.

Moreover, several learners reported fluency gains, such as speaking "*faster and more fluently*," which highlights the link between affective comfort and linguistic performance. These findings echo MALL-based studies (Wang & Chen, 2021; Luo & Gui, 2021), which stress the role of mobile platforms in providing repeated, spontaneous practice that strengthens oral fluency. This observation supports findings by Wang & Chen (2021) and Luo & Gui (2021), who emphasized the role of mobile-based, spontaneous oral practice in developing fluency through repeated exposure and real-time interaction.

The importance of interaction with native speakers also emerged, with one student noting clearer understanding during such exchanges. This perception reflects affective engagement theory, as positive and encouraging responses reduce anxiety and promote deeper involvement

#### **Excerpt 4**

*I prefer talking to native speakers... they can understand what I say clearly.* (Student 03)

This perception reflects affective engagement theory, as positive and encouraging responses reduce anxiety and promote deeper involvement. Similar results were found by Zhang & Xie (2022), who reported that comprehensible output and supportive interaction enhance learners' confidence and engagement.

In summary, HelloTalk enhances confidence by offering a psychologically safe, mobile, and interactive environment where students can practice freely. These findings demonstrate how the platform integrates the principles of MALL (flexible access to practice), SRL (self-initiated participation), and affective engagement (emotional safety and motivation) to foster both confidence and fluency in autonomous learning contexts.

### **Flexibility and Increased Speaking Opportunities**

As reflected in Figure 1, 66.7% of students highlighted flexibility and accessibility as major benefits of HelloTalk. Its mobile nature enabled practice anytime, anywhere, without formal constraints supporting spontaneous and autonomous speaking. This convenience highlights the core principle of MALL, where mobility and immediacy extend language learning into everyday contexts (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008).

Several students reported proactive behaviors that reflect self-regulated learning (SRL). For instance, one explained that they “communicate directly” rather than waiting for invitations, demonstrating initiative and goal-directed participation.

**Excerpt 1**

*It's easier to practice. I can just open the app, find a room, and start speaking.* (student 01)

This emphasizes both convenience and learner agency. The ability to join speaking spaces on demand fosters situated learning and empowers learners to choose when and how to engage.

Proactive behavior was also evident in Student 03's approach:

**Excerpt 2**

*When I open HelloTalk, I try to communicate directly. I don't wait for people to invite me.* (student 03)

Others admitted they only engaged when topics were interesting or peers were friendly, showing how motivation and affective comfort influence autonomous choices. Such initiative reflects self-regulated learning and growing interactional competence, as students navigate live conversations independently.

**Excerpt 3**

*If the topic is interesting and the people are friendly, I join. If not, I don't.* (student 2)

This suggests learners tailor their environment to personal motivation and comfort central to autonomous learning (Benson, 2013).

Interestingly, even less socially active students benefited by using features like AI voice notes, which provided structured yet low-pressure opportunities for speaking practice. This adaptability resonates with Digital Language Learning Ecologies (DLLE), where learners orchestrate diverse tools and resources to meet their individual readiness and goals (Hoerudin, 2025). This highlights HelloTalk's adaptability to different readiness levels, supporting personalized speaking practice across formal/informal boundaries as explained in Digital Language Learning Ecologies (DLLE) (Hoerudin, 2025).

In summary, HelloTalk enhances speaking opportunities by creating a user-controlled, flexible environment. Through voice rooms, AI chats, and selective participation, students extend practice beyond the classroom, exercise self-regulation, and experience affective engagement on their own terms. These findings show how MALL (mobility), SRL (learner initiative), DLLE (personalized ecologies), and affective engagement (comfort and motivation) intersect to promote meaningful and autonomous speaking development.

**Instant Feedback and Correction**

As shown in Table 1, 50% of participants emphasized the value of real-time corrections from both AI and peers. One student noted that the AI “corrects me when I make mistakes,” while another stressed that communication worked because “they understand me, and I understand them.” These brief reflections illustrate the dual role of form-focused feedback (AI corrections) and meaning-focused feedback (peer interaction) in supporting speaking development. Automated feedback enhanced learners' grammatical awareness and confidence, supporting metacognitive regulation, a core component of autonomous learning (Lai, 2023)

This aligns with Zhao et al. (2023) who found that automated corrective feedback (ACF) promotes repeated, accurate speech production, leading to long-term retention. From a MALL perspective, immediacy and accessibility are key affordances that distinguish mobile learning from traditional classroom settings. Students can engage in spontaneous exchanges, receive instant corrections, and apply them immediately, which accelerates the feedback–practice cycle. This

dynamic reflects the principle of autonomy in MALL, as learners independently decide how to respond to and integrate corrections into their speaking.

At the same time, the presence of supportive interlocutors fosters affective engagement.

**Excerpt 2**

*The important thing is communication, they understand me, and I understand them.* (Student 3)

Such meaning-focused feedback, even if implicit, supports noticing and promotes fluency (D. Wang & Guo, n.d.). These combined feedback mechanisms reflect MALL principles of immediacy, autonomy, and authentic interaction (Baranovskaya, 2015) helping students self-regulate and refine their speech in real time.

In sum, HelloTalk's feedback mechanisms integrate MALL's immediacy, SRL's metacognitive strategies, and affective engagement's motivational safety net. Together, these elements enable learners to refine their accuracy and fluency in a self-directed yet socially supported environment.

**Cultural Exposure and Language Authenticity**

Half of the participants highlighted the benefit of exposure to authentic language and diverse English speakers. One student remarked that most users use "everyday English," while another admitted it was "easier to talk with Indonesian users."

**Excerpt 1**

*Most of them use everyday English, which helps me learn.*

**Excerpt 2**

*I enjoy it most when I speak English with Indonesian users because communication is easier.*

These short comments show how HelloTalk creates contact with both global and local varieties of English, offering learners authentic input and opportunities to adjust their communication strategies.

This type of interaction aligns closely with the principles of Digital Language Learning Ecologies (DLLE), which emphasize learning through orchestrating diverse resources and communities (Lai et al., 2016). Exposure to varied accents and pragmatic norms broadens learners' communicative repertoire and strengthens their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) a crucial outcome for English Education students preparing to teach English in multilingual contexts (Y. Wang, 2023; Zhang, 2024).

Although some learners reported difficulty with certain accents, their adaptive strategies, such as focusing on more comprehensible speakers, reflect aspects of self-regulated learning (SRL). Learners actively negotiated which interactions to pursue, balancing challenge with comfort to maintain motivation. This supports Benson's (2013) view that autonomy involves selective engagement with learning opportunities that align with personal readiness and goals.

From a MALL perspective, the value lies in mobility and global connectivity. HelloTalk enables access to authentic language use without geographic limitations, thus expanding the scope of learning beyond traditional classrooms. Importantly, positive intercultural encounters also enhanced affective engagement, as students felt more motivated when communication was both meaningful and comprehensible.

In summary, HelloTalk exposes learners to authentic, diverse English input while supporting intercultural skills and adaptive strategies. These findings demonstrate how the platform integrates MALL's connectivity, DLLE's resource-rich environments, SRL's selective regulation, and affective engagement's motivational impact, positioning it as a powerful tool for developing both language fluency and intercultural competence.

### **Personalized Learning and Autonomy**

Finally, 33.3% of students highlighted HelloTalk's flexibility in adapting to individual learning preferences, confirming its value in fostering learner autonomy and digital language learning ecologies (DLLE) (Hoerudin, 2025). Some preferred to "join live sessions," others engaged mainly in "text chat," while a few relied on the AI to practice both grammar and speaking. These brief excerpts illustrate how learners exercised choice and control in shaping their speaking practice.

#### **Excerpt 1**

*I usually join an ongoing session, and they invite me to speak.* (student 03)

#### **Excerpt 2**

*I usually just use the chat feature like texting.* (student 04)

#### **Excerpt 3**

*For me, it's the English AI... I can practice both speaking and grammar.* (student 05)

These varied preferences show how HelloTalk enables students to build personalized language pathways, selecting features and partners that match their goals, confidence, and learning style core principles of MALL and self-regulated learning (Benson, 2013). Such practices also reflect DLLE principles, as learners orchestrated digital tools like voice rooms, chats, or AI in ways that best supported their development.

From a MALL perspective, the flexibility of mobile platforms fosters personalization by allowing learners to adapt practice to time, space, and mode of communication. Whether through synchronous or asynchronous interaction, HelloTalk accommodates diverse preferences, thereby sustaining engagement. This personalization also supports affective engagement, since learners gravitated toward modes that minimized anxiety and maximized motivation, helping them sustain long-term practice.

In summary, HelloTalk promotes autonomy by enabling personalized, self-directed learning pathways. The integration of MALL's flexibility, SRL's goal-oriented regulation, DLLE's resource orchestration, and affective engagement's motivational impact shows how the platform empowers learners to tailor their speaking practice to individual needs, ultimately reinforcing their autonomy as English speakers.

### **Discussion**

#### **Technical Limitations**

As reported by 50% of participants (Figure 1), technical restrictions in the non-VIP version of HelloTalk pose significant barriers to learning. Students mentioned issues such as limited access to user profiles and time limits on calls. For example, one noted frustration at not being able to "see who they are" without paying, while another described one-hour call restrictions as "challenging.". These brief remarks highlight how the freemium model constrains communication, reducing continuity and depth of interaction.

#### **Excerpt 1**

*There are native speakers who contact me, but I can't see who they are... I don't want to pay.* (students 04)

#### **Excerpt 2**

*Voice and video calls are time-limited, about an hour. That's a bit challenging.* (student 02)

This restricts deep, extended communication, which, from a sociocultural perspective (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), is crucial for meaningful language development through scaffolding. From the perspective of the UTAUT2 framework (Venkatesh et al., 2016), such obstacles illustrate a lack of facilitating conditions, which can negatively influence technology adoption and sustained use. Within sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), restricted interaction time undermines

opportunities for extended dialogue and scaffolding both critical for meaningful language development.

At the same time, some learners displayed adaptability. One explained that conversations could continue if “a VIP account joins,” showing a creative workaround.

### **Excerpt 3**

*If someone with a VIP account joins, there's no time limit. That helps a lot.* (student 02)

This reflects elements of self-regulated learning (SRL), as students exercised agency to maximize limited resources. However, reliance on others' paid access also underscores structural inequity, where learning opportunities are unevenly distributed. While this shows learner agency, it also highlights structural inequity, as access to full learning opportunities depends on others' paid access. These limitations call for institutional support or educational-tier app policies to ensure broader accessibility and inclusion in mobile learning.

From a MALL perspective, these technical barriers reduce the mobility and accessibility that mobile learning is meant to provide. They also affect affective engagement, as frustration and demotivation may discourage learners from sustained practice.

In sum, technical limitations demonstrate how design and access issues can disrupt the potential of mobile-assisted language learning. Addressing these challenges through institutional support, subsidized access, or education-oriented app policies would be essential to ensure more equitable and motivating conditions for autonomous speaking practice.

### **Finding Suitable Conversation Partners**

Another key challenge (reported by 41.7% of students in Table 2) is the difficulty in finding responsive, supportive partners. One participant remarked that “you have to be patient,” reflecting the uncertainty of interaction in open digital spaces. This highlights how interlocutor compatibility shared goals, attitudes, and respect is crucial for sustaining meaningful practice. As Hoerudin (2025) emphasizes, peer quality strongly shapes the effectiveness of digital language learning ecologies (DLLE).

### **Excerpt 1**

*You have to be patient to find the right person to talk to.* (student 01)

This reflects the importance of interlocutor compatibility, not just fluency but shared expectations and mutual respect. As (Hoerudin, 2025) suggests, peer quality significantly shapes digital language learning ecologies.

Some proactive learners tried to overcome this by “joining ongoing sessions,” which shows initiative consistent with self-regulated learning (SRL). Yet, the unstructured and unpredictable nature of open participation often discouraged less confident students. The lack of matching features by proficiency or interest level created risks of interactional fatigue (Chen et al., 2021), especially for beginners, and undermined persistence.

### **Excerpt 2**

*I usually join an ongoing session, and then they invite me to speak.*

This still requires navigating an unstructured, unpredictable environment. The absence of matching filters (e.g., by goal or level) can be discouraging especially for beginners leading to interactional fatigue (Chen et al., 2021; Y. Wang, 2023)

In summary, while HelloTalk offers open access to global interactions, its technical and social limitations, especially under the premium model and unstructured matching can reduce learners' ability to sustain productive speaking practice. Addressing these barriers through user-centered design improvements or educational integration is crucial for maximizing its pedagogical potential.

### **Motivation Issues in Sustaining Practice**

Although HelloTalk offers flexibility and accessibility, several students reported challenges related to maintaining consistent motivation. Without the structure of a classroom or teacher-led activities, autonomous learners are required to generate their own drive to practice. As the results indicate, 41.7% of participants expressed difficulty staying motivated, particularly when their interactions lacked personal relevance or emotional connection. Student 02 explained:

#### **Excerpt 1**

*If the topic is interesting and the people are friendly, I join. If not, I don't.*

This response indicates that student participation is highly dependent on situational factors, such as the appeal of discussion topics or the social dynamics within a voice room. Learners may disengage when they cannot find a personally meaningful or socially comfortable context. This is consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes that interest, autonomy, and perceived competence are crucial to maintaining intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2023). When these elements are lacking, learners may choose to withdraw from the learning experience altogether.

In addition, the absence of external accountability may make it more difficult for some learners to prioritize regular speaking practice. Student 03 noted that although they regularly engage with the app, their activity is self-directed and driven by mood or availability:

#### **Excerpt 2**

*When I open HelloTalk, I try to communicate directly.*

While this response reflects autonomy, it also hints at irregular engagement, as the act of opening the app is based on spontaneous interest rather than consistent goals. According to Chen & Kessler (2021), such behavior is common in mobile learning environments that lack task design or guidance, where students often depend on mood and availability rather than intentional planning. Additionally, some students like Student 04 preferred using the text chat feature instead of speaking, which may indicate a comfort-based avoidance strategy:

#### **Excerpt 3**

*I usually just use the chat feature like texting.*

Although texting still provides language input and output, it may delay the development of oral fluency, particularly if learners are not actively setting personal speaking goals. According to (Chen et al., 2021), learners need both emotional support and task structure to maintain consistent speaking practice in mobile learning environments. Without prompts, challenges, or progress tracking, students may rely solely on spontaneous interest, leading to inconsistent effort and results.

In conclusion, motivation remains a key challenge in the autonomous use of HelloTalk. Without emotional support, social connection, or learning prompts, students may experience a decline in engagement. Integrating features such as learner-set goals, speaking reminders, or recommended conversation themes may help support motivation and encourage consistent practice over time.

### **Accent Barriers in Real-Time Communication**

One significant challenge mentioned by 33.3% of participants (Figure 1) was difficulty understanding different English accents, particularly when interacting with speakers from non-native or diverse linguistic backgrounds. This issue affected students' listening comprehension and sometimes led to confusion or withdrawal from conversations. This can be seen in the excerpts below:

#### **Excerpt 1**

*Sometimes I meet users with strong accents, like Indian or Chinese, and I can't understand them well. (Student 01)*

### **Excerpt 2**

*Understanding accents from people in China or other countries can be difficult. (Student 02)*

These remarks indicate that while HelloTalk offers exposure to a global community, not all learners are equipped to navigate accent diversity effectively. From the perspective of Digital Language Learning Ecologies (DLLE) (Lai et al., 2016), such exposure to authentic linguistic variety is part of real-world learning. However, without sufficient listening strategies or scaffolding, these authentic encounters may become frustrating rather than enriching. To cope, students often adapted by switching rooms or avoiding certain speakers. Student 01 noted:

### **Excerpt 3**

*If I can't understand someone, I move on.*

This practical strategy reflects an emerging sense of learner autonomy (Benson, 2013), but it also highlights the need for better support tools within the app such as transcript features or accent filters to make diverse speech more accessible for intermediate learners.

Overall, these challenges emphasize the importance of scaffolding, technological inclusivity, and motivational support mechanisms in sustaining learner engagement. For HelloTalk and similar platforms to serve as effective tools for autonomous language learning, particularly in speaking, more structured design features and institutional support may be necessary to address these limitations and promote equitable learning outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This study offers a comprehensive synthesis of how the HelloTalk application fosters autonomous English-speaking skill development among English Education students. Drawing on theoretical foundations from UTAUT2, Self-Determination Theory, Digital Language Learning Ecologies, and MALL, the research reveals that students not only perceive HelloTalk as useful and accessible but also experience increased speaking confidence, flexible learning routines, real-time feedback, exposure to authentic global English, and personalized engagement strategies. These findings deepen our understanding of learner autonomy in mobile contexts and extend prior research by highlighting the emotional, social, and strategic dimensions of independent language learning. However, challenges such as limited access to premium features, difficulties in finding supportive partners, inconsistent motivation, and accent barriers illustrate the complex reality of navigating open digital platforms. Academically, the results advocate for the integration of communication-based mobile tools into formal instruction to support personalized, continuous language practice. Culturally and socially, the study underscores the need to prepare learners for diverse linguistic interactions in global contexts. Future research is encouraged to explore long-term usage patterns, assess learning outcomes across varied educational settings, and develop frameworks for scaffolding autonomous speaking practice in technology-rich environments.

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