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Research Article

MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL) FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS: AN INVESTIGATION OF ITS IMPACT ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

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Abstract

Mobile technologies have become increasingly integrated into educational contexts, offering new opportunities for language learning beyond traditional classroom boundaries. In English language education, vocabulary acquisition remains a fundamental yet persistent challenge, particularly when learning opportunities are limited to formal instructional settings. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has emerged as a promising approach that enables flexible, repeated, and learner-centered vocabulary practice through mobile devices. This study aims to investigate the impact of MALL on vocabulary acquisition among English learners. A quasi-experimental research design was employed, involving an experimental group using mobile-based vocabulary learning applications and a control group receiving conventional vocabulary instruction. Data were collected through standardized pretest and posttest vocabulary assessments and supported by learning activity records. Statistical analyses were conducted to examine differences in vocabulary gains between groups. The results indicate that learners who engaged in MALL achieved significantly higher vocabulary gains than those in the control group. The findings also reveal that consistent engagement with mobile learning activities contributed to more stable and sustained vocabulary development. The study concludes that MALL is an effective instructional approach for enhancing vocabulary acquisition in English language learning contexts. Integrating mobile-assisted vocabulary learning into instructional practices can support improved learning outcomes and provide learners with greater autonomy and access to language input.

Keywords: English learners, language education, mobile technology, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, vocabulary acquisition

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INTRODUCTION

Mobile technologies have become an integral part of everyday communication and information access, reshaping how individuals interact with knowledge and learning resources (Namaziandost et al., 2025). In educational contexts, the rapid diffusion of smartphones and tablets has opened new possibilities for language learning beyond traditional classroom boundaries. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has emerged as a pedagogical approach that leverages mobile devices to support flexible, personalized, and context-aware language learning experiences. These developments have prompted educators and researchers to reconsider conventional models of language instruction, particularly in relation to vocabulary learning.

Vocabulary acquisition plays a central role in second and foreign language learning, as lexical knowledge underpins learners' abilities to comprehend texts, express ideas, and engage in meaningful communication. English learners often face persistent challenges in expanding and retaining vocabulary due to limited exposure, insufficient practice opportunities, and reliance on decontextualized learning methods (L. Chen et al., 2025). The integration of mobile technologies offers new affordances for addressing these challenges by enabling repeated exposure, multimodal input, and learner-controlled pacing in vocabulary learning.

The increasing adoption of MALL in English language education raises important questions about its pedagogical effectiveness and learning outcomes. While mobile applications provide interactive and engaging environments for vocabulary practice, their actual impact on learners' vocabulary acquisition requires systematic investigation (Xiuzhen & Keat, 2025). Understanding how MALL influences vocabulary development is essential for determining whether mobile technologies function as meaningful instructional tools or merely as supplementary learning aids within English language learning contexts.

Despite the widespread availability of mobile learning applications, many English learners continue to demonstrate limited vocabulary growth (Wang & Lee, 2025). Classroom instruction often remains constrained by time, curriculum demands, and standardized assessment requirements, leaving insufficient space for sustained vocabulary development. As a result, learners may rely heavily on rote memorization strategies that fail to promote long-term retention or active vocabulary use.

The implementation of MALL in educational settings has frequently been driven by technological enthusiasm rather than pedagogical evidence. Educators may adopt mobile applications without a clear understanding of how these tools support vocabulary learning processes (Alzain & Algobaei, 2025). This situation creates uncertainty regarding whether MALL genuinely enhances vocabulary acquisition or simply increases learners' exposure to digital content without measurable linguistic benefits.

Another problem lies in the inconsistency of findings across existing studies on MALL (Alnujaidi, 2025). Some research reports positive effects on vocabulary learning, while others show minimal or context-dependent outcomes. Variations in research design, learner characteristics, instructional settings, and application features complicate the interpretation of results. These inconsistencies underscore the need for focused investigation into the specific impact of MALL on vocabulary acquisition among English learners.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning on vocabulary acquisition among English learners. The study seeks to determine whether the use of mobile devices and applications contributes to measurable improvements in learners' vocabulary knowledge (Wu, 2025). This objective addresses the need for empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of MALL in supporting core language learning outcomes.

Another objective is to examine how English learners engage with MALL-based vocabulary learning activities (Shahipanah et al., 2025). Understanding patterns of learner interaction, practice frequency, and usage preferences provides insight into the mechanisms through which mobile learning influences vocabulary development. This objective emphasizes the importance of learner-centered perspectives in evaluating the educational value of mobile technologies.

The study also aims to explore the pedagogical implications of integrating MALL into English language instruction. By identifying the strengths and limitations of mobile-based vocabulary learning, the research seeks to inform instructional design and classroom practice (Lo et al., 2025). These objectives collectively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how MALL can be effectively implemented to support vocabulary acquisition.

Existing research on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning has largely focused on learners' attitudes, motivation, and perceptions of mobile technologies (Mansor, 2025). While these studies provide valuable insights into learner engagement, they often offer limited evidence regarding actual language learning outcomes. Vocabulary acquisition, as a measurable and foundational aspect of language proficiency, remains underexplored in many MALL studies.

Many empirical investigations into vocabulary learning continue to prioritize traditional instructional methods, such as textbook-based exercises and classroom drills. Research examining technology-enhanced vocabulary learning often treats mobile learning as a generic digital intervention rather than analyzing its specific affordances (Zhou et al., 2025). This approach overlooks how features such as portability, immediacy, and contextual learning uniquely contribute to vocabulary development.

Additionally, existing studies frequently rely on short-term interventions or small sample sizes, limiting the generalizability of their findings (Zakarneh et al., 2025). Few studies systematically compare MALL-based vocabulary learning with conventional instructional approaches under controlled conditions. This lack of comparative and longitudinal evidence represents a significant gap in the literature that the present study seeks to address.

The novelty of this study lies in its focused examination of vocabulary acquisition as a primary learning outcome of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning. Rather than treating vocabulary improvement as a secondary or incidental effect, the study positions lexical development at the center of analysis (Chengli et al., 2025). This focus enables a clearer assessment of MALL's pedagogical value in English language education.

Another innovative aspect of the research is its integration of learning outcome analysis with learner engagement patterns (Chulerk et al., 2025). By examining both vocabulary gains and how learners interact with mobile learning tools, the study offers a multidimensional understanding of MALL effectiveness. This approach moves beyond surface-level evaluations of technology use to explore the learning processes underlying vocabulary acquisition.

The justification for this study is grounded in the growing reliance on mobile technologies in educational contexts. As mobile devices become increasingly embedded in learners' daily lives, it is essential to establish evidence-based guidelines for their instructional use (Y. Chen et al., 2025). The findings of this research aim to inform educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers about the potential and limitations of MALL for vocabulary learning, thereby contributing to more effective and pedagogically sound language education practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

The following sections detail the systematic approach used to evaluate the impact of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on the vocabulary development of English language learners.

Research Design

The study employed a quasi-experimental research design with a pretest–posttest control group structure (Shafiee Rad & Alipour, 2025). This design was selected to allow for a systematic comparison between learners engaging in mobile-based vocabulary learning and those receiving conventional instruction within an authentic educational setting. The independent variable was the implementation of MALL applications, while the dependent variable was the resulting vocabulary acquisition (Moradi, 2025). This structure enables the identification of specific learning gains that can be attributed directly to mobile-assisted instruction rather than external factors.

Research Target/Subject

The primary objective of this research is to examine and quantify the impact of MALL on vocabulary acquisition. The study targets a measurable improvement in both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge among English learners. By comparing mobile-assisted methods against traditional classroom instruction, the research aims to provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of digital integration in language pedagogy and its ability to foster superior learning outcomes.

The population consisted of English learners at the secondary or tertiary level. Using purposive sampling, participants were selected from intact classes to ensure comparable proficiency levels. The sample was divided into an experimental group, which utilized mobile-assisted vocabulary learning applications, and a control group, which followed traditional vocabulary instruction methods. The final sample size was determined based on statistical power considerations to ensure the reliable detection of treatment effects across both groups.

Research Procedure

The research procedures were implemented in several structured stages, beginning with the administration of a pretest to establish baseline vocabulary knowledge for both cohorts. Following this, the experimental group engaged in a mobile-assisted learning intervention integrated into their regular coursework, while the control group received standard classroom-based vocabulary activities. At the conclusion of the intervention period, a posttest was administered to both groups to measure learning gains (Sulaiman et al., 2025). All procedures were conducted with strict adherence to ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was facilitated through a standardized vocabulary test used for both pretesting and posttesting (Alhujaylan, 2025). This instrument was designed to assess receptive and productive knowledge through multiple-choice items and contextual usage tasks. Additionally, a learning activity log was employed to document participants' engagement with the mobile applications, tracking the frequency and duration of use. These instruments were validated through expert review and pilot testing to ensure high levels of reliability and content validity.

Data Analysis Technique

The study utilizes descriptive and inferential statistical analysis to process the collected data (Trinh et al., 2025). The primary technique involved comparing the mean scores of the pretest and posttest between the experimental and control groups using a t-test or ANCOVA to determine the significance of the MALL intervention (Asadnia, 2025). Activity log data were

also analyzed to identify correlations between the intensity of mobile app usage and the magnitude of vocabulary acquisition, providing a nuanced understanding of the pedagogical impact.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistical analysis summarizes learners' vocabulary performance before and after the instructional intervention. Pretest scores indicated that both the experimental and control groups had comparable baseline vocabulary knowledge, suggesting initial equivalence between groups. Posttest scores, however, showed noticeable differences, with the experimental group demonstrating higher mean vocabulary gains. These descriptive patterns suggest a positive contribution of mobile-assisted learning to vocabulary acquisition.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Vocabulary Test Scores

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Posttest Mean	Posttest SD
Experimental (MALL)	35	54.26	6.84	74.91	7.12
Control (Traditional)	35	53.88	7.01	63.14	6.95

The data in Table 1 indicate that both groups experienced vocabulary improvement, though the magnitude of gains differed substantially. The experimental group showed a larger increase in mean scores compared to the control group, suggesting that exposure to mobile-assisted vocabulary learning contributed to enhanced lexical development.

Further descriptive analysis revealed reduced score dispersion in the experimental group at posttest, indicating more consistent vocabulary gains among learners. The control group showed modest improvement but retained higher variability, suggesting uneven vocabulary development under traditional instructional conditions.

Inferential statistical analysis was conducted to examine whether the observed differences between groups were statistically significant. An independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in posttest vocabulary scores between the experimental and control groups. The results indicate that learners who engaged in MALL achieved significantly higher vocabulary gains than those receiving conventional instruction.

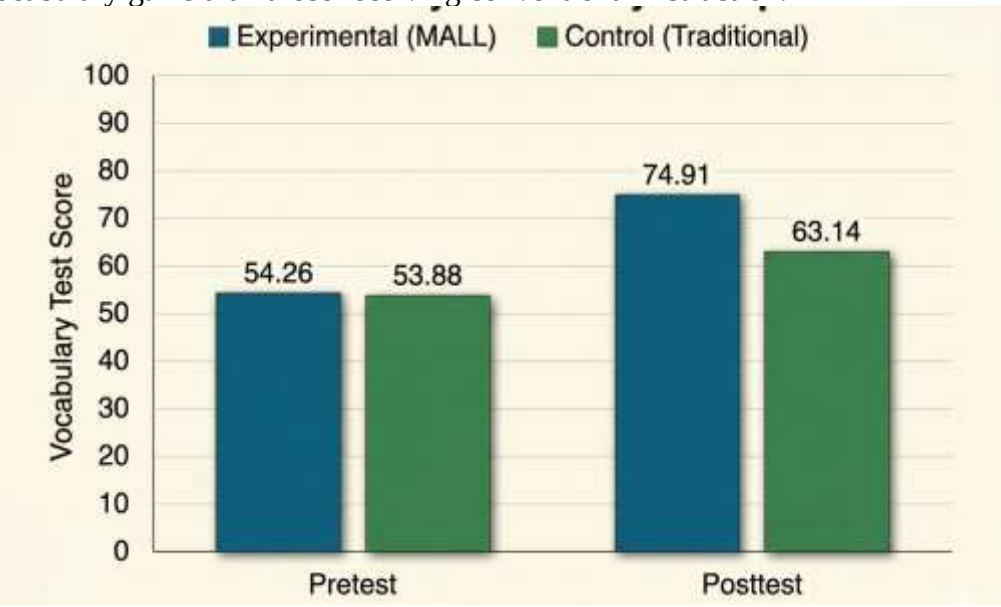

Figure 1. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Vocabulary Scores by Group

A paired samples t-test further confirmed significant within-group improvement for the experimental group from pretest to posttest. The control group also showed improvement, though the effect size was smaller. These findings support the effectiveness of mobile-assisted vocabulary learning as a pedagogical intervention.

Relational analysis examined the association between learners' engagement with mobile applications and vocabulary gains. A positive correlation was found between frequency of mobile application use and posttest vocabulary scores. Learners who interacted more frequently with mobile vocabulary tasks tended to achieve higher learning gains.

The relationship between duration of mobile use and vocabulary acquisition further reinforced this pattern. Extended engagement with mobile learning activities was associated with improved vocabulary retention, suggesting that repeated exposure and practice facilitated lexical development.

A case-based analysis was conducted to illustrate individual learning trajectories within the experimental group. One learner demonstrated substantial vocabulary gains after consistently engaging with mobile vocabulary applications on a daily basis. Learning logs indicated frequent review, contextual practice, and repeated exposure to target vocabulary.

Another case involved a learner who used the mobile application irregularly and showed only moderate improvement in vocabulary scores. Classroom observations suggested limited engagement with contextualized learning features, highlighting individual variation in mobile learning effectiveness.

Explanatory analysis of the case data suggests that active and sustained interaction with mobile learning tools contributed to stronger vocabulary acquisition. Learners who utilized multimedia features and spaced repetition strategies demonstrated deeper lexical understanding and improved retention.

Limited engagement with mobile features appeared to constrain vocabulary development, even when access to learning tools was available. These findings suggest that learner behavior and usage patterns mediate the effectiveness of MALL interventions.

The results collectively indicate that Mobile-Assisted Language Learning has a positive and significant impact on vocabulary acquisition among English learners. Quantitative findings and case-based evidence converge to show that MALL supports vocabulary growth more effectively than traditional instructional approaches.

The overall interpretation suggests that MALL enhances vocabulary acquisition by providing flexible access, repeated exposure, and learner-controlled practice opportunities. These results highlight the potential of mobile technologies as effective instructional tools for supporting vocabulary development in English language learning contexts.

discrepancies. The structured integration of mobile activities into regular instruction in the present study may explain the stronger outcomes observed.

The results also extend earlier research by providing empirical evidence from a quasi-experimental design. Many prior studies relied on perception-based data or short-term interventions. By focusing on measurable vocabulary gains over a defined instructional period, the present study strengthens the empirical foundation of MALL research.

Comparisons with traditional vocabulary instruction studies further highlight the added value of mobile learning. While conventional methods supported vocabulary growth, the magnitude of improvement was notably lower. This contrast suggests that mobile technologies offer affordances that enhance learning beyond what is achievable through classroom-based instruction alone.

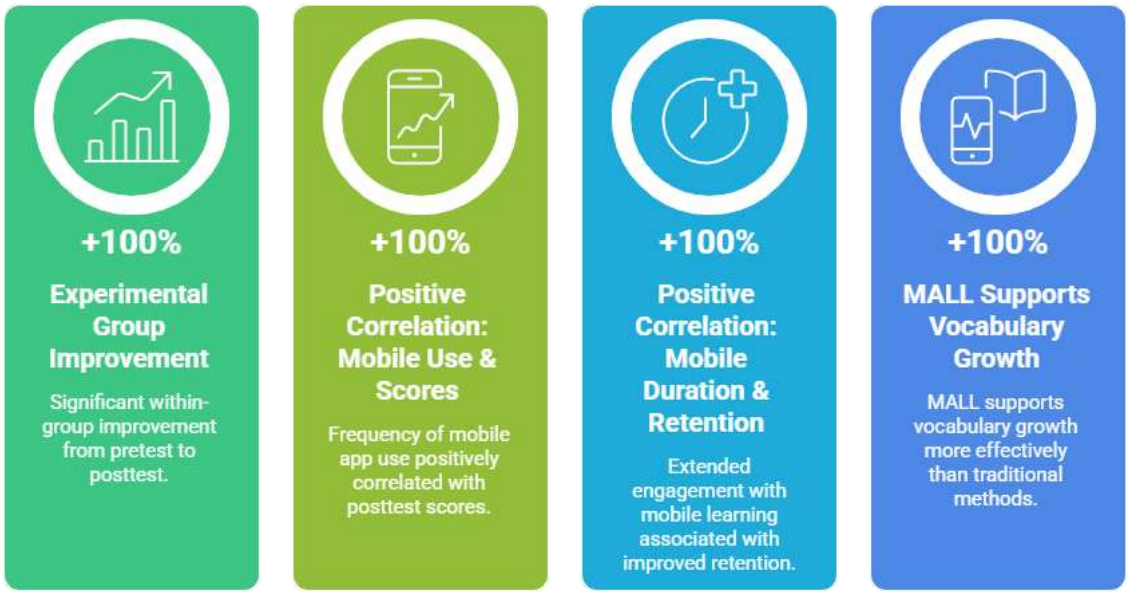

Figure 2. Mobile-Assisted Vocabolary Learning Effectiveness

The findings signal a broader shift in how vocabulary learning can be effectively supported in language education. Vocabulary acquisition appears to benefit from learning environments that allow flexible access and learner-controlled practice. MALL represents an instructional approach that aligns with contemporary learners' digital habits and learning preferences.

The observed vocabulary gains also indicate that mobile learning supports deeper lexical engagement. Repeated interaction with vocabulary items across different contexts may promote stronger memory consolidation. These patterns suggest that MALL facilitates not only surface learning but also durable vocabulary knowledge.

The results further suggest that learner autonomy plays a critical role in vocabulary development. Mobile learning environments encourage self-paced learning and individualized review, which appear to support sustained engagement. This autonomy may be a key indicator of effective vocabulary learning in digital contexts.

The findings can be interpreted as evidence of the pedagogical value of integrating technology meaningfully into language instruction (Farahani et al., 2025). MALL does not replace traditional teaching but complements it by extending learning opportunities beyond classroom boundaries. Vocabulary acquisition benefits when learning is distributed across time and contexts.

The implications of these findings are significant for English language teaching practice. Teachers may consider incorporating mobile-based vocabulary activities to supplement classroom instruction (Shadiev et al., 2025). Such integration can enhance exposure to target vocabulary without increasing instructional time.

Curriculum designers may also benefit from these results by embedding mobile learning components into vocabulary curricula (Moslemi Nezhad Arani & Atasoy, 2025). Structured mobile tasks aligned with learning objectives can support systematic vocabulary development. This approach ensures that technology use remains pedagogically grounded.

Educational institutions may consider supporting mobile learning initiatives through infrastructure and policy. Providing access to reliable mobile applications and digital resources can help maximize learning outcomes (Shoozan et al., 2025). Institutional support is essential for sustainable MALL implementation.

Teacher training programs should also address the effective use of mobile technologies for vocabulary instruction (Al Shihri et al., 2025). Educators who understand how to design and manage mobile learning activities are better positioned to support learner engagement. These implications highlight the instructional relevance of the study's findings.

The observed outcomes raise important questions regarding why MALL produces stronger vocabulary gains. One explanation lies in the increased frequency of exposure afforded by mobile learning (Johan et al., 2025). Learners can access vocabulary materials anytime and anywhere, enabling repeated practice.

Cognitive factors may also contribute to the effectiveness of MALL (Jia & Lu, 2025). Multimedia input and interactive tasks may enhance attention and memory encoding. These features align with cognitive theories emphasizing multimodal learning and spaced repetition.

Motivational factors provide another explanation for the results. Mobile applications often incorporate gamified elements and immediate feedback, which may increase learner motivation (Li & Cui, 2025). Higher motivation may lead to more frequent practice and deeper engagement with vocabulary items.

Contextual learning opportunities offered by mobile devices may further explain the findings (Klinjuy, 2025). Vocabulary encountered in varied contexts supports semantic richness and retention. Mobile learning environments facilitate such contextualized exposure more effectively than static classroom materials.

The findings point toward several directions for future research and practice. Longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of MALL on vocabulary retention and transfer (Janebi Enayat et al., 2025). Such research would clarify whether gains are sustained over time.

Comparative studies across proficiency levels and educational contexts may also yield valuable insights (Jihoon & Lee, 2025). Investigating how beginner and advanced learners respond differently to MALL could inform differentiated instructional design. Cross-context analysis would enhance generalizability.

Future research should explore specific application features that most effectively support vocabulary learning. Identifying which design elements contribute to learning gains would inform more effective mobile application development (El Morabit & Manegre, 2025). This focus would bridge pedagogical theory and technological design.

The study ultimately underscores the need for evidence-based integration of mobile technologies in language education (Taylor, 2025). MALL holds considerable potential for enhancing vocabulary acquisition when implemented thoughtfully. Continued research and innovation are essential to fully realize its benefits for English learners.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that Mobile-Assisted Language Learning significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition among English learners when compared with traditional instructional methods. Learners who engaged in structured mobile-based vocabulary activities demonstrated greater vocabulary gains, more consistent improvement, and stronger retention of lexical items. These results indicate that MALL functions as an effective instructional approach that supports both the quantity and stability of vocabulary development through flexible access and repeated exposure.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its conceptual and methodological focus on vocabulary acquisition as a central learning outcome of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning. Conceptually, the study strengthens the position of MALL as a pedagogically grounded approach rather than a supplementary technological tool. Methodologically, the use of a quasi-experimental design combined with learner engagement data provides empirical evidence of causal relationships between mobile learning practices and vocabulary gains, offering a more robust foundation for future research in mobile-enhanced language learning.

Several limitations of this study suggest directions for further research. The intervention was limited in duration and involved a relatively homogeneous sample, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The study also focused primarily on receptive and productive

vocabulary knowledge without examining long-term retention or transfer to communicative use. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, involve more diverse learner populations, and explore how specific mobile application features influence different dimensions of vocabulary learning over time.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.
Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.
Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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