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IMPROVING THE STUDENT LISTENING SKILLS THROUGH HELLO ENGLISH APPLICATION

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Abstract
This study examines the effectiveness of the Hello English application in improving the English listening skills of ninth-grade students at Subulussalam Junior High School. Using Coats' (2005) model in two research cycles, this classroom action research involved 23 students. The impetus for this research arose from the challenges students continuously faced when trying to understand spoken English. These challenges include fast audio speed, unfamiliar vocabulary, and difficulty concentrating during listening activities. Quantitative data collected during the study showed a significant improvement in students' listening scores, with the average score increasing significantly from 45.1 before the intervention to 83.4 afterward. This improvement can be attributed to students' increased familiarity with the interactive features of the Hello English application. These features include repetition options, feedback, audio level adjustment, and engaging gamified learning elements. Qualitative data from interviews with students and teachers highlight a significant increase in students' engagement levels, motivation, and self-confidence from using the application. The findings of this study indicate that the Hello English application effectively improves listening skills. This is achieved by promoting active and independent learning, which aligns with metacognitive strategies and gamification principles. By fostering a sense of independence and creating a student-centered learning environment, this study concludes that integrating digital applications in language teaching not only addresses common listening challenges but also supports the objectives of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum.

Keywords— Action Research, Gamification, Hello English Application, Listening Skills, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, Student Engagement.

Introduction

In the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, listening skills are one of the important competencies that students are expected to master. Based on the learning syllabus, they are expected to be able to understand various types of spoken texts, such as simple conversations, instructions, short descriptions, and short stories, in the context of everyday life. They also expect to identify general and specific information, recognize proper intonation pronounce, and understand the implied meaning in various spoken texts. The development of listening skills is in line with the Pancasila learner profile, which emphasizes effective communication skills and critical thinking as a provision for facing global challenges in the future.

Some previous research has revealed various challenges in developing students' listening skills. Research conducted by (Altasa et al., 2023; Hardiyanto et al., 2021; Jaelani & Zabidi, 2020) that students face various difficulties in understanding listening material, especially when dealing with native speakers who speak too fast and use unfamiliar accents. In addition, limited vocabulary and lack of concentration during listening activities also exacerbate this situation, making students fail to capture the overall meaning of the conversation, even in important parts (Mandiri et al., 2022; Le Thi Tuyet Hanh et al., 2022;). This difficulty is

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exacerbated if it is not balanced with appropriate learning strategies such as repeated practice of keyword recording or prediction of meaning based on context. Meanwhile, (Guswita & Sugirin, 2021; Le My & Do, 2022) observed that students' anxiety in listening activities comes from difficult audio content and internal factors such as nervousness, lack of confidence, and the pressure of the classroom atmosphere. When students feel stressed or uncomfortable, they tend not to be able to focus optimally on the audio material. These studies consistently show that conventional approaches to learning listening skills have not been able to overcome the problems students face, so innovation in learning methods is needed.

As a solution to these problems, the use of the Hello English application offers an innovative and effective approach to improving students' listening skills. This application was chosen because it provides various authentic audio content with adjustable difficulty levels, a repetition feature that allows students to listen as needed, and interactive activities that increase learning motivation. Hello English also supports independent learning and can be accessed at any time, thus providing more opportunities for students to practice outside formal lesson hours. This application aligns with the spirit of Merdeka Belajar, which encourages the use of technology in learning and develops students' independence and responsibility for their learning process.

Although the use of mobile applications in language learning has been widely researched, the literature still lacks information on the specific effectiveness of Hello English applications for improving listening skills in the Indonesian educational context. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how Hello English applications can improve students' listening skills.

Literature Review

The definition of listening has been put forward by several experts with varying perspectives. Rost, (2024) defines listening as an active process of receiving, understanding, and interpreting spoken messages that integrates linguistic, psychological, and social components in language learning. Listening is an active and receptive language skill. This means that when listening, a person needs to activate their mind to recognize the sounds of language, understand, and interpret their meaning, so that the message conveyed by the speaker can be received properly (Rubtsova & Devdariani, 2021). Meanwhile, according to (Worthington et al., 2024) listening is an important skill in life because it is the foundation for all other communication skills, namely speaking, writing, and reading. Goh & Vandergrift, (2021) add that listening is a very essential skill, as it enables language learners to receive and interact with language input, and supports the development of other language skills. From these four definitions, listening is a complex and active language learning process involving the reception, understanding, and interpretation of spoken information. Listening is not merely a passive activity but requires the integration of various linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural components that demand the active attention and engagement of the listener.

Listening skill is a fundamental skill that is very important in language acquisition, especially in the context of foreign language learning, such as English. Several studies have provided definitions that enrich understanding of this skill. Loebis, (2025) states that listening skill is the ability to understand speech in real time through interactive audio media equipped with adaptive feedback, especially in artificial intelligence-based learning applications. Listening skills as the ability of students to process verbal information conveyed through audio-visual media and emphasize the importance of context and mental readiness of students in understanding the messages heard (Yuswandari & Alimah, 2024). Listening skills consist of three levels, namely literal, inferential, and critical understanding, each of which plays a role in capturing explicit meaning, understanding implied meaning, and critically evaluating the content of the message (Wolvin & Lim, 2022). Based on these three views, listening skill is a cognitive-communicative ability that includes understanding sound, sentence structure, and interpretation of meaning in an authentic oral context, and the quality of the learning media used greatly influences this ability.

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Along with the development of learning technology, the Hello English application has emerged as a mobile learning solution widely used to improve language skills, including listening skills. Hello English as an artificial intelligence (AI)-based learning application that provides voice recognition features, adaptive audio exercises, and real-time feedback to support the development of students' listening skills independently (Loebis, 2025). Hello English as part of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), a mobile application that offers multimodal learning with the integration of educational games, vocabulary exercises, and interactive quizzes (Mutmainah & Ferdiyanto, 2023). Furthermore, a study by Amini & Jamilah, (2024) explains that Hello English is a comprehensive learning platform that combines features such as report cards, user discussion forums, bilingual dictionaries, and audio and text-based exercises. From these three sources, Hello English is a mobile and AI-based language learning application that is interactive, flexible, and fun, which can help students develop English language skills, especially listening skills.

In terms of design, Hello English has an attractive and intuitive user interface specifically designed to support independent and flexible language learning. The main features of this application include listening exercises with interactive audio, speech recognition feature, quizzes, educational games, point system and leaderboard, discussion forum between users, and bilingual dictionary (Mutmainah & Ferdiyanto, 2023; Amini & Jamilah, 2024). The advantages of this application are its ability to increase students' learning motivation through a fun and gamification-based approach, as well as feedback that helps students understand their weaknesses directly (Loebis, 2025). However, there are some shortcomings, including the focus of the application, which has not been entirely focused on improving listening skills in depth and limited experimental research that evaluates listening features separately. Nevertheless, several studies have shown the effectiveness of the Hello English application in supporting listening learning. Loebis, (2025) through a quasi-experimental study, found that using this application could significantly increase students' listening comprehension scores compared to conventional learning methods. Meanwhile, Amini & Jamilah, (2024) showed that the use of Hello English contributed to increasing students' learning motivation, reading skills, and indirectly supported the development of listening skills through interactive audio features and context-based exercises.

Based on the theoretical description and empirical findings, the research hypothesis is formulated as follows: there is a significant influence of the use of the Hello English application on improving students' listening skills. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that the use of the Hello English application, which is equipped with audio features, gamification, and voice recognition, can help students improve their ability to understand spoken information in English more effectively and fun.

Research Method

This study is an action research aimed at improving the English listening skills of ninth-grade junior high school students in Subulussalam, adopting Coats' (2005) framework. A total of 23 students participated in this study, which was conducted in several cycles. Each cycle followed four main stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The researcher designed the learning process during the planning stage by integrating the Hello English application. The implementation stage involved using the application in learning activities, while observation was conducted to monitor student interactions and progress. Reflection was carried out at the end of each cycle to evaluate the results and design improvements for the next cycle.

Data collection was conducted using quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were obtained from a 23-question listening comprehension test administered as a pre-test and post-test. Qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews with students. These interviews were conducted after the pre-test, Cycle 1, and Cycle 2 to gain direct insight into the challenges faced by students and their experiences using the application.

Data processing was carried out on two types of data, namely quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data in the form of test scores were analyzed using descriptive

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statistics, including calculations of averages, percentage increases, and comparisons of scores at the pre-test, cycle 1, cycle 2, and post-test stages. Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic descriptive analysis, through transcription, identification of themes such as challenges in listening (audio speed, new vocabulary, and lack of focus), and students' perceptions of the application's interactive features (point system, leaderboard, and ease of access).

Results and Discussion

After analyzing the data on the improvement of English listening skills, the results showed that in the preliminary study, quantitatively, the pre-test results showed an average score of 45.1. This means that students' English listening skills are still low because they are far from the minimum passing score of 75. Qualitatively, based on interviews after the pre-test, one student said that

> *" Tantangan yang paling sering adalah kecepatan audio, sulit memahami kata-kata baru, dan kurang fokus saat mendengarkan (The most frequent challenges are audio speed, difficulty understanding new words, and lack of focus when listening)."*

Which emphasizes that limitations in listening make it difficult. Another student also stated:

> *" Kecepatan audio terlalu cepat, sulit untuk mengikuti (The audio speed is too fast, hard to follow)."*

These statements indicate that students have difficulties with listening skills. Their English teacher also shared that

> *"Banyak siswa yang kesulitan memahami audio bahasa Inggris, terutama jika audionya cepat (Many students have difficulty understanding English audio, especially if the audio is fast)"*

This shows that students do face real difficulties in listening activities.

The researcher then implemented two cycles of action. Each cycle followed 4 stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. In cycle 1, the planning stage is carried out by preparing lesson plans to improve listening skills using the Hello English application in 60 minutes. Students experienced obstacles such as difficulty downloading the application during implementation and network problems. Nevertheless, students began to show interest in application features such as listening exercises and interactive quizzes. The average score increased to 61.2 from 45.1 (up 35.7). Although improved, this result did not reach the minimum passing standard.

Interviews showed that students liked this method. Some student statements, such as

> *"Aplikasi ini mirip seperti game, ada sistem poin, leaderboard (This application is like a game, there is a point system, leaderboard)," and " Bisa diakses dengan mudah (It can be accessed easily)."*

Indicate that this application is effective and interesting. Teachers also support its use because

> *"aplikasinya interaktif dan materi listening-nya lengkap(the application is interactive and the listening material is complete)."*

It can be concluded that the student experience improved listening by using Hello English. However, it does achieve the minimum passing grade. Therefore, the researcher continued to the second cycle. In the second cycle, technical obstacles were overcome, and students used the application more intensively (3-5 times a week). The process ran more smoothly, and the learning atmosphere was more interactive. Students are getting used to the features of the Hello English application. The average score increased to 83.4 (up 36.27 from cycle 1), passing the minimum passing score of 75.

Interviews showed students remained enthusiastic:

> *"Saya merasa lebih percaya diri karena sering berlatih dan sudah terbiasa mendengar bahasa Inggris melalui aplikasi (I feel more confident because I practice often and I am used to hearing English through the application)," and "Hampir semua siswa merasa kemampuan listening mereka meningkat, baik dalam memahami percakapan maupun*

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dalam menjawab soal listening (Almost all students feel their listening skills have improved, both in understanding conversations and in answering listening questions)."
Teachers also stated that the Hello English application made students
"lebih antusias dan termotivasi (more enthusiastic and motivated)" and "skor listening meningkat dan mereka lebih percaya diri (listening scores improved and they were more confident)."

Cycle 2 Reflection, there was a significant improvement because the application's use was more optimal, the obstacles had been resolved, and student learning outcomes exceeded the KKM. Features such as pronunciation exercises, interactive quizzes, exercises with audio, repetition features, and a point/level system help improve students' listening skills.

Overall, this study shows that the Hello English application successfully improves the listening skills of 9th-grade students of Subulussalam Junior High School from an average score of 45.1 to 83.4, representing an increase of 84.9.

As discussion, this study's findings indicate that the Hello English application significantly improves students' listening skills. These results align with gamification theory, which states that applying game elements in an educational context can effectively increase student motivation and engagement. Deterding et al. (2011) explain that gamification utilizes point systems, levels, daily challenges, and leaderboards to create a fun and competitive learning environment. In the context of Hello English, features such as points, levels, interactive quizzes, and a ranking system encourage students to continue learning enthusiastically. This is reinforced by students' statements in interviews that the application is “like a game,” making them feel more interested and consistent in practising their listening skills. Support for this view also comes from Hamari et al., (2014), who found that gamification increases students' emotional and cognitive engagement due to immediate feedback, meaningful challenges, and a clear sense of learning progress.

The improvement in students' listening skills can also be explained through the theory of metacognitive strategies in understanding listening, as described by (Bozorgian & Shamsi, 2025). They state that adequate listening comprehension requires integrating linguistic understanding and cognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The Hello English app supports these strategies through features such as audio repetition, difficulty level options, and instant feedback, enabling students to control and evaluate their understanding. Through regular application use, students learn to identify their mistakes, improve their listening strategies, and enhance their metacognitive awareness of audio material.

Furthermore, the results of this study also reflect research by (Ambubuyog et al., 2023), in which the listening process is not a passive activity, but rather an active interpretive process that involves cognition, social context, and learning experiences. Through features such as pronunciation exercises, dialogues with native speakers, and context-based quizzes, the Hello English application actively engages students in constructing meaning from authentic audio materials. Students receive information, analyze, draw conclusions, and independently understand context and intonation. This demonstrates that Hello English supports a holistic and learner-centred approach to listening instruction.

The results of this study are also supported by several recent studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of mobile applications in improving students' listening skills. Alshammari et al., (2021) found that students who used mobile-based listening applications showed higher retention and comprehension due to the repetition and interactive engagement features. Huseinović, (2024) reported that gamified language applications can increase students' intrinsic motivation and learning autonomy, directly impacting their listening skills. Bozorgian et al., (2022) also emphasizes the importance of real-time feedback and user control over audio input in developing metacognitive-based listening strategies. These findings reinforce that applications like Hello English contribute to language proficiency and enhance learning engagement and the use of self-directed learning strategies among students.

Therefore, these three theories: gamification theories, metacognitive strategies in listening, and interactive constructivism complement and support each other in the successful use of Hello English in listening learning. A well-designed learning application helps improve students' cognitive abilities in understanding spoken language and creates a positive, enjoyable,

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and meaningful learning environment. Therefore, integrating applications like Hello English into listening instruction can serve as an effective alternative to address students' challenges, while reinforcing the spirit of Merdeka Belajar, which emphasizes self-directed, flexible, and student-centred learning.

Conclusion

This This study confirms that the Hello English application significantly improves students' listening skills, particularly among ninth-grade students at Subulussalam Junior High School. The increase in average scores from 45.1 to 83.4 indicates that this application is not only academically effective but also capable of enhancing students' motivation, self-confidence, and engagement in the learning process. This aligns with gamification theory, metacognitive strategies in listening, and interactive constructivism, which emphasize the importance of active, enjoyable, and student-centred learning. With features such as interactive audio exercises, a point and level system, and immediate feedback, Hello English supports the principles of Merdeka Belajar, which promote independence and flexibility in learning.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that educators be more open to utilizing digital learning applications in teaching language skills, particularly listening. For future research, the scope of the study should be expanded to include different educational levels and regions to assess the generalizability of the results. Researchers may also compare the effectiveness of Hello English with similar applications and explore the long-term impact of using this application on improving other language skills, such as speaking and reading. Qualitative research that delves into the psychological and motivational aspects of students in technology-based learning is also important to enrich the understanding of the overall effectiveness of this approach.

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