



## Students' Perceptions of Using iPad Applications to Support EFL Oral Communication Skills

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the use of iPad apps to support oral communication skills in EFL instruction. The researchers used a descriptive quantitative research design and data was collected through the use of a questionnaire to conduct this research study. A total of 30 EFL students at Secondary School in Baghdad, Iraq, were chosen at random to participate in this study during the second semester of the academic year. The questionnaire was developed to assess the perceptions of EFL students of how the use of iPad applications can assist them with speaking fluency, authentic language exposure, authentic language use, and understanding the culture of the people they are communicating with. The results of the study show that most of the students viewed the iPad applications as useful for practicing oral communication. In fact, the students indicated that the iPad applications facilitated providing them with authentic language input and making speaking activities more engaging because they had the ability to provide students with authentic language exposure. However, the students' responses to the questionnaire also indicated that the success of using iPad applications for language practice is dependent on the effective use of pedagogical approaches and requiring the active participation of the students who are using the iPad applications for language practice. This study concludes that iPad apps have the potential to support the development of speaking skills, although more effective implementation strategies are needed in an educational setting.

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## INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language teaching and learning methods have been greatly influenced by advances in information and communications technology (ICT) over the last several years (Hasumi & Chiu, 2024; Poudel, 2022). Digital technology is no longer used only as a supplemental resource; it is now integrated into both classroom instruction (Hudha et al., 2029; Mubarak et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025; Triyoga et al., 2025; Zahro et al., 2025). Students have more opportunities to receive authentic input and to have interactive experiences while learning English as a second or foreign language (Alghasab, 2025; Rafida et al., 2024; Suryanto et al., 2024). There has also been a marked increase in interest in the field of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), which has received a great deal of attention in recent years due to the flexibility that mobile devices afford learners to access learning materials anytime and anywhere, and because they offer many multimedia-rich, learner-centered activities for use by EFL students (Al-Omari, 2012; Putri & Fakhurriana, 2024). According to several recently published meta-analyses, there has been a

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dramatic growth in research conducted on the impact of using mobile technologies in EFL education from 2019 to the present; however, the majority of research conducted on this topic has predominantly focused on the use of mobile technologies in higher education, specifically on the use of smartphones (Al-Busaidi, 1998; Guo et al., 2024).

Within EFL learning, oral communication remains one of the most essential yet most challenging skills to develop (Brown, 1994; Paneerselvam & Mohamad, 2019; Ur, 1996). Speaking requires learners not only to produce language accurately, but also to organize ideas quickly, respond appropriately, and maintain interaction in real time (Al-Sibai, 2004; Yan et al., 2024). In many EFL contexts, students' speaking difficulties are associated with limited vocabulary, low confidence, insufficient exposure to spoken English, weak cultural knowledge, and inadequate opportunities for meaningful oral practice (Al-Hela, 2003; Jiang & Phusawisot, 2023). In most EFL contexts, the difficulties encountered by EFL learners in speaking are not only related to their linguistic competence, but are also affected by psychological factors, especially speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate (Aydin & Demirer, 2022; Bozathi, 2003; Wilson, 2006). Recent studies have shown that speaking anxiety is still an important factor that can affect EFL learners' self-confidence, fluency, and willingness to communicate, and that learners' communicative self-confidence and motivation are still the key issues in speaking skills (Deep et al., 2025; Fuentesal-García et al., 2025; Muengnakin & Narathakoon, 2025). This challenge is particularly relevant in the Iraqi context, where preparatory school students have been reported to experience substantial difficulty in speaking English due to limited classroom exposure, low motivation, and insufficient communicative support. These conditions make oral communication a critical area for pedagogical innovation.

Using iPads along with language-learning applications can help improve the lives of learners with disabilities or language delays (Chou et al., 2014). iPad apps provide learners with audiovisual input, multiple opportunities to listen to a word repeatedly, an interactive space to perform different tasks related to language development, and greater flexibility with where they practice (Howlett & Waemusa, 2019). Learners who use these technologies have an opportunity to be exposed to authentic language use, have repeated rehearsal, and have an opportunity to be more involved in speaking-related activities. Prior research has shown learners have favourable experiences using the iPad for language development purposes (Alajmi & Al-hadih, 2017; Chou et al., 2014; Ireland & Woollerton, 2010). Compared with conventional classroom materials, iPad applications can provide audiovisual input, repeated listening opportunities, interactive speaking tasks, and access to more contextualized language models (Alhamami, 2016; Ellis, 2003). Prior studies have shown that learners generally hold positive attitudes toward iPad use in language learning.

For example, Alzaidiyeen, (2017) found that EFL learners at Majmaah University reported generally positive attitudes toward using iPads in language learning. Likewise, Morgana & Shrestha, (2018) reported that the use of iPads in an Italian EFL classroom positively supported student motivation and fostered greater independence in language learning tasks. Recent evaluations of mobile-assisted language learning emphasize the necessity for more context-specific and skill-based research, particularly studies that clarify how learners experience technology-mediated language learning in those areas that are underrepresented (Seraj et al., 2021). These findings suggest that iPads may offer pedagogical value beyond simple content delivery, particularly in increasing engagement and supporting more active forms of learning. More broadly, research on mobile devices in school-based EFL contexts has also shown that students often perceive mobile technologies as beneficial for learning and learner satisfaction.

Nevertheless, there exists a significant void in the current body of knowledge. First, while iPads and mobile technology learning have been researched extensively, language development has not been specifically related to oral communication skills but rather is viewed in a general manner with little evidence of the iPad's impact on oral (spoken) skills (Ireland & Woollerton, 2010). Second, most of the studies published to date were conducted with post-secondary students or were teacher-student induced, which means they neglect secondary students. Third, while some prior research has documented a positive attitude toward using an iPad for learning, relatively few studies exist which have evaluated the impact of an iPad application on EFL students' perceptions regarding exposure to authentic language, increased confidence for speaking, real-world situations

to communicate in, and opportunities to practice oral skills, this is critical because the student's perception of the application will greatly contribute to his/her acceptance and engagement with technology, as well as the likelihood that technology will be used again in the future within the classroom.

In light of this context, the current investigation looks at how EFL students view using iPads to support their speaking abilities (Howlett & Waemusa, 2019; Wang et al., 2024; Xiao, 1997). The unique feature of this project is that it examines the opinions of young learners at the secondary level in an Iraqi environment about their own experiences and opinions about the skill of speaking, as opposed to examining EFL students' attitudes toward learning a foreign language in general or using technology to integrate into their learning. Although this is an addition to previous work involving the use of an I-Pad with MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning), it also provides further insight into students' perceptions of the pedagogical value of iPad applications in supporting oral communication practice. Ultimately, this study will offer practical suggestions for teachers and institutions to utilize when incorporating the use of I-Pad applications to increase student interest and engagement in speaking skills and provide an effective means of incorporating iPad applications into their instructional approaches (Yaseen, 2022; Yu, 2024; Zhang, 2009).

The research presented in this paper contributes to the existing literature by extending inquiry into iPad- and MALL-based approaches beyond general language-learning attitudes to specifically examine students' perceptions of oral communication within the context of an underrepresented secondary school in Iraq. This study aims to investigate EFL students' perceptions of using iPad applications to support their oral communication practice. Specifically, it explores how students perceive the usefulness of iPad applications in providing opportunities for speaking practice, exposure to authentic language, and engagement in oral communication activities. In practice, the findings of this study may provide useful insights for practitioners in making pedagogically appropriate decisions when integrating iPad applications into speaking instruction.

## METHOD

This study used a descriptive quantitative research design with a survey approach (Creswell, 2008). The design was used for the study since it aimed at exploring the perceptions of EFL students about using iPad applications for developing their oral communication skills. The study used a descriptive survey design since it was important to capture the perceptions, attitudes, and responses of the students about the usefulness of using iPad applications for English language learning.

The study was conducted at a secondary school in Baghdad, Iraq, during the second semester of the academic year. The participants included 30 EFL students who were randomly selected from the school. The participants were used for the study since they were actively participating in English language learning and were exposed to using digital tools for learning.

To ensure that the study was aligned with the objective of the study, the questionnaire items were developed based on the relevant literature about mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), English language speaking instruction, and using iPad applications for educational purposes. The items were used to capture the perceptions of the students about using iPad applications for developing different aspects of English language speaking instruction.

Before administration, the questionnaire was reviewed in terms of its clarity, wording, and suitability for use by the target participants. Since the primary objective of the present study was to offer a descriptive account of students' perceptions, it was used as a preliminary survey method. For future studies, it would be recommended that the questionnaire be subjected to a formal expert validation and internal consistency reliability be statistically established using a measure such as Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

The collected data were subjected to analysis using descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages, in order to establish the distribution of students' perceptions towards each item of the questionnaire. The analysis of the collected data was based on establishing a general trend of students' perceptions towards the use of iPad applications in supporting oral communication learning. The analysis was then interpreted in light of the objective of the study and existing literature on mobile-assisted language learning and EFL speaking instruction.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Overall Pattern of Students' Perceptions

This research aimed to elicit feedback from the 30 EFL students on their perceptions of how they were able to improve their oral communication skills through the use of applications on their iPads. The research questions were on the students' interest in utilizing the iPad in association with their English language learning, their perceptions on whether or not they thought the use of iPads could be helpful for their oral communication, their exposure to real-life authentic types of communication, and their perceptions on whether or not the utilization of iPads could provide aid for their oral communication skills. From the research, it is clear that there were no uniform perceptions from the students, implying that their perceptions on utilizing the iPad applications for oral communication were not uniform. In this regard, there were perceptions from some of the students that the applications were helpful for their oral communication skills, while there were perceptions from some of the students that were less positive. This implies that the applications were not helpful for their oral communication skills.

The initial data set included a survey that asked if the students thought it was a fun way for them to practice and help develop their speaking skills using iPad applications. The results were displayed in a frequency distribution format. There was a significant amount of variation in the response rate for the five categories used in this survey question, as demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Students' Responses to the Perceived Usefulness of iPad Applications for Supporting Speaking Skills

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	4	13.3%
Agree	6	20.0%
Neutral	3	10.0%
Disagree	14	46.7%
Strongly Disagree	3	10.0%
Total	30	100.0%

As depicted in Table 1, it is noticeable that the distribution of the responses of the students on this particular item covered all categories of responses, with the highest percentage falling within the disagree category (46.7%). This implies that, for this particular statement, the students did not overwhelmingly see the iPad applications as an interesting tool for improving speaking skills. However, a small percentage of the students expressed a positive point of view, with 20.0% agreeing and 13.3% strongly agreeing with the statement that the applications of the iPad could be helpful for speaking improvement.

### Summary of Perceived Benefits and Mixed Responses

There is a relatively even split in the responses reported by students; generally, they held neither an overwhelmingly positive nor overwhelmingly negative view of how they perceived using iPad apps in EFL speaking instructional settings. In fact, they probably perceive them in varying degrees and ways depending on both the types of activities in which they were engaged the perceived usefulness of an app for the specific task, and the degree that the app had been effectively incorporated into speaking practice.

From the perspective of the questionnaire (which included items related to authentic language exposure, real-life communication, understanding language in context, understanding language as it pertains to a particular culture, and demonstrating oral proficiency), the findings suggest that iPad apps have potential for pedagogical value; however, that potential is not universally recognized across all learners. In other words, it suggests that while you can use an iPad app as a standalone tool to assist in creating a more engaging, yet effective experience in the classroom, it is not necessarily a substitute for other tools or resources that can aid in developing your oral communication ability.

## Discussion

The results of this study suggest that EFL students' perceptions of using iPad applications for facilitating oral communication skills development were not consistently positive. This is an interesting finding because it implies that EFL students do not necessarily perceive the use of digital tools for facilitating oral communication skills development as effective (Reinders & White, 2022; Stockwell, 2022). Rather, it implies that EFL students perceive the use of iPad applications as a potentially facilitative tool for facilitating oral communication skills development, depending on how it is integrated with other speaking-related learning activities (Wichadee & Tanadon, 2021; Zou et al., 2023). Thus, it can be argued that this study does not aim to suggest the direct effect of using iPad applications on EFL students' speaking performance; instead, it aims to reveal how EFL students perceive the pedagogical value of using iPad applications for facilitating oral communication skills development (Stockwell, 2022).

This finding is partly consistent with earlier studies that reported generally positive attitudes toward iPad use in language learning, but it also reveals a more nuanced picture (Zou et al., 2023). Alzaidiyeen, (2017) found that EFL learners at Majmaah University generally held positive attitudes toward using iPads in language learning, suggesting that students tended to welcome the device as a helpful educational tool. However, that study examined language learning in a broad sense and focused on university students' attitudes toward iPad use overall, rather than on students' views of iPad applications specifically for oral communication skills. In contrast, the present study narrows the focus to speaking-related learning and shows that once the question becomes more specific, student perceptions may become more conditional and less uniformly positive (Reinders & White, 2022; Stockwell, 2022).

The diverse findings of this research may also be explained through the larger background of Mobile Assisted Language Learning provided by Guo et al. (2024). There are more and more studies being published about Mobile Assistant Language Learning (MALL), but the spread of this work is uneven across technology, educational level, and language skill area (Wichadee & Tanadon, 2021; Zou et al., 2023). It is to be expected, therefore, that this study remains pertinent, with the amount of work being generated under the MALL umbrella occurring at an increasing rate; however, studies still need to investigate specific contexts and/or age groups and specific language skills (Guo et al., 2024; Stockwell, 2022). In this instance, the population investigated (EFL learners in Secondary School), the technology utilized (tablet/iPad applications), and the area of English language skill focus (orally communicated English), represent an area of literature that has yet to be investigated directly.

From the perspective of novelty, the study offers a more specific contribution than much of the earlier literature. Alzaidiyeen, (2017) emphasized general student attitudes toward iPad use in language learning, while Morgana and Shrestha examined combined student-teacher perceptions of iPad-supported EFL learning in a school setting. The present study differs from both by focusing specifically on students' perceptions, in a secondary-school Iraqi EFL context, and within the narrower domain of oral communication skills. The novelty, therefore, lies not in introducing iPads as a new technology, but in generating more focused evidence about how learners in an underrepresented context perceive iPad applications as tools for supporting speaking practice. This makes the study more than a replication; it is a contextual and domain-specific refinement of existing iPad and MALL research. Practically, the findings imply that teachers and schools should be cautious about assuming that tablet-based tools will automatically improve speaking instruction (Reinders & White, 2022). Instead, iPad applications should be selected and integrated with clear communicative goals, such as providing authentic listening models, encouraging oral rehearsal, supporting pronunciation practice, and reducing students' anxiety in speaking tasks (Dewaele, 2022; Zou et al., 2023). In this way, the study contributes not only to the literature on digital language learning but also to pedagogical decision-making in EFL classrooms where oral communication remains difficult, and technology adoption must be justified by students' actual learning experience.

## LIMITATIONS

The study has several limitations. Firstly, the study was based on the students' perceptions of their improvement in speaking performance. Secondly, the study was conducted at only one school for secondary students with a small number of participants. Thirdly, the study was based only on the questionnaire data collected. Lastly, the study did not examine the types of iPad applications used with the students in relation to their effectiveness in improving the students' speaking performance.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the perceptions of EFL students with regard to using iPad applications in enhancing their oral communication skills in an Iraqi secondary school context. The study's findings reveal that the perceptions of the students were varied, indicating that the use of iPad applications is not fully seen as an effective means of developing speaking skills but is instead seen as a supportive means for enhancing speaking skills. Although the study found that iPad applications were seen as an effective means of providing real-life input for the students, giving them ample practice with regards to speaking skills, and giving them more engaging means for developing speaking skills, the study's findings reveal that the usefulness of these applications is seen to depend on the appropriateness of the selected applications with regards to speaking skills. The study contributes to the existing literature with its more focused understanding of the perceptions of the students with regard to using iPad applications for enhancing their oral communication skills in an underrepresented context for EFL studies. The study's practical implications reveal that these applications should be used with caution as supportive means for enhancing speaking skills. Given the study's limited sample and reliance on self-reported data, future research should involve larger participant groups, stronger instrument validation, and direct measures of speaking performance to provide more comprehensive evidence of the role of iPad applications in EFL oral communication development.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AHH contributed to conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data curation, and writing the original draft. AGS contributed to formal analysis, validation, writing, review, and editing. MMA contributed to data collection and project administration. BNR contributed to supervision, validation, writing, review, and editing. BSMA contributed to methodology, supervision, writing, review, and editing. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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