

Talkin App as an Effective English Learning Media to Enhance Participants' Speaking Ability at the Malaysian International Community Service

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ABSTRAK

Pelaksanaan kegiatan Pengabdian Masyarakat Internasional adalah untuk berkontribusi aktif dalam kegiatan internasional seperti pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dengan menggunakan Talkin App. Aplikasi dipakai untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara partisipan selama Program Layanan Masyarakat Internasional di Malaysia. Menggunakan metode Penelitian Aksi Partisipatif (PAR), proyek ini melibatkan komunitas internasional Malaysia sebagai partisipan aktif dalam mengidentifikasi masalah, merancang solusi, dan mengevaluasi hasil secara kolaboratif yang berfokus pada pengembangan bahasa Inggris. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, jurnal reflektif, dan penilaian kinerja. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Talkin App efektif meningkatkan kelancaran, pengucapan, dan kepercayaan diri partisipan dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris. Integrasi teknologi dengan strategi pembelajaran partisipatif tidak hanya meningkatkan kompetensi komunikatif tetapi juga mendorong pemahaman lintas budaya di antara peserta dan komunitas lokal. Kesimpulannya, Talkin App terbukti menjadi media yang efektif dan menarik untuk mengembangkan keterampilan berbicara dalam konteks internasional, menunjukkan potensi pendekatan partisipatif dan berbantuan teknologi dalam inisiatif pendidikan global.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the International Community Service program is to actively contribute to international activities such as English language learning using Talkin App. The application was used to improve students' speaking skills during the International Community Service Program in Malaysia. Using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, this project engaged Malaysian international community as active participants in identifying problems, designing solutions, and evaluating outcomes collaboratively, focusing on English language development. Data were collected through observations, interviews, reflective journals, and performance assessments. The research findings showed that Talkin App effectively improved participants' fluency, pronunciation, and confidence in speaking English. The integration of technology with participatory learning strategies not only improved communicative competence but also fostered cross-cultural understanding among participants and the local community. In conclusion, Talkin App proved to be an effective and engaging medium for developing speaking skills in an international context, demonstrating the potential of participatory and technology-assisted approaches in global education initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, English has become a global lingua franca that plays a crucial role in academic, professional, and social communication. Despite being engaged in English-learning environments, many students, even at the university level, still struggle to speak fluently and confidently (Roda'i, 2022). The integration of digital technology, particularly interactive applications, offers opportunities to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication (Jeon et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Cerezo et al. (2024) state that in today's digital era, communication applications (referred to in this study as the Talkin App), mobile- or web-based platforms that enable real-time or recorded oral interaction with feedback from teachers or peers, are viewed as potential tools for enhancing speaking proficiency. Several studies have shown that speaking applications can improve learners' motivation, confidence, learning autonomy, and technical aspects such as fluency, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Sari, 2023). These speaking applications have been evidenced by several previous studies on the use of speaking applications in language learning, including Ziyi & Jingxian (2023) in their work titled *A Study on the Effectiveness of Speaking Apps in Improving Students' Speaking Skills*, and Zhang & Pérez-Paredes (2023) in *The Effectiveness of Mobile Apps in Improving Speaking Skills among EFL Learners*. These studies found that digital speaking-learning applications enhanced learners' interest, self-directed learning awareness, and overall speaking performance. Similar findings were reported by Rosilah & Ulfa (2024) in their study *The Use of Hello Talk Application for Speaking Skills: A Case Study of Online Language Learners for Senior High School*, as well as by Harahap & Salmiah (2017) in *"I Speak" an Application to Improve Students' Speaking Competencies*. Both studies revealed that the use of such applications helped improve fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary development among secondary school learners. Furthermore, findings by Roda'i et al. (2025) on the use of digital applications, in a study titled *Assisting Students in English Language Learning through the Use of Duolingo Application at the International Community Service Activity*, and by Meliana et al. (2025) in *HelloTalk's Role in Enhancing English Speaking Skills: A Lesson from Technology-Assisted Language Learning*, reported similar results. These studies additionally noted that students felt more motivated and enthusiastic when using digital applications because they enabled English learning anytime and anywhere.

It is important to note that the "Talkin App" is relatively new or less commonly examined in academic research compared to well-established applications like HelloTalk. However, principles and findings from studies on similar applications offer valuable insights into the potential and challenges of using the Talkin App in learning or communication contexts. The researcher employed this digital speaking application, known as Talkin App, because it is a newly emerging platform that provides a virtual space for learners to practice English speaking with peers and native speakers through voice messages, instant corrections, and real-time feedback. The study was conducted within the International Community Service (ICS) program in Malaysia to investigate how the Talkin App enhances participants' speaking performance through a participatory and collaborative approach. English proficiency, particularly speaking skills, has become one of the essential competencies in a globalized context. Participants who engage in international community service programs abroad (such as in Malaysia) often face situations requiring direct communication with the Malaysian international community as well as with fellow international participants (EMS Language Centre, 2023). However, many

experience difficulties such as speaking anxiety, unclear pronunciation, low confidence, and limited opportunities for speaking practice. The researcher believes that Participatory Action Research (PAR) is well-suited for this context because it actively involves participants in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning activities. Through PAR, learners are not merely research subjects but partners who help design activities, identify challenges, and collaboratively overcome obstacles. Meanwhile, selecting Malaysia as the location for the International Community Service program is highly appropriate. Besides being geographically close to Indonesia, Malaysia is known as a multilingual country with an international educational landscape and a diverse community, offering an ideal environment for students to apply English in real-life activities. International community service programs often involve interactions with local residents, non-profit organizations, schools, and immigrant communities. Initiatives such as the English Language Ambassador Award and various community outreach programs in Malaysia demonstrate the genuine need for effective English-learning media (Splendour Project, 2023).

Based on the above context, this study aims to determine the effectiveness of using the Talkin App in improving participants' speaking abilities in an international community service setting. The more specific objectives of this research are: (1) To evaluate the effectiveness of the Talkin App in enhancing the English-speaking skills of International Community Service participants in Malaysia; (2) To identify which aspects of speaking (fluency, pronunciation, confidence, interaction) are most influenced by the use of the application; and (3) To identify the challenges and solutions in implementing the Talkin App as a speaking-learning medium in an international community service context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) method is an approach developed from the ideas of social psychologist Kurt Lewin around the 1940s. This method has been widely used in language education research because it enables continuous reflection and allows for responsive changes tailored to local contexts. According to Kemmis & McTaggart (2014), PAR is conducted through a cyclical process that includes: problem identification → action planning → implementation → observation and reflection → revision and re-implementation. Through the PAR method, researchers are able to obtain the necessary data regarding the use of the Talkin App and optimize the learning process according to the needs of participants in the international community service program. The design of this study adopts the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method with several cycles. This aligns with Rusli (2024), who states that PAR consists of multiple cycles, and each cycle includes: (1) Problem identification: conducted through interviews, preliminary observations, and questionnaires regarding challenges in speaking English; (2) Action planning: designing the use of the Talkin App, providing initial training, arranging usage settings, and determining evaluation procedures; (3) Action implementation: students use the application over a period of six weeks, completing both structured and free speaking tasks; (4) Observation and reflection: recording speaking performance, collecting feedback, conducting post-action interviews, and reviewing participants' reflective journals; and (5) Action revision: improving aspects of application use based on observations and reflections, followed by implementation in a subsequent cycle. The research took place in Malaysia and involved participants from among secondary school students, university students, migrant learners, young workers, and local community members. More specifically, the study was

carried out within the context of the International Community Service (ICS) program in Malaysia. A total of 32 participants from the international community in Malaysia took part in the study, consisting of secondary school learners, migrant students, young employees, and community members who served as speaking partners. Participants were divided into small groups for collaboration and practice. To obtain the required data, the researcher conducted data collection using several prepared instruments. These included: direct observation and audio recordings of speaking sessions; assessments of speaking performance (pre-test and post-test) using rubrics that measured fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, interaction, and confidence; semi-structured interviews with participants and local partners; reflective journals written by participants throughout the cycles; and post-action questionnaires to measure perceptions, motivation, and satisfaction regarding the application. After collecting the data, the researcher conducted data analysis. The quantitative data (pre- and post-test scores) were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired t-tests to examine significant improvements. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding, focusing on challenges encountered, strengths, and suggestions for improvement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researcher and the team addressed the research questions derived from the study objectives, and attempted to obtain answers based on those objectives. The study focused on three key points: identifying the effectiveness of the Talkin App in improving the English-speaking skills of participants in the International Community Service program in Malaysia; determining which aspects of speaking (fluency, pronunciation, confidence, interaction) were most affected by the use of the application; and identifying challenges and solutions in implementing the Talkin App as a speaking-learning medium in an international community service context. To achieve this, the researcher conducted field investigations through observations during the pre-test phase, designed based on the study objectives, and continued with a post-test. To provide clearer insights, the researcher and the team implemented several steps related to the use of the Talkin App following the PAR method, which included the following:

Finding Problem Identification of Technological Access, Oral Practice, Learning Media and Psychological Problem to Make Sure the Use of Talkin App

In this stage, the researcher and the team conducted interviews. These interviews were carried out with the organizing committee or facilitators of the International Community Service program. The results indicated that the preparation had been optimized: all international teams confirmed their participation, and facilities such as venue availability, internet data packages, and the Talkin App were ready for use. To ensure the accuracy of the interview findings, the researcher also conducted verification. This process, referred to as preliminary observation, ensured that preparations aligned with the plan. To obtain valid data for problem identification, the researcher administered a questionnaire focusing on challenges in speaking English due to accent, dialect, or cultural differences to prevent misunderstandings among participants. Interviews were also conducted with program participants, involving 32 individuals from the international community in Malaysia, comprising secondary school students, migrant university students, young workers, and community members who wished to improve their English skills for academic or professional purposes. Participants ranged from 15 to 28 years old, with varying

English proficiency levels. Most participants possessed basic English abilities but faced challenges in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking confidence. From the initial interviews, participants expressed that:

1. They felt embarrassed or anxious when speaking English for fear of making mistakes.
2. Limited access to native speakers resulted in infrequent speaking practice.
3. Formal classroom learning did not provide sufficient oral practice.
4. Engaging and interactive learning media were still lacking.

These findings indicate the need for alternative media capable of increasing speaking practice in a flexible, engaging, and low-pressure environment. The Talkin App was selected as a solution because it offers conversation features, speech-recognition technology, context-based activities, and voice-message-based interaction.

Making Planning through Talkin App by Formulating Learning Needs and Establishing Program Objectives

In the planning stage, the researcher and the team, together with the community as PKM implementers, formulated learning needs and established program objectives based on the needs assessment and the main priorities were:

1. Increasing speaking confidence,
2. Enriching vocabulary,
3. Improving pronunciation,
4. Building fluency through repeated practice, and
5. Providing a supportive English-learning environment suitable for beginners.

The researcher and the team then developed a Talkin App-based activity module that included:

1. Pair conversation exercises using the voice-message feature,
2. Real-life simulations such as ordering food, self-introductions, and discussions on daily topics,
3. Pronunciation drills using speech recognition,
4. Small-group discussions to strengthen contextual language use, and
5. Weekly voice journals to document speaking development.

The planning stage also included brief training on the use of the Talkin App to ensure that no technical barriers would occur during implementation. To accomplish this, the researcher and the team conducted a trial application session. If any technical issue arose, the settings were reconfigured to ensure smooth usage. To guarantee that the program would run effectively, the entire plan underwent careful evaluation.

Doing Implementation through Talkin App to Increase Speaking Ability and Learning Motivation

During the implementation phase, students used the application over a period of six weeks. The activities were carried out according to the action plan. Two PAR cycles were implemented, each lasting three weeks, with both structured and free speaking tasks. The following describes the implementation of the two cycles:

Cycle 1

1. The pre-test showed that the average speaking score of participants was relatively low, particularly in pronunciation and confidence; many participants were hesitant when speaking.
2. After using the Talkin App for three weeks with weekly assignments, dialogue practice, light debates, monologues, and interactions with local partners, participants showed noticeable improvements in fluency and confidence.
3. Pronunciation improved, especially in difficult sounds such as *th*, *r/l*, and long/short vowels, although some residual errors remained.
4. Participants reported that feedback from local partners or peers was very helpful; listening to native-speaker models through the app or recordings provided concrete references.

Cycle 2 (Revised Action)

1. Based on reflections from Cycle 1, additional pronunciation drills, the use of facial expressions and gestures during speaking, and more realistic simulations (role-playing local community situations) were integrated.
2. After the second cycle, the post-test showed statistically significant improvements in almost all aspects: fluency, interaction, pronunciation, confidence, and vocabulary use.
3. Participants' motivation increased; they used the app more frequently outside assigned schedules, spoke more often with fellow participants and local residents, and used English more consistently.

Setting Observation, Interview and Reflection related to Implementation, Improvement and Impact of the Use of Talkin App

During both cycles, the researcher and the team recorded participants' speaking performance during dialogues, mini-debates, monologues, and interactions with local partners. The reflections examined whether:

1. the implementation was executed effectively,
2. the improvements in fluency were genuine and consistent,
3. there was an impact on speaking confidence, and
4. pronunciation improvement, including difficult sounds such as *th*, *r/l*, and vowel contrasts, was evident despite minor remaining errors.

Feedback was gathered through observations and interviews with committee members and participants. These interviews served as a comparison to validate observational data. A sequence of reflective journals was also collected to assess whether activities needed to be revised. Participants consistently reported that the feedback feature from peers and local partners was highly beneficial, as the native-speaker audio models provided concrete speaking references.

Action Revision (Based on Two PAR Cycles)

Based on reflections from Cycle 1, the researcher and the team added focused pronunciation training, the use of gestures and facial expressions, and more realistic simulation sessions. After Cycle 2, a post-test was administered to all selected ICS participants to obtain data on the effectiveness of the Talkin App. The results showed statistically significant improvements in nearly all aspects of speaking ability, as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Scores

No	Aspects	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Gain Score	t-value	Sig. (p)
1.	Fluency	68.4	82.6	+14.2	4.55	0.001
2.	Pronunciation	70.1	85.3	+15.2	4.89	0.000
3.	Vocabulary	72.5	86.8	+14.3	4.12	0.002
4.	Confidence	65.9	84.7	+18.8	5.33	0.000

The findings regarding the effectiveness of the Talkin App in the context of the Malaysian International Community Service demonstrate that the application successfully enhances participants' speaking skills in several key areas: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence. This effectiveness aligns with the principles of technology-enhanced language learning (mobile-assisted language learning), which emphasize flexibility, accessibility, and real-time interaction. Based on the results, it is evident that the Talkin App facilitates language practice that is authentic, through simulated real-life communication, personalized, allowing learners to practice at their own pace, participatory, through two-way conversations and community collaboration, and repetitive, which is essential for mastering speaking skills. Within the context of the international PKM program in Malaysia, it was found that the use of digital applications such as Talkin serves as an innovative solution to overcome the limited opportunities for direct interaction with native speakers or English-speaking environments. The integration of the Talkin App within the PAR method in this study also served as an effective framework for community-based language learning. PAR is highly suitable for international community service projects for several reasons. First, PAR empowers participants by positioning them not merely as objects of learning but as active subjects who help determine learning needs, evaluate processes, and reflect on outcomes. Second, PAR fosters contextual learning as participants design conversation topics relevant to their daily experiences in Malaysia, making learning more meaningful. Third, PAR strengthens social engagement as participants support each other through voice-message exchanges and discussions, thereby creating a collaborative learning environment. Finally, PAR promotes continuous improvement, as each cycle leads to adjustments in teaching methods, task types, and application feature utilization based on participant feedback.

Data obtained through observation, interviews, and pre-test and post-test results indicate that the Talkin App leads to measurable improvements in participants' speaking abilities across linguistic indicators. In terms of fluency, participants who initially spoke in fragmented sentences gradually became more fluent, sustaining speech for 30–60 seconds. This improvement occurred because regular voice-recording practice helped them reduce filler words such as “umm” or “ahh.” Enhancements were also observed in pronunciation, supported by the speech-recognition feature that automatically detects errors, allowing participants to correct their pronunciation more easily through instant feedback. Additionally, improvements were recorded in self-correction, as participants increasingly noticed their own grammatical errors and corrected them without instructor intervention. Vocabulary development was also evident, as situational practice encouraged learners to acquire relevant vocabulary, such as

expressions used in cafés, malls, workplaces, and other contexts, enabling many participants to form spontaneous sentences without relying on written texts.

Regarding the development of attitudes and learning motivation, the research team found that the use of the Talkin App contributed to significant positive changes among participants. These included increased confidence, reduced speaking anxiety, the growth of intrinsic motivation due to enjoyable learning experiences, and a stronger sense of progress that participants were able to monitor. Motivation also increased because participants frequently used the application outside formal task hours, engaging in conversations with peers and local residents and using English more consistently. These findings align with Krashen's affective filter theory, which maintains that comfortable learning environments reduce affective barriers and therefore facilitate more effective language acquisition. Several challenges were identified during the implementation of the Talkin App. One major issue was limited internet access; some participants required additional data support to practice consistently. Beyond internet limitations, variations in motivation also presented challenges, as a number of participants displayed reduced consistency by the second week, prompting facilitators to provide additional encouragement. Another challenge was the diversity of language proficiency backgrounds. Beginner learners required additional explanations to follow the activities effectively. However, most challenges were addressed through PAR strategies such as reflective discussions, peer mentoring, and task adjustments.

The researcher and the team can say that the use of the Talkin App made significant contributions to the international community through the International PKM program. The initiative not only improved participants' English speaking skills but also strengthened social connections within the international community. Interactions through the application and face-to-face activities promoted cross-cultural collaboration, mutual respect in the learning process, and the emergence of a bilingual learning community. Additionally, the program cultivated the mindset that technology is not merely a form of entertainment, but a powerful tool for educational empowerment. The findings highlight several important implications for the development of English language learning media. They show that language learning can take place anytime and anywhere; the PAR approach increases participants' sense of value and motivation; digital applications accelerate speaking improvement more effectively than traditional methods; and technology supports the sustainability of international PKM programs regardless of geographical location. Overall, this discussion demonstrates that:

1. The Talkin App is indeed effective as a supplementary tool, though not a replacement for direct interaction, and its success depends greatly on technical aspects and design features such as ease of use, audio quality, availability of native-speaker models, and feedback mechanisms.
2. PAR plays a crucial role, as participants' active involvement enables actions that align with real needs and immediate reflection that addresses learning barriers.
3. Challenges identified include unstable internet access, variations in local accents, shyness or reluctance to speak, and differing proficiency levels among participants. Solutions implemented included peer support, small-group practice sessions, and the use of personal recordings prior to public presentations.

CONCLUSION

The results of this international PKM program indicate that the Talkin App has proven effective as an English learning medium to enhance the speaking abilities of participants within the international community in Malaysia, particularly in the aspects of fluency, confidence, pronunciation, and interaction. The PAR method facilitated a learning process that was more adaptive and responsive to participants' needs, accelerating improvements in the use of media and learning strategies. This enabled participants to be actively involved in every stage, from planning to reflection, resulting in learning that was contextual, collaborative, and sustainable. Despite several technical and psychological challenges, these obstacles were minimized through participatory action revisions and consistent peer and local support. Significant progress was evident in areas such as speaking fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary enrichment, confidence and motivation, and the ability to communicate in real-life contexts. The researcher further concludes that this program contributed meaningfully to strengthening English literacy within the international community in Malaysia and opened future opportunities for the development of technology-based learning media. Therefore, to optimize the use of the Talkin App, institutions organizing International PKM or similar programs should provide initial training on application use and targeted pronunciation practice; ensure that the application includes features such as recording, playback, native-speaker models, automatic feedback, and peer assessment; guarantee adequate technological infrastructure, including stable internet connectivity and devices; and incorporate direct practice sessions (either face-to-face or through local community involvement) as a complement to digital learning. Future research may involve larger samples, longer application-use duration, and comparisons with control groups.

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