

## Daily Conversations on the Application “Hallo”: A New Approach to Assign Speaking Homework to Students

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i2.1258>

**APA Citation:** Le Thi, H., & Nguyet, D. T. . (2023). Daily Conversations on the Application “Hallo”: A New Approach to Assign Speaking Homework to Students. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 5(2), 278–291. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i2.1258>

**Received:**

23/04/2023

**Accepted:**

02/06/2023

**Keywords:**

application, daily conversations, speaking homework.

**Abstract**

Utilizing mobile phone apps to enhance students’ English-speaking skills is not novel to teachers. Hallo is an app on which users make random audio calls with several callers from different countries in the world. Based on one feature of Hallo that for every 10-minute conversation with any speaker counts towards their consecutive use of the application over ten weeks. The case study was carried out to investigate the effectiveness of practicing English speaking on Hallo as daily at-home exercises. Ten English major sophomores at Hong Duc University were chosen to participate in the study lasting ten weeks. These students were required to make daily conversations about assigned topics on Hallo and then video-record them to send to the teacher for regular checking. The comparisons of pre-test and post-test results, interviews and classroom observations indicate that students made significant progress in English speaking skills and could communicate with others more fluently. The study suggests that the teacher should give detailed guidelines to help low-level students maximize the benefits of this app in mastering English speaking.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Byrne and Diem (2014) state that smartphones are considered to be an advanced technology device. Smartphones are capable of opening many possibilities for language learners, and their rapid adoption makes it easier to make these possibilities real. Being multifunctional devices used for communication, entertainment, networking and learning, they are seen as potentially useful for second language learning and instruction because of their portability and connectivity. One of the more popular functions of smartphones is their ability to support mobile applications. The use of smartphone apps for language learning seems ideal for learners

when the rate of smartphone use is increasing. Users just search for an app with the functions they want and download it to use anytime and anywhere.

In the era of Covid-19, communicating in person has been limited. App developers have been developing a number of apps which enable users to connect with people all around the world. This convenience may assist learners to have much more opportunities to practice English speaking. According to Canale (1983), speaking with foreigners seems to be the most useful way for language learners to practice English. Instead of doing speaking homework individually, the learners foster their English competency by communicating with other foreigners. This seems to be an interesting approach that the teacher should exploit to create motivation in speaking English to the students, and consequently enhancing their speaking ability.

Among a number of mobile applications which support English speaking practice such as “Audacity”, “Voice blog”, or “Hello Talk”, there have been a great number of studies related to Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) (Belanger, 2005; Chinnery, 2006; Garcia Cabrere, 2002; Kukulska-Hulme, 2005; Valarmathi, 2011). This study aimed at exploring the effectiveness of assigning speaking homework to students by making daily conversations on the app “Hallo”. This is a free mobile application which allows users to talk with real users all over the world in anytime and anywhere. The aim of the study was fulfilled by answering the research question: “How effective is practicing English speaking on “Hallo” as daily homework?”

## **2. THE APPLICATION “HALLO”**

### **2.1. Overview of the app**

In 2017, Joon Beh and his co-founder, Benjamin Dent, founded [Hallo](#) - a social app and marketplace for English learning. As a Korean immigrant, Joon Beh understands the challenges of learning a new language, the biggest one being lack of opportunities to speak. English learners spend most of their time in textbooks instead of actually speaking. However, the best way to learn a new language is by speaking, practicing, and immersing yourself in the language and culture daily.

“Hallo” is the first free, real-time, language-learning, social platform available in the market. According to a survey conducted by Hallo, English learners from 170 countries around the world practice speaking together on Hallo for over a million minutes every day. At the click of a button, Hallo users have conversations with a random practice partners in real-time audio chat. Hallo connects English learners, helping them improve their social speaking skills - arguably the most important aspect of language learning.



*Figure 1: Logo of app “Hallo”*

### **2.2. Using the application “Hallo” to practice English speaking**

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The application “Hallo” offers a number of functions for users such as teaching English one-on-one, participating in online English classes and speaking English with different users. With the purpose of enhancing English speaking to any students wanting to improve their skills, any teacher might ask students to make one-on-one conversations with different users on the application “Hallo”.

To use the function of 1-on-1 conversation, it is essential to register an Instagram account. By choosing “Instamatch” and “Start Instamatch” (figure 2), there appears a random speaker to talk (figure 2). If the user would like to talk with that person, he/she may accept and after three seconds the conversation can start (figure 2). However, if one does not want to talk with that speaker, the user can skip and wait for another speaker.

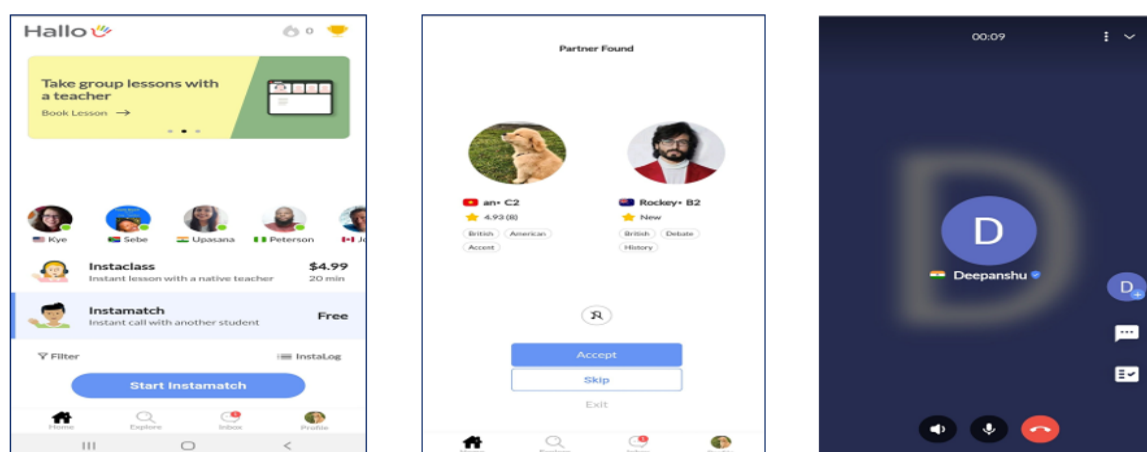


Figure 2: the steps to start a conversation on the application “Hallo”

This application can count the number of days (called “streak in progress” on Hallo) that users speak English with others via “1-on-1 conversation” if the length of time for each conversation is over 10 minutes (figure 3). When users complete the more than 10-minute conversation, the app will count one day of “streak in progress”, which allows the users and the teacher to follow the frequency of using the application “Hallo”.

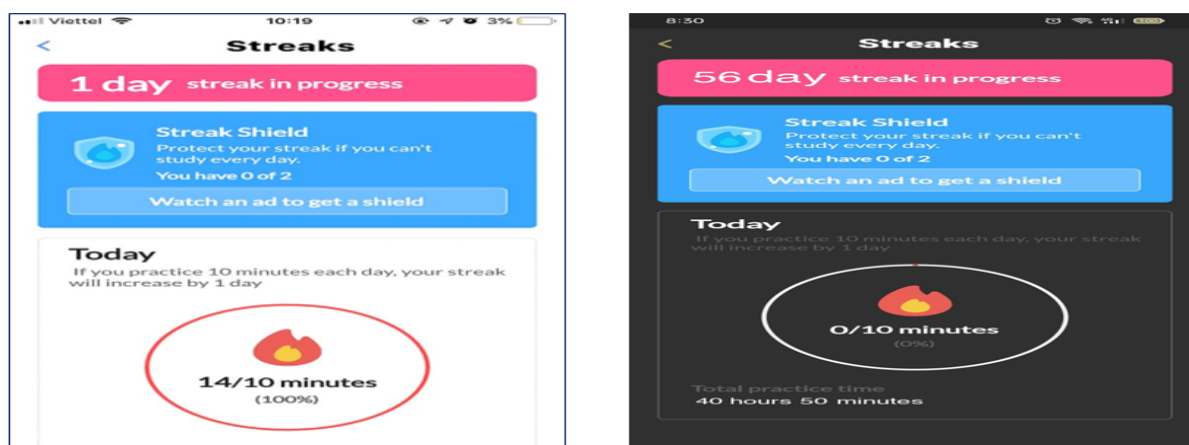


Figure 3: Counting from day 1 to day 56 using on the application “Hallo”

Additionally, after making one-on-one calls, the user can review the history of conversations, which records all the voice calls via Hallo. From this calling history, users may follow or add friends with the people who have called in order to text or have more calls later if necessary (figure 4).

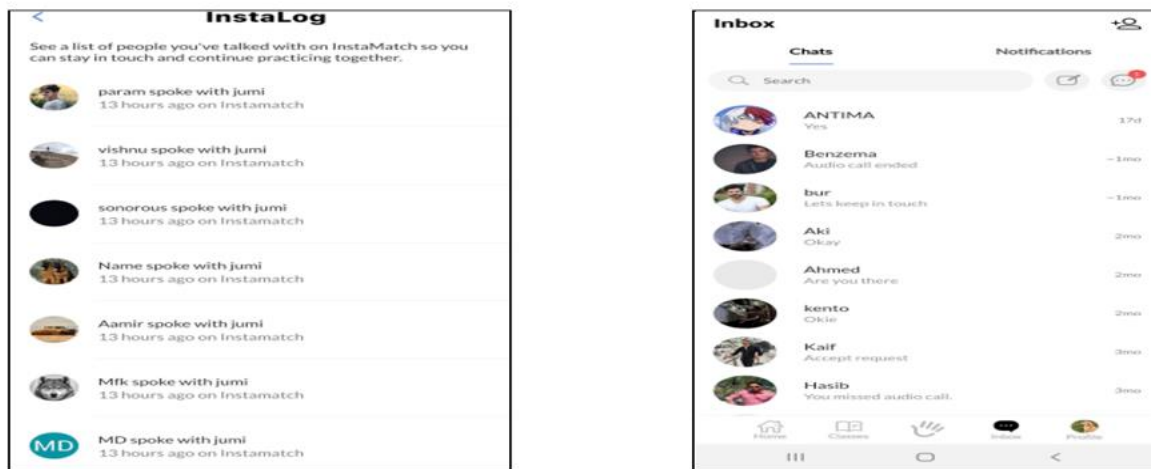


Figure 4: The calling history and friend-list on the app “Hallo”

It cannot be denied that the application is a useful tool for both teachers and students in teaching and learning English. With the function which counts the number of days of more than 10-minute conversations with other users on the application, the teacher can assign speaking homework on this app to students to practice English speaking every day. This way may motivate the students to speak English much more than only practicing speaking individually or with their peers.

### 3. Literature review

#### 3.1 Speaking skills

Eckard & Kearny (1981) state that speaking is considered as a two-way process relating to a true communication of ideas, information or feelings. This means that when making conversation, it is essential to have two people to interact in terms of opinions and emotions. According to Qasemi (2020), speaking is defined as a form of communication which demonstrates the most meaningful language competency.

Canale (1984) based on an earlier version by Canale and Swain (1980) reconstructed a framework of communicative competence and categorized it in four elements: Grammatical competence, Sociolinguistic competence, Discourse competence and Strategic competence. This framework implies that to communicate well, learners need to have good language knowledge. However, Islam W., Ahmad, and Islam M.D. (2022) believed that through communication and interaction, speaking skills may be clearly shown in their importance. In other words, speaking skills play a crucial role in facilitating communication and interaction among people.

#### 3.2 Homework

The Oxford Dictionary of English defines homework in more or less the same way; it is “schoolwork that a pupil is required to do at home”. This definition is similar with what stated in the previous research that “homework is work assigned to students by the teacher in order to be completed outside of the school time” (Cooper, 1989; Thomas, 1992). In addition, Dennis

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(2007) states that “the purpose of homework is that the pupils learn to take responsibility, plan their work, organize their school work and develop good study techniques”. By completing homework regularly, learners have chances to enhance the skills and knowledge they have learnt in the class.

Vatterott (2010) classified five characteristics of good homework: purpose, efficiency, ownership, competence, and aesthetic appeal. When assigning homework, it is of utmost importance that teachers think about its purposefulness, consider how well it encourages their students to become self-directed (Blaz, 2006), and listen to learners’ wishes (Cushman, 2010). Regarding assigning homework to students, Paulu (1998) recommended nine suggestions that the teacher should: 1) create assignments with a purpose and make sure students understand the purpose; 2) make assignments relevant to the learning in the classroom; 3) match assignments to the skills, interests, and needs of the students; 4) create assignments that challenge students to think and to integrate; 5) assign an appropriate amount of homework and do not overburden the students; 6) vary assignment and avoid repeating the same type of assignment; 7) give homework that makes learning personal; 8) develop a reasonable way to give correction and feedback; 9) let the students have incentives to do their best in doing the homework.

### **3.3 Mobile assisted language learning (MALL)**

Using mobile devices in teaching and learning process is called as mobile learning. According to Kukulska-Hulme & Shield (2008), mobile learning is the way of learning which can be done anywhere and anytime through the use of handheld device. Azli, Shah, and Mohamad (2018) stated that Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is considered as a way of formal and informal learning which can support traditional learning. This way can be done in the classroom or outside of the classroom.

According to Chiu et al. (2015), the use of mobile device in language learning could improve students’ language skills. It is mainly because mobile devices provide some features and applications that supports language learners to improve their language skills. As a result, only with a smart phone accessing the internet, learners can practice language skills very conveniently.

Abdelraheem and Ahmed (2015) clarified that Mobile Assisted Language Learning is a language learning strategy that uses mobile phone applications such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and other social media that supports language learners to learn their target language. By interacting frequently on those mobile applications, language learners can improve their language skills in a less-stressful way.

### **3.4 Previous studies**

There have been a number of studies researching on the implementation of mobile apps into enhancing students’ English speaking. However, there are few researchers publishing the studies related to the application “Hallo” in English language learning.

In one study, So (2016) states that “WhatsApp” can be used in language learning because this application enables teacher and students to communicate outside of classroom. It also enables

teacher to share learning material through group chat to students. By using this app frequently to send or reply the messages, students can practice communication skills in English together.

Ahn and Lee (2016) carried out an investigation on the effectiveness of using application “Speaking 60 Junior” to foster English speaking for students. He found that this app created an ideal speaking environment outside class room for students. Using this app made students feel more fun and enjoyable when speaking English because they could receive the feedback of their speaking immediately.

Some researchers carried studies on the effectiveness of utilizing “Voice blog” in learning a foreign language generally and in fostering English speaking specifically, named Sun (2009), Hsu, Wang and Comac (2008), or Huang (2015). They all agreed that “Voice blog” is a great tool to manage students’ speaking homework and promote the interactions among English language learners.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Pedagogical Setting & Participants**

Hong Duc University, in Thanh Hoa City, Vietnam, was the place where the study was conducted. The period of time for the study lasted ten weeks in the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022.

The participants participating in the study were ten sophomores in the Faculty of Foreign Languages (5 males and 5 females). The age range of the participants was nineteen to twenty. All participants in the study were chosen randomly in an intact class. The time carrying out the study, these students were studying the subject “Listening and Speaking 4”. They must have B1 English level to meet the requirement of the subject.

These students were asked to complete speaking homework by making daily conversations of 10 minutes or more on the application “Hallo”. They video-recorded their conversations and sent them to the teacher for daily checking. Each week, the teacher assigned one topic based on the contents of the units in the textbook and asked students to follow assigned topics in order to make day-to-day conversations with random users on the application.

### **4.2 Design of the Study**

The study investigated the effectiveness of practicing English speaking on Hallo as daily homework by using qualitative and quantitative methods. The study followed a pre-test and post-test design for one group of 10 participants chosen randomly. In this design, a single case is observed at two time points, one before the treatment and one after the treatment.

The quantitative method was utilized to analyze data from the pre-test taken before applying the application and post-test data taken after applying the application. The qualitative method was implemented to analyze the results of interviews after applying the application to the

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students. Also, this method was used for the analysis of the data from the classroom observation which the teacher wrote after every speaking period in the class.

#### **4.3 Data collection & analysis**

To gather the data in order to answer the two research questions, the three instruments carried out were pre-test and post-test, interviews and classroom observations.

##### ***Pre-test and post-test***

Both pre-test and post-test were designed to assess students’ speaking competency. The formats of two tests included three main parts, named the interaction part with familiar topics, the situation part, and topic development. The pre-test was taken before students started using the application to make daily conversations with random users. The post-test was taken after students finished participating in the 10-week period of using the application to practice English speaking. The results from pre-test and post-test were analysed by SPSS 26.0 software to determine the mean scores and the sig. value.

##### ***Classroom observations***

The classroom observations were conducted to identify the students’ speaking performances in the class. The observer was the teacher as well as the researcher who carried out the classroom observations over ten weeks by taking notes of students’ attitudes, engagement and performance in speaking periods. The researcher would be a participant to obtain insider data and subjective information for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

##### ***Interviews***

The interviews were designed with two main questions in order to corroborate the findings of tests and observations and learn how the participants felt about using app “Hallo” to practice English speaking every day:

- 1) *What do you think about using app “Hallo” to practice English speaking with random users every day?*
- 2) *Which do you prefer, using the app Hallo to practice English speaking or practicing English speaking with others in-person?*
- 3) *Did you have any problems during the time using app “Hallo” to practice English speaking every day? (If yes, what were those?)*

Ten students participating in the study were chosen to do the face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted about ten minutes. Vietnamese was allowed to help them express their thoughts freely. All interviews were audio-recorded to support the descriptive analysis. Their names were coded into S1, S2, and up to S10.

#### **4.4 Research procedure**

The study was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022 at Hong Duc University. The time length for the research was ten weeks. Ten sophomores in one class in the Faculty of Foreign Languages were chosen to participate in the research. The researcher was the teacher who directly taught these participants in the class during those ten weeks.

***Procedure for the participants***

During week 1, the students were asked to do the pre-test to assess their speaking competency before participating in the research. From week 2 to week 9, the students practiced English speaking on the application as daily speaking homework. They followed the topics that the teacher assigned and guided in the class. When making daily conversations on the app, the participants video-recorded their conversation and sent it into the Facebook group. They simultaneously captured their mobile screen which displayed the number of day-streak-in-progress on the application in that group for daily checking. In week 10, ten participants took part in the face-to-face interviews and took the post-test to assess their speaking ability after ten weeks of using the application.

***Procedure for the teacher/researcher***

During the first week of the study, the teacher built a detailed plan which integrated assigning speaking homework by practicing English speaking on Hallo. In this week, the teacher also delivered the pre-test to ten participants to assess their speaking ability before participating in the study. From week 2 to week 9, the teacher assigned topics for students to practice English speaking on the app every day. The teacher also checked videos and screen captures that students sent in the Facebook group. In speaking periods, the teacher carried out the classroom observation by taking notes based on the criteria such as attitudes, engagement and performance. In week 10, the teacher delivered the post-test to assess students’ progress in speaking competency, and then synthesized data gathered to analyse and answer the research question.

**5. FINDINGS**

***Pre-test and post-test results***

A descriptive statistics test was utilized to examine whether the participants had different results between the pre-test and post-test assessment. The results gained from the scores of pre-test and post-test were calculated, analyzed, and reported in table 1.

**Table 1:** *Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test results*

<b>Paired Samples Statistics</b>					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	5.700	10	.6749	.2134
	Post-test	7.550	10	.4972	.1572



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As shown in Table 1, the results show a big difference between the mean score of pre-test (M=5.7) and the mean score of post-test (M=7.55). Moreover, it can be seen easily that the results of post-test are higher than the results of pre-test. Therefore, the intervention of the application “Hallo” to foster students’ speaking skills was effective.

**Table 2:** *Inferential statistics of pre-test and post-test results*

Paired Samples Test										
		Paired Differences					Significance			
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Pre-test – post-test	-1.8500	.4743	.1500	-2.1893	-1.5107	-12.333	9	<.001	<.001

In table 2, the sig. value of 0.01 is lower than the alpha value (0.05). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that students’ speaking skills after using app “Hallo” to practice English speaking every day were improved significantly. The students’ speaking competency after the period of time practicing on app “Hallo” could be improved significantly.

***Interview results***

Ten students were interviewed to explore the effectiveness of using the application to practice English speaking every day. The interviews were conducted after 10 weeks when the students finished practicing English speaking on Hallo.

With the question “What do you think about the app Hallo?”, all respondents answered that app Hallo was a useful app for them to practice English speaking with foreigners all over the world. Some typical words in their answers were “good”, “helpful”, “wonderful”, or “useful”.

*“To me, app “Hallo” helps me have chances to practice English speaking freely. [S1]  
App “Hallo” is a useful app for me to speak English with all users around the world in anytime and anywhere I like.” [S4]*

*“Doing speaking homework on Hallo gave me a lot of fun. I found it more relaxing and interesting than doing other types of speaking homework.” [7]*

*“It’s wonderful to practice English speaking at home with a number of foreigners in the world without paying any money.” [S9]*

With the question “Which do you prefer, using the app Hallo to practice English speaking or practicing English speaking with others in-person?”, 8 out of 10 students said that they found the effectiveness of utilizing the app as a tool to practice speaking English with others better than speaking with their peers in person. Most of them stated that practicing English speaking face-to-face made them shy to speak, but on Hallo they could speak freely without fear of making mistakes because of the function of voice-call.

With the question regarding the problems during the time using app “Hallo” to practice English speaking every day, while most answered that they did not have any problems of practicing speaking on Hallo every day, two students said that they had some problems in using the app and they were overloaded with practicing every day.

*“I have to study several subjects this semester and I feel tired when I had to practice on Hallo every day. I have other homework, which is also very important and I need to complete.” [S6]*

*“I do not like practicing speaking on Hallo every day. This daily homework made me so exhausted.” [S8]*

Generally, a majority of interviewees agreed that Hallo was an ideal app for them to practice English speaking. When communicating on Hallo, English was the popular language, and they had to speak English. As a result, the students might have much more opportunities to practice speaking English. They had chances to speak English with other speakers all over the world. They did not feel embarrassed when audio calling with a person they did not know before, so they could speak English fluently.

### ***Classroom observations***

The classroom observations were managed by the researcher who taught directly in the class. These observations were recorded based on the students’ English speaking performance in the class. Through the observations, ten students who used the application to practice English speaking were able to speak English more fluently. 100% of these students were willing to answer questions and express their opinions in front of the class. 80% of them could make their answer longer instead of answering in short sentences or single words as they did before using the application. 80% of them could pronounce the words more correctly.

Obviously, assigning speaking homework by asking the students to make daily conversations on the app “Hallo” brought their positive performances in the classroom activities. The students were eager to participate in speaking activities and their speaking skills were improved significantly.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

From the data analysis of pre-test, post-test, interviews and class observations, it was stated clearly that practicing English speaking on the app “Hallo” brought the improvements among students. The results of post-test (M=7.55) was higher than those of pre-test (M=5.7), which allowed to conclude that there was an effectiveness in using the app “Hallo” to assign speaking homework to students every day. In addition, most of interviewees answered that they found the enjoyment from doing speaking homework by making daily conversations with real users. It is because this app allows the users have voice calls with other real users. Therefore, they could speak freely and fluently without much hesitation. Moreover, observations in the class also showed that the students who used app “Hallo” to practice English speaking every day could be more willing to answer the questions than those who did not practice speaking on

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“Hallo”. Obviously, after 10 weeks of practicing English speaking with a number of foreigners all over the world on app “Hallo”, students may enhance their speaking competency. These results are correspondent with the findings of other studies which found that mobile apps brought learners motivational benefits and foster their language skills (Huynh, et al., 2008; Ryder & Machajewski, 2017).

In addition to the positive findings, the data from face-to-face interviews indicated that the requirement of completing speaking homework every day on Hallo made students feel exhausted. They claimed that making conversations on Hallo fostered their speaking a lot, but they also needed to spend their time on other homework and they would like to reduce the amount of daily homework. This is also stated in the research that the teacher should consider both the length and frequency of homework when assigning to the students (Wallinger, 2000).

## **7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Speaking English with learners from all over the world is a great opportunity in the language learning process since it facilitates real life communication with native and native-like speakers which puts into practice the materials the learners have already covered. Current educators need to mix English language learning with technology since most learners have a smartphone to access information. Teachers should customize their teaching and learning with current technology and do so in the easiest way possible. With the accelerated development of Apps about learning English and the popularization of mobile devices, students have become increasingly interested in the learning benefits that apps on mobile devices bring. The app “Hallo” is one of educational applications which helps users make progress in learning English, especially speaking and listening. The users can talk with different foreigners in English anytime they desire. After a ten-week period, students could improve their speaking skills. They are more willing to speak fluently with longer speech.

Although the study received the positive results of the effectiveness of implementing app “Hallo” as an assignment of speaking homework to students, it still has some inevitable limitations such as small-scale study with a small number of participants, and time limit. Therefore, further studies with longer duration should be carried out to ensure constant effectiveness of using app “Hallo” as an approach to assign speaking homework to students.

For the students, to maximize the advantages of practicing English speaking with users on the app “Hallo”, students had better prepare several questions related to topics assigned carefully before making a random call. When talking with users on the app, students do not know who the person are talking, so it is necessary to be polite during the conversation. This app offers free of charge with the function of calling randomly; therefore, to have much more remarkable progress, students should try to practice speaking English on Hallo as much as possible and keep good relationships with random speakers on it for later practice.

For the teachers, the teacher should plan carefully before assigning speaking homework by practicing English speaking on Hallo to students. In addition, the teacher had better give more detailed guide such as several questions and sample answers related to assigned topics for low-

level students. Also, learners can “take the lead and engage in activities that are motivated by their personal needs and circumstances of use” (Kukulka-Hulme et al., 2007, pp. 53), so to motivate students in practicing English speaking on this app, teachers may encourage by giving prizes or awards to the students who have the most active interaction on the app.

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