

The Use of English Learning Applications as an Extension of Classroom Learning in Junior High Schools That Limits The Use of Cell Phones as a Form of Teacher Creativity

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This study investigates how English teachers in Surabaya junior high schools, where smartphone use is restricted in classrooms, extend learning activities by employing mobile applications at home. Specifically, it aims at finding how teachers who report using English learning mobile apps integrate these tools at home as a continuation of classroom activities in schools with smartphone restrictions and the ways this practice reflects their creativity within their application of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK). The study involved ten English teachers who acknowledged using mobile apps to support English learning outside the classroom. Data were collected through interviews and observation of teachers' digital footprints within the apps, facilitated by the researcher's membership in the platforms. The data were analyzed qualitatively and iteratively. Findings reveal that WhatsApp and Google Classroom are the most frequently used mobile apps, followed by Quizizz, Wordwall, Canva, and YouTube comments. The instructional procedure typically begins with directions in WhatsApp groups and continues in the designated mobile apps. Results highlight teachers' creative practices in mobile app use, offering concrete examples of TPACK application in English language teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of technology into English language teaching in Indonesia has been widely embraced across educational levels, from elementary schools to universities. A national survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018) reported that schools employ diverse information technologies, including radio, television, telephones, computers, and the internet. Among these, the internet has emerged as the most fundamental, with 64.5% of schools reporting its use, primarily through fixed broadband (55.7%) and mobile broadband (42.68%). As a result, classroom learning technologies have increasingly become internet-based, accessed via both fixed and mobile broadband. Smartphones, leveraging mobile broadband, have gained prominence in English language learning due to their accessibility among students and the wide range of applications available (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018; Indriani & Wirza, 2020; Jayani, 2012).

The integration of mobile technology into English lessons in the world has included both early and advanced forms of application. For instance, as early as 2008, mobile phones were already being employed to deliver English learning materials through GSM and SMS technologies (Saran et al., 2008). Reviews of studies conducted in the United States on the use of mobile devices for foreign language learning highlight significant benefits, including enhanced learning outcomes, improved self-efficacy, greater student engagement, and increased time spent with academic content (Ok & Ratliffe, 2018). Similar findings have been reported in the Czech Republic, where research reviews emphasized comparable advantages (Kacatl & Klímová, 2019).

In Indonesia, mobile devices have likewise been well received by English teachers across primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Almost all schools and universities employ various forms of information technology, particularly mobile phones, computers, and the internet, supported by both fixed broadband and mobile broadband infrastructure (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018). Numerous studies have documented how English teachers utilize mobile applications to facilitate teaching, deliver instructional materials, provide worksheets, and conduct assessments. For example, WhatsApp has been widely adopted by English teachers to distribute learning materials and share links to teleconferencing platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet (Wulandari et al., 2021).

The range of mobile learning applications available is extensive (Shahrol et al., 2020). Among the most popular are social media applications such as Telegram (Aisyah et al., 2021), WhatsApp (Wulandari et al., 2021), and Wattpad. Teachers often choose these platforms because they are free, even though they lack specialized features for English language learning. Nevertheless, teachers creatively exploit the available functions, such as using Telegram's chatbot to develop and deliver instructional materials.

Research has documented the diverse ways in which English teachers employ mobile-based applications to support instruction. Indriani and Wirza (2020), for example, identified a range of applications used by teachers, including Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, E-books, Excel, browsers, email, messenger apps, social media, vlogs, blogs, Google Forms, Google Docs, Google Classroom, and Jibas, a school-based e-learning platform. In addition, many schools have adopted WhatsApp, locally developed learning management systems (LMS), and teleconferencing tools such as audioconferencing, audiographic conferencing, videoconferencing, and web-based conferencing to facilitate English language teaching. These findings highlight the growing reliance on internet-enabled technologies and mobile applications, underscoring their role in shaping contemporary pedagogical practices in Indonesia.

However, several challenges in the use of mobile devices for English language learning include teachers' limited ability to operate such applications, inadequate specifications of students' mobile devices, and numerous school policies prohibiting students from bringing mobile phones into classrooms to prevent misuse. Statistical data indicate that 60% of teachers are unable to implement mobile-assisted learning (Merdeka, 2021). Although the government initially announced plans to review the use of mobile phones in schools (Kominfo, 2018), many schools had already enforced such bans (Redaksi-1, 2022). At present, the government is reconsidering these restrictions (Lombok Post, 2022). This has been worsened in 2018 as the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Communication and Informatics, announced plans to review the use of mobile phones in schools (Kominfo, 2018). At that time, however, mobile device usage in schools was rapidly expanding, driven by the widespread availability and affordability of smartphones. This announcement sparked considerable debate, with some stakeholders supporting the policy while others opposed it. Despite the controversy, many schools had already implemented mobile phone bans (Redaksi-1, 2022). Although the government has since reconsidered the restrictions (Lombok Post, 2022), there remain no indications that the policy will be revoked.

Such restrictions have raised concerns about teachers' practices in integrating mobile technology into classroom instruction. In reality, despite the prohibition, many students in Indonesia continue to bring smartphones to school (Juniarto et al., 2012), a phenomenon also observed in the United States (Amaechi, 2016). The impact of mobile phone bans on students' learning comfort has been perceived ambivalently. On the one hand, students reported being more focused on lessons without the distraction of phone notifications; on the other hand, some expressed anxiety about the potential exposure to inappropriate content such as pornography (Juniarto et al., 2012).

English teachers, in particular, often enforce mobile phone restrictions without a clear pedagogical rationale or theoretical foundation, relying instead on directives issued by school administrations (Amaechi, 2016). If such policies persist, it is likely that they will reshape how English teachers conceptualize and theorize the use of mobile technology in their instructional practices.

These policies raise concerns regarding teachers' practices in utilizing mobile technology in schools. The limitations on mobile device use are believed to reshape how English teachers conceptualize teaching with mobile technology. Meanwhile, the impact of mobile phone bans on students' learning comfort has been perceived both positively and negatively by students (Juniarto et al., 2012). Nevertheless, findings from a study involving 576 English teachers at junior secondary schools under both the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture revealed that 56% of respondents continued to use mobile applications despite restrictions on mobile phone use in schools (Munir, 2023). These teachers assigned mobile app-based tasks as homework, allowing students to access their phones outside school hours.

Over the past decade, teachers in Indonesia have been strongly encouraged to integrate educational technology into their practice. This development coincides with the addition of a mandatory competency for English teachers, namely the ability to apply Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Indonesian Directorate General on Teachers, 2020). However, with policies prohibiting students from bringing smartphones to school, English teachers are often compelled to teach without access to information technology. Abandoning technology in favor of traditional instruction would represent a regression in the theorization of their teaching practices.

Theorizing, in this context, refers to the process of making sense of what teachers do in their instructional experiences. It constitutes a form of practical knowledge that teachers use to construct frameworks guiding their actions (Mangubhai et al., 2004). Through theorizing, teachers are able to describe, interpret, and provide coherent explanations of classroom events. Importantly, this process is neither immediate nor simple. Previous studies have shown that teachers' ability to theorize requires time and sustained effort in order to develop the capacity to derive theory from everyday teaching experiences (Edwards, 2014; Glenn, 2011).

The extended time required for teachers to formulate personal theories from practice has attracted considerable scholarly attention in the fields of teacher cognition and experiential theorizing. Notable contributions include the work of Burns et al. (2015), Korthagen and Kessels (1999), as well as scholars of professional development such as Huberman (1989) and Steffy and Wolfe (2001). A teacher is considered to have reached

the level of “Theory with a capital T” when they are able to articulate logical sequences, explain the foundations of these sequences, and establish causal if-then relationships. Furthermore, teachers attain this level when they can draw logical connections among the elements of a conceptual network. The point at which teachers achieve this stage of theorizing varies across their professional trajectories. However, according to Steffy and Wolfe (2001) model of the teacher career cycle, five stages can be identified: novice teacher, apprentice teacher, professional teacher, expert teacher, distinguished teacher, and emeritus teacher. Theorizing typically begins at the professional teacher stage.

The use of mobile applications also reflects teachers’ creativity, a phenomenon widely documented in research. Henriksen et al. (2021) demonstrated that teachers’ creativity is fostered through the integration of mobile applications in English language teaching. Similarly, Javid et al. (2023) reported positive effects of mobile application use on the creativity of English teachers in Pakistan. Specifically, mobile applications enable teachers to explore latent creativity by providing tools such as cameras and portable features, which enhance their confidence in teaching and support innovative instructional practices (Javid et al., 2023).

There are form of teacher's creativity while using technology. One of the simplest is the use of annotated animations to draw attention to grammatical patterns and image-based exercises to consolidate vocabulary can enhance student engagement and creativity in teaching (Tseng, 2018). Another simple for of creativity is evaluating sentence patterns through text-chatting with chatbots can provide interactive and innovative ways for students to practice language skills (Tseng, 2018). And the commonest form of creativity is reflective practice groups and technical training are popular CPD activities that can improve teachers' digital literacy and innovation capabilities (Li & Mohammed, 2024).

Mobile learning has proven highly beneficial for both students and teachers (Pegrum, 2014), and its application is frequently realized through flipped or blended learning models (Voss & Kostka, 2019). Yet, questions remain, how this process can be effectively implemented and whether teachers can fully maximize the benefits of mobile applications as supplementary tools for English language learning beyond the classroom. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how restrictions on mobile device use in English classrooms have reshaped teachers’ approaches to employing mobile applications, highlighting their creativity and professionalism (Coombe et al., 2020; Kessler, 2020).

Specifically, this study poses the following research questions:

1. How do English teachers who report using mobile applications for language learning employ these apps at home as a continuation of classroom English activities in schools where smartphone use is restricted?
2. In what ways does this usage reflect teachers’ creativity in applying the TPACK framework?

It is assumed that by utilizing mobile applications outside the classroom—specifically at home, when students have access to smartphones—teachers can maximize the acceleration of students’ mastery of English learning materials. This assumption aligns with the government’s expectation that teachers possess Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Indonesian Directorate General on Teachers, 2020). At the same time, such practices reflect teachers’ creativity and innovation (Freeman et al., 2013)

as well as their professionalism in integrating technology into classroom instruction (Kessler, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a basic interpretive study (Ary et al., 2019). Such a design was deemed appropriate given the research questions, which focus on describing teachers' use of mobile applications outside the classroom – particularly at home – and examining how this practice reflects their creativity within the TPACK framework. Accordingly, the study was conducted with English teachers who reported using mobile applications for English language learning at home as an extension of classroom activities in junior secondary schools (SMP) in Surabaya, where smartphone use is restricted.

The participants of this study consisted of ten English teachers from seven public junior secondary schools (SMPN) in Surabaya. The distribution of participants is as follows:

- 1) UKH, female, teacher at SMPN in South Surabaya
- 2) AGC, male, teacher at SMPN in North Surabaya
- 3) AAR, male, teacher at SMPN in North Surabaya
- 4) ARW, male, teacher at SMPN in West Surabaya
- 5) AAM, female, teacher at SMPN in Central Surabaya
- 6) DHF, female, teacher at SMPN in Central Surabaya
- 7) WWY, female, teacher at SMPN in West Surabaya
- 8) AGI, female, teacher at SMPN in East Surabaya
- 9) NNN, female, teacher at SMPN in Central Surabaya
- 10) SSS, male, teacher at SMPN in North Surabaya

All participants had more than ten years of teaching experience in junior secondary schools and had obtained a Master's degree in English education.

Data were collected through focus group interviews, questionnaires, and digital trace observations of the mobile applications used by the teachers. The semi-structured interview questions included the following:

- 1) Do you use mobile applications for students' extension activities at home?
- 2) Which mobile applications do you use?
- 3) How do you use these applications?

Following the interviews, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to capture their planning and implementation of mobile application use in classroom contexts. During the implementation phase of mobile application use, the teachers who had completed the questionnaire provided access to the specific mobile applications they employed through their membership accounts on those platforms.

The data derived from interviews, questionnaire responses, and digital traces were analyzed qualitatively. The analysis process began with transcribing the interview data, followed by coding, and subsequently conducting content analysis to identify words and phrases centered on the key theme: "steps in using mobile applications for English language classes." In addition, digital traces were documented through screenshots taken while teachers were actively engaging with the mobile applications under study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Use of Mobile Applications for English Language Learning at Home as an Extension of Classroom Activities under Smartphone Restrictions

In the context of school policies restricting smartphone use, English teachers have adopted home-oriented mobile application strategies to extend classroom learning. Teachers such as UKH, AAR, DHF, SSS, AGC, AGI, and AAM initiated this process by assigning tasks through platforms accessible to students beyond school hours, notably Google Classroom and WhatsApp Groups (WAG). These platforms served as effective communication bridges, enabling teachers to maintain instructional continuity despite institutional limitations. Table 1 presents the range of mobile applications employed by teachers as extensions of classroom activities.

Table 1. Mobile Applications Used by English Teachers as Home-Based Extensions

Teacher	Grade	Mobile apps	Language skills focus	Duration
1.UKH	9	WhatsApp Group (WAG) Google Classroom dan Wordwall	Listening, Reading Writing	August-September
2.AGC	9	WhatsApp Group (WAG), Google Classroom dan Canva, Capcut	Grammar	August-September
3.AAR	9	WhatsApp Group (WAG) Google Classroom dan Quizizz, wordwall	Reading	August-September
4.ARW	7	Google Classroom, ELSA Speak	Speaking,	August-September
5.AAM	7	WhatsApp Group (WAG), Youtube Instagram	Writing, Speaking	August-September
6.DHF	9	WhatsApp Group (WAG) Canva dan CapCut, Youtube	Speaking, Writing	August-September
7.WWY	9	WhatsApp Group Live Worksheet,	Writing, Speaking	August-September
8.AGI	9	WhatsApp Group, Youtube comments	Reading	August-September
9.NNN	8	WA, QUIZIZZ, GOOGLE CLASSROOM, WAKELET	Reading	August-September
10. SSS	8	Bamboozle, Canva	Reading, writing	August-September

As shown in Table 1, all teachers in this study utilized WhatsApp Groups as the primary medium for delivering task instructions, which were subsequently supported by various mobile applications to extend learning activities at home. For instance, UKH integrated Wordwall within Google Classroom to reinforce vocabulary learning. A sample Wordwall activity designed by UKH is provided below. dimensions that may impact the development of design competencies.

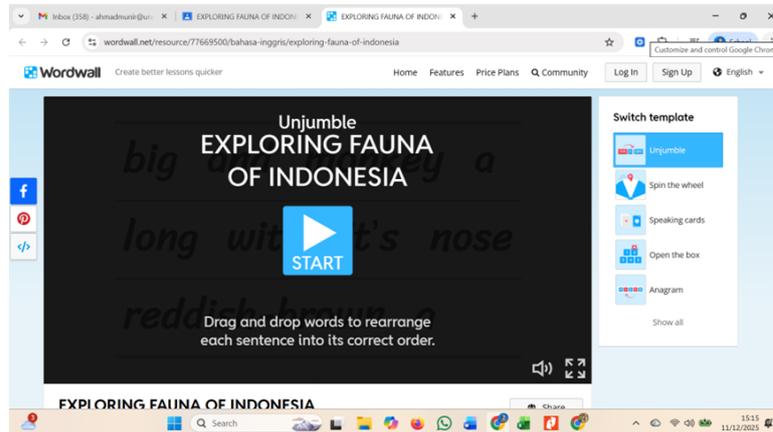


Figure 1 Wordwall example used by UKH

Another teacher, AAR, relied on Quizizz to develop students' understanding of recount texts and the passive voice through interactive quiz formats. Meanwhile, DHF utilized Canva and CapCut for multimedia report assignments, thereby enriching students' competencies in visual literacy. Teacher SSS selected Bamboozle and Canva to foster students' creative engagement. The following section presents evidence of a Canva product created by the students of teacher AGC.



Figure 2 Canva product by a student of AGC

Another teacher, AGI, introduced YouTube-based video assignments as a means of fostering students' critical thinking skills. As part of this activity, students were required to engage in reflective practice by posting comments on selected YouTube videos. The following section presents evidence of students' participation in the commenting activity within AGI's class.

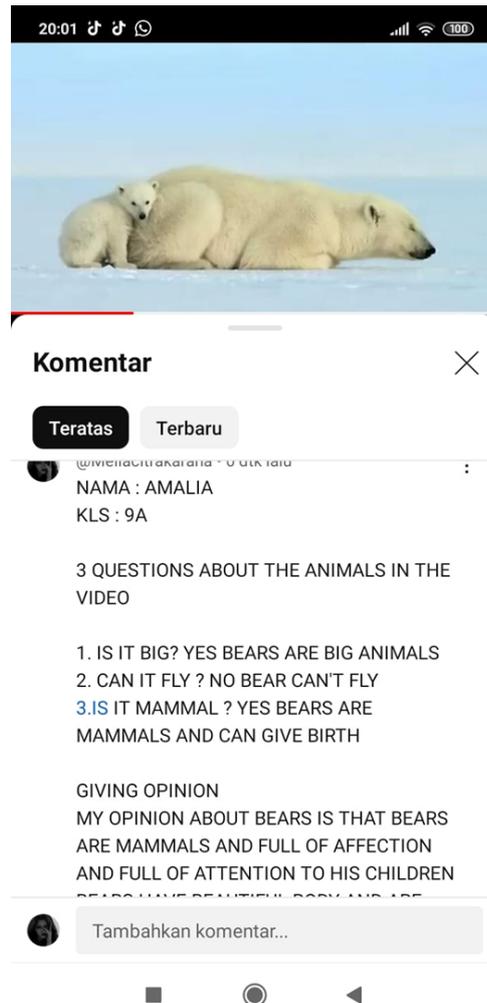


Figure 3 Youtube comments task by AGI

Google Classroom, installed on students' smartphones, emerged as the most commonly utilized mobile application among teachers. For example, teachers such as AAR and ARW relied on this platform to facilitate the extension of classroom learning activities beyond school hours.

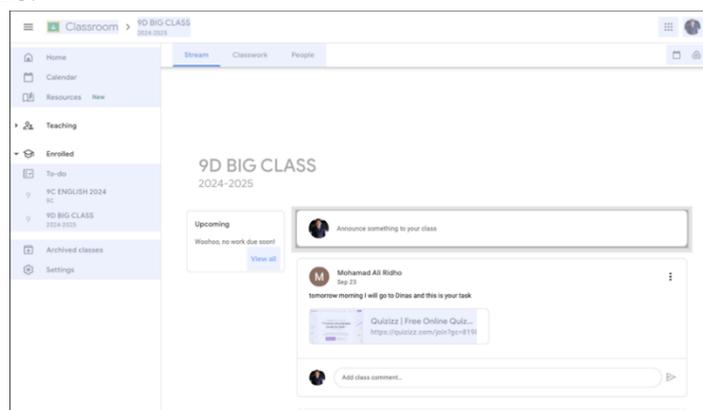


Figure 4 Google Classroom screenshot by AAR

Ensuring Continuity of English Language Learning through Mobile Applications

The procedure of initiating instruction via WhatsApp Groups (WAG), followed by the integration of other mobile applications, was employed by teachers to ensure the effective continuity of English language learning without violating school policies prohibiting smartphone use. This approach demonstrates that, through strategic adaptation, technology-enhanced learning can still be implemented within contexts of significant restriction.

The findings of this study reveal that junior secondary school English teachers successfully overcame institutional limitations on smartphone use by optimizing mobile application-based learning at home. They adopted a two-stage mechanism: first, providing directions and assignments through communication platforms such as Google Classroom and WhatsApp Groups, and second, extending learning activities through the use of digital applications.

This practice aligns with the report of Indriani and Wirza (2020), which highlights Indonesian teachers' active adoption of internet-based technologies in teaching and learning. Moreover, the findings reinforce Pegrum's (2014) view of mobile learning as a vital means of expanding educational access, even under restrictive conditions. Despite physical constraints in the classroom, teachers leveraged the flexibility of mobile applications to sustain the continuity of English language learning.

The integration of mobile applications into home-based activities also resonates with the flipped learning approach described by Voss and Kostka (2019). In this model, learning activities traditionally confined to the classroom are extended into students' personal domains, thereby creating more fluid and spatially unconstrained learning interactions. Consequently, this study underscores that device restrictions need not constitute barriers to effective technology-enhanced learning; rather, they can stimulate teachers' creativity in designing alternative mobile-based instructional strategies.

Teachers' Creativity Reflected in the Application of TPACK

The English teachers in this study have demonstrated some of the forms of creativity in using technology as suggested by Tseng (2018) and Li and Mohammed (2024). As seen in Table 2,

Table 2. Forms of Teachers' Creativity in Using Mobile Applications as Home-Based Extensions

Teacher	Mobile apps	Forms of creativity
1.UKH	WhatsApp Group (WAG) Google Classroom, Wordwall	Using annotated animations
2.AGC	WhatsApp Group (WAG), Google Classroom dan Canva, Capcut	Using annotated animations Text-chatting with chatbots
3.AAR	WhatsApp Group (WAG) Google Classroom dan Quizizz, wordwall	Using annotated animations

4.ARW	Google Classroom, ELSA Speak	Text-chatting with chatbots
5.AAM	WhatsApp Group (WAG), Youtube Instagram	Using annotated animations
6.DHF	WhatsApp Group (WAG) Canva dan CapCut, Youtube	Using annotated animations
7.WWY	WhatsApp Group Live Worksheet,	Using annotated animations
8.AGI	WhatsApp Group, Youtube comments	Using annotated animations
9.NNN	WA, QUIZZZ, GOOGLE CLASSROOM, WAKELET	Using annotated animations
10. SSS	Bamboozle, Canva	Using annotated animations

Table 1 shows that the favorite form of creativity is using annotated animation, followed by using chatbots. In addition to this table, all the participants of this study are members and the coordinator of the English teacher association in Surabaya. This means that they also implemented the third form of creativity, that is, reflective practice groups and technical training.

The integration of ideological and political elements into design curricula enhances students' cultural quality and innovative capabilities. Collaborative education between counselors and professional teachers is essential for merging ideological and professional training, promoting a holistic educational experience (Wang & Dai, 2024).

Teachers' use of mobile applications extended beyond fulfilling the technical requirements of distance learning; it also reflected their creativity in practically integrating Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK). Creativity was evident in the selection of applications aligned with instructional objectives, the design of tasks that challenged students' creativity, and the choice of flexible communication media. This findings supports the results of study by Tseng (2018) and those of Li and Mohammed (2024).

From the technological dimension, teachers selected platforms accessible to students at home, such as Canva for visual design, Wordwall for vocabulary practice, and Quizizz for interactive game-based quizzes. Pedagogically, teachers such as SSS implemented differentiated learning by offering students the choice between digital design (Canva) and manual artwork (hand-drawn illustrations). In terms of content, all activities remained focused on developing English language competencies, including comprehension of report texts, mastery of adjective order, and enrichment of vocabulary related to fauna.

Although teachers' reflective narratives on technology selection were not fully documented in theoretical terms, their practices clearly demonstrated an awareness of the close relationship between technology use, students' pedagogical needs, and mastery of subject matter. Their creativity in designing digital learning ecosystems illustrates that

physical restrictions in schools did not hinder the adaptive and innovative application of TPACK.

Teachers' use of mobile applications further affirmed the implementation of TPACK principles, even if not explicitly articulated in their reflections. They demonstrated proficiency in selecting relevant applications, designing creative project-based tasks, and ensuring that English language content remained central to all activities. For instance, DHF and SSSS employed Canva and CapCut to strengthen students' multimedia production skills, while USK and AAR utilized Wordwall and Quizizz to innovate in game-based learning. These practices exemplify the synergistic integration of technology, pedagogy, and content, as outlined in TPACK theory within language education.

The findings are consistent with Henriksen et al. (2021), who emphasized that technology use can serve as a catalyst for teachers' creativity in designing learning activities. Furthermore, teachers' adaptation to smartphone restrictions reflects a process of theorizing in practice, as described by Korthagen and Kessels (1999), whereby teachers develop personal theories from real-world classroom experiences.

Although deep pedagogical reflections on application selection were not fully evident in the results, classroom practices revealed that teachers intuitively integrated the three core dimensions of TPACK into their instruction. This is consistent with Freeman et al. (2013), who argued that the success of innovation in language education depends heavily on teachers' adaptability and responsiveness to contextual change.

Through these creative approaches, teachers not only maintained instructional effectiveness under restrictive conditions but also demonstrated professional capacity aligned with Kessler's (2020) vision of the importance of professionalization in the use of technology for language teaching.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that English teachers in public junior secondary schools (SMPN) in Surabaya, despite institutional policies restricting students' smartphone use, continued to employ mobile applications to extend English language learning into the home environment. The use of communication platforms such as WhatsApp for delivering instructions, followed by the integration of widely available mobile applications on students' smartphones – including Google Classroom, Wordwall, Quizizz, Canva, CapCut, and Live Worksheet – illustrates teachers' creativity in applying the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework. Importantly, these teachers did not abandon mobile-assisted learning; rather, they strategically adapted its use to ensure that students could achieve the targeted learning objectives. What the teachers used and implemented have shown that they have creativity in their practice. There is no doubt that they also have shown their TPACK.

Based on the above conclusions, several recommendations are proposed for teachers, schools, and policymakers. First, teachers of English should critically evaluate which mobile applications most effectively support students in achieving the intended learning outcomes. Second, schools are encouraged to create a more conducive environment in which smartphones may be permitted during English lessons, thereby enabling controlled and purposeful integration of mobile applications into classroom practice.

Finally, parents are expected to provide support for their children in completing mobile application-based assignments assigned by teachers at home.

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