

IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILL THROUGH MOBILE LEARNING APPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

In recent years mobile technology has been developed for academic purposes. The traditional academic environment is shifted to m-learning because of the wide use of mobile wireless technology. As mobile applications' advancement increases in function, Indonesian college students can use the applications to assist their English learning. Mobile applications create more opportunities for students to improve their English ability. Thus, this study investigated the use of a mobile application Busuu in improving students' speaking skills. This research was classroom action research (CAR) following the research procedures: planning, action, observation, and reflection. This study was conducted in two cycles consisting of two meetings in each cycle. The data collecting techniques used were observation, test, and questionnaire. This research involved fourteen students of a private university in Surabaya. The research findings showed an improvement in students' speaking skills after using Busuu application in English learning. It was proven by the increase of the mean score of students' speaking test from 63.43 in cycle 1 to 70.28 in cycle 2. Furthermore, the questionnaire results revealed that the students had a positive attitude towards the use of Busuu in English speaking learning.

Keywords: Busuu, *English speaking skill, m-learning*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill plays a vital role in English learning, as it is related to communication skill development. The capability of communicating helps students to connect with foreigners or native speakers of English. It is argued that speaking is proven to be a highly demanded skill by EFL students (Pratolo et al., 2019). On the other hand, speaking in English is considered

challenging because it requires more than understanding its grammatical and semantics rules. The learners must acquire the knowledge of how native speakers of English use the language context to use the language appropriately in social interactions to make effective oral communication (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Besides, Canale & Swain (1980) stated that there are four fundamental components of speaking competence. The first one is grammatical competence dealing with sentence construction, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Secondly, sociolinguistics competence defining how the utterances are used in different contexts. Then, discourse competence examining the cohesion and coherence of the utterances. Lastly, strategic competence dealing with the language use of the speaker to achieve the communication goals. Most EFL learners have difficulties to accomplish those four components. Several studies are investigating speaking challenges in the context of EFL learners. In his study, Abrar, et.al (2018) found that the students encountered difficulties in speaking in terms of the use of appropriate grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. In line with this, Manrique (2013) also said that mispronunciation and grammatical mistakes are the most dominant varieties of mother tongue interference on target language speaking.

Malasari (2017) added that EFL learners are reluctant to practice their English because they have minimal English exposure. It is often assumed that speaking skills can be developed simply by assigning them to discuss general topics or particular subjects. The limited exposure makes the students rarely practice their English speaking skills. Consequently, they get difficulties producing grammatical sentences, recognizing new vocabulary, and pronouncing the words. The teachers can apply many techniques to facilitate the students to practice their English both inside and outside the classroom. One of the alternatives is providing the students with a tool that allows them to have much English exposure.

Lately, mobile-assisted learning has become popular among higher education educators (Kusmaryanti et al., 2018). They also added that both teachers and students could explore new knowledge and improve their language skills using mobile-assisted learning. Also, mobile-assisted learning allows students to access the mobile learning process anytime and anywhere. There have been many studies investigating the use of technology to improve students' skills. Malasari (2017) examined an application on Android named e-talk to improve students' speaking skills. Her study showed that the application eases speaking practice and helps the students improve their

vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. Rezaei et al. (2014) reported the use and the effectiveness of mobile applications in English vocabulary learning. The study revealed that when mobile applications, Busuu and Interactive English were presented, the students showed more motivation to learn vocabulary since it helped visualize the definitions in a meaningful manner. The study also showed that using the applications helped the students enhance the learning of vocabulary, confidence, class participation, and that students had a positive tendency toward multimedia in education. The use of Busuu in English learning, examined by Rezaei et al. interested the writer to investigate further, especially in English speaking learning.

Busuu is one of the mobile learning applications that enable students to practice their language skills as it provides exercises such as pronunciation, speaking, listening, grammar, writing, and vocabulary. The use of the mobile learning application also facilitates students to have an enjoyable learning process because of its interesting features that make the learners become more motivated and become independent learners. Using Busuu mobile application, teacher-centered possibly shifts to learner-centered because the students are given more chance to learn and practice their English by themselves. Additionally, it is also said that learner-centered activities would be more effective than attending lectures in the process of learning speaking. The more they practice their English, the better their English speaking skill they have. Therefore, this study presents an investigation of the use of mobile learning application Busuu to improve students' speaking skills and the students' perception of Busuu in speaking class.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speaking Skills

As a verbal language, speaking is used to communicate with others. Nunan (2003) defined that speaking is a process where ideas and information are expressed to be understood by listeners. This is in line with Brown (2001), stating that language acquisition is considered successful when learners demonstrate an ability to accomplish pragmatics goals through interactive discourse with other speakers. It means that when people speak, they are concerned about the use of appropriate sounds and grammar and the choice of words to convey the intended meaning. Brown (2004) also added that speaking skills involve micro and macro skills. The micro skills focus on

producing smaller chunks of language such as phonemes, morphemes, words, collocation, and phrasal units. The macro skills concern the speaker's focus on the larger elements: fluency, discourse, function, style, cohesion, nonverbal communication, and strategic options.

There are some elements proposed by Hame (2001) that must be considered in order to have effective speaking, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension. As one of the essential aspects of speaking, pronunciation affects the appropriate communication directly in conversation. It refers to how a word is pronounced, including the knowledge of segmental features such as stress and intonation. The second aspect, which is also crucial for good speaking skills, is vocabulary. The more English vocabulary the students have, the better they can use the appropriate diction to communicate and express their ideas to speak effectively. The third element is grammar, which deals with rules exploring the forms and structures of sentences to show meaning. Understanding grammar helps learners to use effective style to express their ideas both in verbal and written form. The fourth aspect in effective speaking is fluency, which refers to speaking at average speed without any hesitation, repetition, and the use of coherent compound statement speech. Fluency has an essential role in speaking as it influences students' confidence in their speaking performances. The other aspect of effective speaking is comprehension. It is defined as the ability to understand the meaning of what is said.

Mobile Learning

Mobile learning (m-learning) is learning via the internet or network using personal mobile devices related to the most recent technologies. M-learning allows learners to use their tablets and smartphones to obtain learning materials through mobile applications. By using m-learning, learners have easy access to learning to be one of the alternatives for distance learning. Gerry (2004) states that m-learning gives learners flexibility since it provides educational content and knowledge for students on any platform, anywhere, and anytime. M-learning also gives significant opportunities for students to do autonomous learning through their mobile devices. Regarding its advantages, it is remarkable to develop mobile learning in the system of education.

Busuu

Busuu is a digital language-learning application providing courses in twelve different languages on the web, iOS, and Android. One of the language

courses provided by this mobile learning application is English. The resource offers vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, listening, speaking, and writing practice through self-paced study exercises. The application allows the users to subscribe to a premium membership or to sign up for free. The premium features offer advanced grammar lessons, McGraw-Hill education certification, and direct feedback on a written and spoken lesson from Busuu worldwide community connecting with English native speakers. However, the learners can still benefit from the free section, such as the lesson plan, that can help the learners practice their English using ¹⁶ges, audio, and text in each lesson. The application has four levels, namely Beginner A1, Beginner A2, Intermediate B1, and Intermediate B2. Each level enables users to learn the basic grammar and vocabulary, listening practice through audio dialogue, pronunciation practice, and language games. The application also provides fun and quick quizzes to do the test and get direct feedback to see how much they have learned from Busuu.

METHODS

The research applied Kemmis and McTaggart's model of Classroom Action ¹⁹Research (CAR). This ²⁰research aimed to solve the problem found during the teaching and learning process, focusing on improving ⁵students' speaking skills. In this study, two cycles were implemented that each cycle consisted of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The stages were structured as follows:

1. Planning ²²

As ^{the} teachers, the researchers designed a lesson plan and prepared a mobile learning application, Busuu, as the learning media. The researchers also designed the self-evaluation sheet and prepared the appropriate speaking test.

2. Acting

In this step, the teachers implemented a mobile learning application, Busuu collaborated with the learners-centered method. The teaching was conducted in four meetings divided into two cycles.

3. Observation

At this level, the researchers systematically conducted the observation in the classroom to see the class participation, the ¹² impact of implementing the method, and the problem that occurred in the teaching and learning process. The researchers also applied the peer and

teacher assessment to see the results of students' speaking performance and measure how they did the self-evaluation.

4. Reflection

As the last step, the researchers evaluated the process of teaching-learning using the Busuu and learners-centered method. The students were suggested to fill in the questionnaire to see the students' responses on the use of Busuu in class. The reflection defined the process of teaching and learning in the next cycle to improve.

The research was conducted in a private university in Surabaya. The participants of the study were fourteen students who were at the intermediate level. The researchers used observation, speaking test, and questionnaire as the instruments in this study to collect the data. The observation was done to obtain further information and a description of Busuu and in the classroom. Additionally, the students completed the self-evaluation sheet to see how they did the self-learning while they were using Busuu. The timed speaking task was used to measure the students' progress in speaking. The students were required to speak based on the given topic, which has been learned from Busuu. The students' speaking performances were evaluated using a speaking assessment rubric by Harris (1969) and TSE rating score by Brown (2010), which elaborate on the students' speaking into five aspects: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension. Lastly, the students were required to fill in the questionnaire to obtain the students' response to the use of Busuu mobile application in learning English speaking skills. This study applied the Likert scale questionnaire, including multiple-choice options, strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, and strongly disagree with the Likert item. The interpretation criteria were based on the interval of the Likert scale shown in the following table.

Table 1: The interpretation Interval for the Likert Scale

Interval Range	Interpretation
0 %-19.99 %	Busuu does not improve students' speaking skill at all
20 %-39.99 %	Busuu slightly improves students' speaking skill
40 %-59.99 %	Busuu somewhat improves students' speaking skill
60 %-79.99 %	Busuu fairly improves students' speaking skill
80 %-100 %	Busuu completely improves students' speaking skill

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Students' Speaking Skill Improvement

The speaking tests were administered after using Busuu mobile learning application in teaching speaking. The students were required to speak based on the relevant topic which had been learned from Busuu. The aspect of students' speaking measured was pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension. The researchers also allowed the students to do peer assessment by evaluating their friends' speaking performance. In cycle one, the highest score was 76, and the lowest one was 52. The students got improvement in the second cycle, with the highest score was 82 and the lowest one 60.

Table 2: Students' Speaking Skill Improvement

Mean Scores	Cycle One Test	Cycle Two Test	Gain	Percentage of Improvement
	63.43	70.28	6.85	10.79%

The table above presents students' speaking tests in cycles one and two, and the result increased in cycle two. The mean score was 63.43 in the first cycle, and it increased to 71.42 in the second cycle, which increased by 10.79%. It indicated that teaching speaking using Busuu mobile application improved the students' speaking skills. In cycle one, the students showed an interest in learning to speak Busuu by actively participating in classroom activities. During the session, the students were asked to listen to the dialogue, do the grammar exercise on Simple Past Tense, and practice vocabulary from Busuu in intermediate B1 level with the topic titled "How Was Your Trip". As the application allowed the students to do self-learning by using their smartphones, the students were given a self-evaluation sheet to obtain their self-study results.

It was difficult for students to get used to the mobile learning application because it was a new experience for them to explore their smartphones to support their learning activities. However, they showed their enthusiasm and curiosity by frequently delivering the teachers' questions during the implementation of Busuu in the process of teaching and learning. The student also seriously completed the evaluation sheet to see how the students did the self-study. The results of students' evaluation sheet showed that the students did not encounter significant difficulties. The students were able to finish the tasks on listening, vocabulary, reading, and grammar from

Busuu in the time given. As self-learning got the students involved in the lesson, they could focus on the tasks given and enjoyed the class.

In term of students' speaking performance, the main problems face remarkably students were poor pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, and inappropriate grammar indicated that it was difficult for the students to pronounce the English words correctly, combine and use appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas, and also arrange the words in sentences using proper grammar. As a result, their speaking performance was not fluent and comprehensive. However, the researchers did not see any problems in students' speaking performance ¹³ dealing with lack of confidence and anxiety. They spoke confidently and knew ² what they were going to say in the source language, but they got confused when switching the language into the target language.

To optimize the use of Busuu in the process of teaching and learning, the peer assessment was implemented where the students were given a chance to evaluate their friends' speaking performance. The teachers explained briefly the criteria in assessing speaking based on the rubric proposed by Harris (1969) to ensure that the students could apply the rubric effectively. The peer assessment was expected to encourage the students to engage with the course material more deeply and critically provide feedback to the others. Therefore, they were motivated to learn about the aspects of speaking performance. In the conclusion of the first cycle, the mean score of students' speaking was 63.43, where generally the students' speaking performance was not adequate by showing incorrect pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and vocabulary. Thus, the second cycle was conducted to improve the students' speaking. ⁴

The treatment in cycles one and two was quite similar. The teaching and learning process implemented the use of Busuu, but the topic given was different from the previous one. The title of the topic was "The World Biggest Events" with Comparative & Superlative Degree as the grammar point that the students can independently learn. While the students were doing their self-learning, they also completed the self-evaluation sheet to see how they practiced grammar, vocabulary exercises and listened to the dialogue from Busuu. The speaking task was then conducted, followed by a peer assessment activity to get feedback from the teachers and friends. The activity helped the students to have better quality learning and develop their speaking ability.

The students' participation increased in this cycle. It can be seen from their enthusiasm in asking and answering questions, doing self-learning,

performing their speaking skill, and evaluating their friends' speaking tasks. Based on the students' speaking tasks, the students' speaking performance's mean score increased to 70.28. It indicated that the students performed the speaking task somewhat competently and succeeded in using the compensatory strategies in terms of the accuracy of the pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and vocabulary. It showed that the improvement of the students' speaking skill was found in cycle two.

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2. Students' Perception of the Implementation of Busuu to Improve English Speaking Skill

To determine students' perception of Busuu's use to improve their speaking skills, the researchers distributed the questionnaire to the students. Based on the data obtained, most of the students agreed that they enjoyed using Busuu in class. 52 % of students responded that as a mobile learning application, Busuu met their needs and interest. It indicated that they were enthusiastic about using the application because it helped them understand the material and got direct feedback that allowed them to do the self-learning. In terms of using the application, 72% of students agreed that the mobile learning application Busuu is friendly-used, so they did not encounter any significant problems in doing self-learning from Busuu. Besides, most students responded positively to the use of Busuu that can increase their English learning activities, especially speaking skills. In conclusion, students have a positive attitude towards the implementation of the Busuu mobile learning application to enhance their speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

After the researchers conducted action research implement¹¹ the use of Busuu mobile language learning application, it can be concluded that the use of Busuu in class could improve the learning atmosphere. The atmosphere of learning became more enjoyable and relax. Busuu enabled the students to do self-learning and exposed the students to English practices such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, listening to the dialogue, and writing exercises, so they were encouraged to speak based on the relevant materials they had learned. The peer assessment was also introduced to the students in this research. The students can assess their friends' speaking performance to have a more²¹anced and more in-depth understanding of the critical aspect of speaking. Based on the results of students' speaking performances, it was

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proven that there was an improvement in students' speaking skills. The mean score of students' speaking tasks in the first cycle was 63.43, and the mean score increased to 70.28 in the second cycle. In addition, the result of the questionnaire distributed to the students showed that the students gave positive feedback towards the implementation of Busuu in the process of teaching and learning.

It was found that students' speaking improves by using the mobile application, Busuu, and the students also showed a positive attitude toward the use of Busuu in speaking learning. This may imply that the mobile application help English teachers facilitate the students to practice their speaking skill both inside and outside the classroom. The application helps teachers teach and students to learn useful expressions, vocabulary, and grammar needed by students. Also, the audio that is available in the application ease students to practice how to pronounce words. The application allows students to have more practical, enjoyable, and easier English learning, which can motivate them to practice their English. Finally, the study's result can be used as one of the references that can help the further writers investigate the other new way to improve students' speaking skill.

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ORIGINALITY REPORT

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SIMILARITY INDEX

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