

Busuu Application On Students' Reading Skills Development

Darwawin Perdana Akbar

Universitas PGRI PALEMBANG, Indonesia

Aswadi Jaya

Universitas PGRI PALEMBANG, Indonesia

Hermansyah

Universitas PGRI PALEMBANG, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: hermansyah@univpgri-palembang.ac.id

Abstract

This study aimed to describe how students used the Busuu application in their previous reading activities and how they perceived its use in an EFL classroom context. The study employed a descriptive qualitative method involving 35 students of Grade XI.3 and one English teacher at SMA PGRI 1 Palembang. Data were collected through classroom observation, questionnaire, student interviews, and teacher interview, with student interviews used as the main source of data and the other instruments used for supporting and triangulation purposes. The data were analyzed using data condensation, categorization, data display, and conclusion drawing based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The results showed that students used Busuu mainly for reading short texts, following instructions, and doing reading tasks and also used some strategies such as rereading, guessing the meaning from context, and using digital features such as translation tools, audio, pictures, and videos to help them in understanding the meanings of vocabulary and sentences. The results also showed that these elements helped students to manage their reading while some students still had problems with unfamiliar vocabulary, sentence comprehension, and some idioms. As for student perceptions, most students perceived Busuu as a useful and practical application that facilitated their reading activities. Some students also reported their reliance on digital features and the importance of teacher guidance and independent reading practice in enhancing their understanding.

Keywords: Busuu application, reading activities, students' perceptions.



INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill for EFL learners because it enables them to obtain information and construct meaning from written texts. Reading not only involves recognizing words and sentences but also understanding and interpreting the meaning conveyed by the text. Pardede (2022) states that reading plays an important role in helping learners acquire, store, and retrieve information from written materials.

Reading difficulties remain a common issue in many EFL learning contexts. Students may read a sentence correctly but still struggle to understand its intended meaning because important vocabulary items or grammatical patterns are unfamiliar to them. According to Hezam et al. (2022), limited vocabulary knowledge and insufficient understanding of grammar are among the main factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties. These challenges become more noticeable when students work with short reading texts that require careful attention to sentence meaning and contextual vocabulary use. Similar concerns are also reflected in the Indonesian context. The results of PISA 2022 indicate that Indonesian students' reading performance remains below the OECD average, suggesting that many learners still require meaningful opportunities to develop reading comprehension and vocabulary understanding.

Alongside these challenges, advances in educational technology have created new opportunities for language learning. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) allows learners to access learning materials through mobile devices without restrictions of time and place. Sürüç (2021) argues that mobile learning supports learner autonomy and flexibility, while Klimova and Zamborova (2020) highlight that mobile applications can facilitate reading activities through interactive features such as audio, visuals, and vocabulary support. As a result, mobile applications have become increasingly relevant in supporting English language learning, including reading-related activities.

One mobile language-learning application that has gained considerable attention is Busuu. Busuu is a CEFR-based language-learning platform that provides structured learning modules integrating reading, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and interactive exercises. Through short lesson units, learners are exposed to reading-related activities such as understanding vocabulary in context, interpreting sentence meaning, reading short dialogues, and completing brief reading tasks. Previous studies have reported positive responses toward the application. Susanti and Fitriani (2025) found that students perceived Busuu as useful, flexible, and enjoyable for independent English learning, while Hidayatunnisa et al. (2025) reported that



students appreciated its vocabulary and pronunciation features. In addition, the short and guided lesson format offered by Busuu is consistent with the concept of microlearning, which presents learning content in manageable units that may support learner engagement (Nitiasih et al., 2023). Nevertheless, students may also encounter practical challenges such as limited access to premium features and internet connectivity issues (Afifka & Daulay, 2022).

Previous studies have examined Busuu in relation to various aspects of language learning, including vocabulary acquisition, listening, speaking, learner motivation, and learning effectiveness. However, most studies have focused on broader language-learning outcomes rather than specifically examining reading-related activities. Furthermore, limited studies have explored how students use Busuu during reading activities and how they perceive the application from a qualitative descriptive perspective, particularly in Indonesian senior high school contexts. Despite the increasing use of mobile-assisted language-learning applications, there is still a lack of descriptive research investigating students' experiences with Busuu in reading activities involving vocabulary understanding, sentence interpretation, short dialogues, and brief reading texts.

Therefore, this study aims to describe how students use the Busuu application in reading activities and to explore their perceptions of using the application for reading-related tasks. The study focuses on students of Grade XI at SMA PGRI 1 Palembang who had previously used Busuu as a supplementary learning medium during English classroom activities. Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of the application or measuring learning outcomes, this study seeks to provide a descriptive understanding of students' experiences and perceptions of using Busuu for reading activities in an EFL classroom context.

OVERVIEW OF BUSUU APPLICATION

Busuu is a mobile-assisted language learning application that provides structured language-learning materials through both mobile and web-based platforms. According to Nafa et al. (2023), Busuu was developed as a multiplatform language-learning application that enables learners to access learning materials flexibly in different learning situations. One of the main characteristics of Busuu is its curriculum structure, which is organized based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This level-based system allows learners to progress systematically from beginner to more advanced proficiency levels while monitoring their learning development through the application features (Afifka & Daulay, 2024). In addition



to its structured learning pathway, Busuu integrates various language-learning components, including reading, vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, and pronunciation activities within short lesson units. Reading-related activities in Busuu commonly involve short dialogues, brief texts, vocabulary-in-context exercises, and sentence-level comprehension tasks that guide learners to construct meaning from written language. The application also incorporates multimedia features such as audio support, visual elements, interactive exercises, and immediate feedback that may assist learners in understanding language content more effectively. According to Susanti et al. (2025), Busuu provides vocabulary support, grammar explanations, and pronunciation activities that help learners understand words and expressions in context. Furthermore, Busuu offers community-based interaction features that allow learners to receive feedback from other users and native speakers (Shibata, 2020). Through its combination of structured lessons, interactive activities, multimedia support, and progress-tracking features, Busuu can be viewed as a comprehensive digital language-learning platform that supports learners' engagement with language-learning activities, including reading-related tasks in mobile learning environments.

OVERVIEW OF READING ACTIVITY

Reading activity in EFL refers to the process through which learners interact with written texts in order to construct meaning and gain information from language input. Reading is widely recognized as an essential skill because it provides learners with opportunities to engage with vocabulary, sentence structures, and ideas presented in written form. However, reading involves more than simply recognizing words or decoding sentences. According to Ali et al. (2022), reading requires learners to process meaning carefully and connect linguistic information with their existing knowledge. In many EFL contexts, reading activities are often conducted through short reading tasks that focus on specific learning objectives, such as vocabulary understanding, sentence interpretation, short dialogues, and brief paragraphs. These tasks allow learners to concentrate on smaller units of meaning without being overwhelmed by lengthy texts. Although short reading activities may appear simple, learners may still encounter difficulties when they face unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence patterns, or limited contextual understanding. Anwar and Sailuddin (2022) explain that understanding difficult words remains one of the major challenges experienced by learners during reading activities. Furthermore, reading comprehension requires learners to connect words, sentences, and contextual clues in order to



interpret meaning accurately. Contextual reading materials may also support learners in understanding unfamiliar language because meaningful contexts can provide clues that facilitate vocabulary and sentence comprehension (Bhatti et al., 2022). Therefore, reading activity can be understood as an active meaning-making process in which learners interact with written language, interpret information, and construct understanding through engagement with various types of texts and reading tasks.

MOBILE-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (MALL)

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) refers to the use of mobile technologies to support language learning activities in both formal and informal learning environments. As the development of digital technology continues to influence educational practices, mobile devices have become increasingly important tools for language learning because they enable learners to access learning materials beyond the limitations of time and place. Hsieh (2024) defines MALL as the use of mobile devices for language learning across different learning contexts, while Jabbar (2024) describes MALL as an approach that promotes interactive learning and learner self-regulation through mobile technology. Similarly, Sari and Sulisty (2022) explain that MALL incorporates language learning through digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers. Unlike traditional classroom instruction, MALL allows learners to engage with language-learning activities flexibly and independently through mobile applications and digital resources. Therefore, MALL has become an important approach in contemporary language education because it provides learners with opportunities to access language input, practice language skills, and participate in learning activities anytime and anywhere.

One of the central characteristics of MALL is its emphasis on mobility, learner autonomy, and personalized learning experiences. Through mobile applications, learners can interact with various learning resources, multimedia content, and interactive activities that support language development. Alisoy et al. (2024) argue that MALL creates more personalized and interactive learning environments by integrating smartphones into learning activities. In addition, Martínez, Gómez, and Restrepo Botero (2025) emphasize that the portability, connectivity, and multimedia features of mobile devices contribute to meaningful language-learning experiences. However, the implementation of MALL may also involve challenges such as distractions from non-academic notifications, differences in digital literacy, and classroom management issues (Sánchez-Tello & Argudo-Garzón, 2022; Sari & Sulisty, 2022). Despite these challenges, MALL remains an



important theoretical foundation for understanding how learners interact with mobile language-learning applications. In this study, MALL serves as the theoretical lens for examining students' use of the Busuu application and their perceptions of engaging in reading-related activities through a mobile learning platform.

THE USE AND VOICES OF BUSUU APPLICATION IN READING ACTIVITY

The findings revealed that students used the Busuu application as a supporting medium for reading-related activities during English learning. Based on interview data, students commonly used the application to read short texts, dialogues, and brief paragraphs before completing the reading tasks provided in each lesson. Many participants explained that they usually began by reading the text carefully, identifying the main information, and then answering comprehension questions available in the application. Several students also stated that they followed the lesson sequence step by step, moving from reading activities to vocabulary and comprehension tasks. The teacher interview further confirmed that Busuu had previously been used to support reading-related classroom activities, particularly in helping students understand vocabulary, sentence meaning, and short explanatory texts. Observation findings also showed that students were already familiar with digital learning activities and participated actively in reading-related classroom tasks. These findings indicate that students used Busuu not merely as a task-completion tool but also as a medium for engaging with reading materials during English learning activities.

The findings also showed that students employed various strategies to understand the meaning of texts while using Busuu. When encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or unclear sentence meanings, students did not rely on a single strategy. Some participants reported guessing the meaning from the context of the sentence, while others attempted to understand the meaning through the overall dialogue or situation presented in the text. Several students also mentioned discussing difficult words with teachers or classmates before checking the translation feature. Translation support, however, remained one of the most frequently used tools for clarifying vocabulary and sentence meaning. In addition, multimedia elements such as pictures, videos, and audio pronunciation were often used to support comprehension. These findings suggest that students actively combined contextual, social, and digital strategies when engaging with reading activities in the application. Similar patterns were evident in the questionnaire results, where most students reported that Busuu's features helped them understand sentence



meaning (88.6%) and that multimedia supports such as audio, pictures, videos, and translation features facilitated comprehension (91.4%).

Another recurring finding was the use of rereading as part of the students' reading process. Many participants explained that they reread texts when they were uncertain about sentence meaning, wanted to verify their answers, or needed to understand specific details more accurately. Some students stated that rereading helped them confirm whether their interpretation of the text was correct, while others explained that they reread sections containing unfamiliar vocabulary or similar answer choices. This pattern demonstrates that rereading functioned as a comprehension strategy rather than simply repeating the reading activity. The questionnaire findings further supported this result, showing that 62.8% of the students reported rereading texts to gain a clearer understanding of the content. These findings indicate that students actively monitored their comprehension and revisited the text when additional clarification was needed.

Students' voices regarding the use of Busuu were generally positive. Many participants described the reading materials as simple, manageable, and relatively easy to understand because the texts were short and presented in structured lesson sequences. Several students stated that the topics were familiar and related to everyday situations, making the texts easier to follow than longer reading passages. Some participants even considered the materials suitable for their proficiency level, although a few students commented that certain tasks were too easy and lacked challenge. These perceptions were consistent with the questionnaire findings, where 85.7% of the students reported that the reading texts were easy to understand and 85.7% stated that the reading activities were easy to follow. The teacher also reported that students generally responded positively to Busuu because of its simple interface, short lesson format, and interactive learning activities. Overall, these findings suggest that students perceived Busuu as an accessible platform that supported their participation in reading activities.

The findings additionally highlighted the importance of Busuu's supporting features in facilitating reading comprehension. Students frequently referred to translation tools, audio pronunciation, pictures, and videos as features that assisted them in understanding vocabulary and sentence meaning. Translation features were particularly useful when students encountered unfamiliar words, while audio support helped them connect pronunciation with written language. Pictures and videos were often described as contextual supports that helped learners understand the situation or meaning of the text. The questionnaire data reinforced these



perceptions, indicating that a large majority of students found the supporting features beneficial during reading activities. These findings suggest that the multimodal design of Busuu contributed positively to students' reading experiences by providing multiple sources of support during meaning-making processes.

Despite the generally positive responses, students also reported several challenges while using Busuu for reading activities. Some participants experienced difficulties understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and sentence meanings that could not be interpreted word by word. Others admitted that they sometimes relied heavily on translation features or visual supports instead of attempting to interpret the text independently. A few students acknowledged that immediate access to translation occasionally reduced their effort to infer meaning from context. Similar concerns appeared in the questionnaire findings, where 42.8% of the students reported experiencing difficulties during reading activities. The teacher interview also indicated that some students continued to require assistance when dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary and complex expressions. These findings demonstrate that although Busuu provided substantial support, language-related challenges remained present for some learners.

Overall, the findings indicate that students viewed Busuu as a useful and practical application for reading-related activities. Students used the application to read short texts, complete comprehension tasks, apply various reading strategies, and utilize multimedia features to support understanding. Their voices reflected positive perceptions regarding the accessibility, simplicity, and usefulness of the application, particularly for vocabulary learning and sentence comprehension. However, students also recognized that Busuu could not fully replace independent reading practice and teacher guidance. Additional exposure to reading materials, contextual interpretation skills, and classroom support remained important for helping students develop a deeper understanding of English texts. Therefore, while Busuu functioned as a supportive mobile learning tool, effective reading development still depended on students' active engagement and continued instructional support within the EFL learning context.

DISCUSSION

The findings showed that students used Busuu as a supporting medium for reading-related activities through short texts, dialogues, and structured reading tasks. Rather than using the application solely to complete exercises, students engaged with reading materials by attempting to understand vocabulary, sentence meaning, and textual information before



proceeding to subsequent tasks. This finding suggests that Busuu functioned not only as a task-based application but also as a digital learning environment that facilitated reading activities. Such a finding is consistent with the concept of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which emphasizes the use of mobile technologies to support language learning beyond traditional classroom practices. Through mobile applications, learners are provided with opportunities to access learning materials flexibly and engage with language input through interactive learning experiences. In the present study, students appeared to use Busuu as a medium that allowed them to interact with reading materials in a structured and accessible manner.

The findings further revealed that students employed different strategies while trying to understand reading materials in Busuu. Translation features, contextual guessing, discussions with teachers and classmates, audio support, and visual elements were commonly used to facilitate comprehension. These findings indicate that students did not depend on a single strategy when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or unclear sentence meanings. Instead, they combined several approaches to construct understanding from the texts. In reading activities, comprehension involves more than recognizing written words because learners must actively interpret meaning by connecting textual information with contextual clues and prior knowledge. The use of multiple strategies in this study reflects students' efforts to negotiate meaning while engaging with English texts. This finding also supports previous discussions that reading comprehension in EFL contexts often requires learners to utilize various forms of linguistic and contextual support when processing unfamiliar language.

Another important finding was the frequent use of rereading during reading activities. Many students reported rereading texts to confirm understanding, verify answers, and clarify sentence meaning. This finding suggests that rereading formed part of students' meaning-making processes rather than serving as a simple repetition of reading tasks. Through rereading, students were able to revisit information, identify important details, and reduce uncertainty when interpreting the texts. The finding indicates that students actively monitored their comprehension while engaging with reading materials. In this sense, reading was not a passive activity but a process that required continuous interaction with the text. The use of rereading strategies demonstrates that students attempted to construct understanding gradually, particularly when they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary or confusing expressions.

Students' voices also revealed generally positive perceptions toward the use of Busuu in reading activities. Many participants described the application as practical, easy to use, and



supportive for understanding vocabulary and sentence meaning. The short reading materials available in Busuu were frequently perceived as manageable because students could focus on smaller units of information without feeling overwhelmed by lengthy texts. This finding may be associated with the structured lesson format provided by the application, where reading materials are presented through brief and sequential learning activities. Such a format is consistent with the characteristics of mobile learning environments that emphasize flexibility and accessibility. The positive responses expressed by students are also in line with previous studies reporting that Busuu is generally perceived as a useful platform for independent language learning due to its structured learning materials and supportive learning features.

The findings additionally highlighted the importance of multimedia support during reading activities. Translation tools, audio pronunciation, pictures, and videos were frequently mentioned as features that facilitated comprehension. These features appeared to assist students in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, interpreting sentence meaning, and following the overall context of the reading materials. From a MALL perspective, multimedia resources provide learners with multiple forms of language input that may support understanding and engagement during learning activities. The findings suggest that the combination of textual and multimedia elements in Busuu created a learning environment that supported students while interacting with English texts. The availability of these features may also explain why many students perceived the application as helpful during reading activities.

Despite the positive perceptions, the findings showed that students continued to experience several challenges while using Busuu. Difficulties related to unfamiliar vocabulary, sentence interpretation, and contextual understanding remained evident among some participants. Several students also admitted that they occasionally depended heavily on translation features and visual supports when reading texts. These findings are consistent with previous discussions highlighting vocabulary limitations as one of the major obstacles experienced by EFL learners during reading activities. Although digital features can provide immediate support, they do not automatically eliminate language-related difficulties. Excessive reliance on translation tools may also reduce opportunities for learners to develop independent meaning-making strategies when engaging with written texts.

Another important finding concerns the continued role of teacher support during digital learning activities. Although Busuu provided various learning resources and supporting features, students still reported the need for teacher explanations when encountering unfamiliar



vocabulary, unclear expressions, or difficult instructions. Observation and teacher interview findings also indicated that teacher guidance remained visible throughout classroom learning activities. This suggests that mobile learning applications function most effectively when they complement rather than replace classroom instruction. The findings reinforce the view that technology-supported learning should be accompanied by instructional guidance to help students interpret information, clarify misunderstandings, and develop more effective reading strategies.

Overall, the findings indicate that Busuu supported students' engagement in reading activities through structured reading materials, multimedia features, and flexible learning opportunities. Students generally responded positively to the application and employed various strategies to understand texts while participating in reading activities. However, vocabulary difficulties, dependence on supporting features, and the continued need for teacher guidance suggest that digital learning applications should be viewed as supplementary learning tools rather than complete substitutes for classroom instruction. Within the context of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, the findings demonstrate that Busuu can facilitate reading-related activities while still requiring active learner participation and instructional support to maximize learning experiences in EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings indicate that students used the Busuu application as a supportive tool for reading activities and generally held positive perceptions of its use in an EFL classroom context. The findings revealed that students used Busuu to read short texts, complete reading-related tasks, and understand vocabulary and sentence meanings through various strategies, including rereading, contextual understanding, translation tools, audio support, and visual features. The short and structured reading materials, together with multimedia features such as translation tools, audio pronunciation, pictures, and videos, helped students engage with reading tasks and supported their comprehension of English texts. These findings reflect the potential of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) to provide flexible learning opportunities and additional support for students during reading activities. However, the study also indicated that digital learning support does not completely eliminate the challenges experienced by EFL learners. Some students continued to encounter difficulties related to unfamiliar vocabulary, sentence interpretation, and contextual understanding, while others reported relying heavily on



supporting features when reading texts. Therefore, although Busuu functioned as a useful supplementary learning tool for reading activities, teacher guidance and independent reading practice remained important components of the learning process. The findings suggest that the integration of mobile learning applications such as Busuu can support students' engagement with reading activities, while meaningful reading development continues to depend on active learner participation, continuous reading practice, and instructional support within EFL learning environments.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings of this study suggest several directions for educational practice and future research related to the use of mobile-assisted language learning applications in EFL contexts. Since students generally perceived Busuu as a useful and accessible tool for reading activities, teachers may consider integrating mobile learning applications into classroom instruction to provide additional opportunities for reading practice and vocabulary development. However, the findings also indicate that students continued to rely on teacher guidance and independent reading practice while using the application. Therefore, future learning activities should encourage students to develop greater autonomy in reading by balancing the use of digital support features with independent comprehension strategies. In addition, future studies may explore the use of Busuu or other Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications in different educational settings, language skills, and learner populations. Further research may also investigate students' reading strategies, vocabulary development, and learning experiences during longer periods of mobile-assisted learning. Such studies may contribute to a broader understanding of how digital learning applications can support language learning and reading activities in diverse EFL environments.

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