The Use of Busuu for Learning Listening in English

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Abstract

M-learning has gained remarkable popularity in language learning. Mobile-assisted language learning offers learning opportunities outside the classroom. This study is a smaller part of a bigger project. This study has strived to highlight the advantages of the use of a mobile-assisted language learning application named Busuu in supporting students’ listening practice. Participants involved in this study were 32 first-year college students who have used Busuu for two months. Students used Busuu for listening practice and regularly report their progress to the lecturers. The study revealed that Busuu widens vocabulary range, provides listening practices, has attractive and interactive features, and fosters learning autonomy. Students also wrote that the use of mobile applications is very useful, due to their practicality, portability, flexibility, and accessibility. In addition, it opens up learning opportunities and immediate feedback for learning. Thus, Busuu is promising to be used in listening classroom.

Keywords: Busuu, listening practice, mobile-assisted language learning
The Merits of Mobile-assisted Language Learning: The use of Busuu for Learning Listening in English

Introduction

To be relevant to the culture of digital generations, classroom adaptation is required. Today’s education demands the acquisition of information via mobile devices (Noriega, 2016). Learning via mobile device is called mobile learning. Mobile learning or m-learning is distinguished by its ability to facilitate spontaneous, informal, personalized, and ubiquitous learning (Miangah & Nezaret, 2012). For more than a decade, m-learning has played an important role in foreign language learning. The term referring to the use of mobile learning in language learning is Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (henceforth MALL). MALL has made language learning more flexible (Çakmak, 2019). MALL is different from computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Compared to CALL, MALL offers portability and connectivity (Miangah & Nezaret, 2012). One striking implication of the existence of MALL is that MALL has blurred the traditional boundary between the classroom and the outside world, allowing language teachers and students to take advantage of opportunities for language practice outside of the classroom (Nushi & Jenabzadeh, 2016).

Students significantly use mobile devices, particularly mobile phones for learning (Yurdagül & Öz, 2018). MALL offers students rich, real-time, convenient, and contextual learning opportunities whether they are in or out of the classroom (Helwa, 2017). MALL provides a source of multisensory language input, which is required for learning to take place (Alzieni, 2020). Mobile technology features such as texting, voice and video recording, internet access, and cameras eventually empower learners with abilities that allow them to improve their communicative abilities and gain access to reliable resources (Hasan & Islam, 2020). It helps students’ comprehension of language learning. MALL activities contribute to the provision of explainable input, meaning negotiation, and easy-to-understand output (Azar & Nasiri, 2014). Therefore, it facilitates the teaching-learning process and allows students to gain in-depth knowledge (Yedla, 2013).

In Indonesia, a growing number of studies on MALL applications have been conducted. One of the most popular mobile applications used is Busuu. The official website of Busuu claims that Busuu is a mobile application trusted by a global community of 100 million learners. Busuu is a self-taught language learning app that provides native speaker-approved language material (Nee, 2014). Busuu provides language material authorized by native speakers (Taufiqurrochman, 2016). Busuu provides a platform for skills such as listening, speaking, writing, and reading (Nushi & Jenabzadeh, 2016). Shibata (2020) specifies that Busuu offers four levels of language courses which are divided into beginner, elementary, low-intermediate, and upper-intermediate. Busuu provides its users with well-crafted learning tools such as flashcards, conversation models, native speaker correction, and grammar extracts (Nushi & Jenabzadeh, 2016). In android, Busuu is easily accessible for a free download in Playstore (see Figure 1). Users can download it from iTunes and Google Play. It is available in IOS and Android. It is only 35 MB, which is considered not to take too much space in the phone memory.

Figure 1. Busuu in Playstore
Busuu provides 12 languages such as German, Spanish, French, Arabic, Turkish, Polish, Portuguese Chinese, Russian, Japanese, English, and Italian. Busuu pays attention to the need of its users. While signing up, users are asked to select the level of English. For those who are not sure about their level, a placement test is provided (See Figure 2). Thus, Busuu can tell which level the users are.

![Figure 2. Pages for Signing Up for Busuu](image)

The purpose of using the application is also questioned when users are signing up. There are several options such as learning English for pleasure and culture, education, careers, travel, or friends and family. The algorithm will let Busuu prepare the best course according to the need of users. These features might be different from other applications since Busuu shows its concern for the study. This way, the consumer will be guaranteed that they will get a lesson that suits their needs. Busuu ensures that consumers are treated and taught following the purposes of their learning.

![Figure 3. Subscription Plan for Busuu](image)

Busuu can be used according to the affordability of the users. Students in this study used the free version or called the basic version. Those who want to enjoy all features of Busuu, can subscribe to it. Busuu offers options for the user to use the application with a subscription or for free. Users can also try the premium version of Busuu in their first 7-day trial. There are differences between the basic and premium versions of the application. The free version only provides access to one language course. Meanwhile, with the premium version, users are provided with facilities to learn with native speakers, unlock all lessons, make a private study plan, learn vocabulary and grammar with the support of artificial intelligence, learn everywhere only, and learn 12 languages. Currently, in 2022, the price offered for a subscription is IDR 812.150. The payment became one of the major drawbacks of the use of Busuu. The cost and technologies associated with mobile devices should be considered for language learning (Miangah & Nezarat, 2012).

The disadvantage of Busuu is not only associated with the cost incurred for a subscription. In comparison to other free popular language learning applications, the major disadvantage of Busuu (free version) is the limited variety of exercises it provides; simply put, it becomes boring after a while and learners may lose interest in
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continuing to use the application (Nushi & Jenabzadeh, 2016). Saona-Vallejos (2018) express her criticism toward Busuu that It has regressed from a social orientation to a cognitive orientation, from participation to an acquisition metaphor, and from L2 use to L2 learning. Another disadvantage of the free version is that it cannot be used offline and advertisements keep popping up if users use the free version (Nushi & Jenabzadeh, 2016). Despite the criticism, studies have proven that Busuu helps students’ English language improvement with good support from instructors and parents.

As a hand-held device application, scholars have described the merits of Busuu regarding students’ English language skills. Busuu was proven to support students’ speaking skills (Kuning, 2020; Mulyadi & Maesaroh, 2021), listening skills (Helwa, 2017), reading, writing, and listening (AlDakhil & AlFadda, 2022). The Busuu Efficacy Study conducted by Vesselinov et al. (2021) studied 114 Busuu users involving beginner and intermediate-level college students who use the application for two months. Students used Busuu for approximately 13 hours in two months. The study revealed that user got their language proficiency in terms of grammar, reading, and oral proficiency enhanced. Beginner users outperformed intermediate users in at least one of the areas of grammar, reading, and oral proficiency.

In terms of learning to listen, previous studies have mentioned the merits of Busuu in supporting students’ listening skills (Samara, 2021; Shibata, 2020). Since there is a scarcity of research describing the advantage of Busuu in listening skills, this study will be a preliminary study on the perception of students after having a listening task in Busuu. This study is a small part of a bigger project on the use of Busuu in English language learning. Hence, this study only focuses on students’ perception after having listening tasks at Busuu. This study does not specify the aspects of listening in detail since this study is only the smaller part of a bigger project. This study is expected to provide more elaboration on the advantage of Busuu after students were asked to do the listening task for two months.

Method

This study intends to examine the second-year vocational college students’ perceptions of the advantages of Busuu when they use features for learning listening. 32 Students participating in this study used Busuu for two months. They were asked to use Busuu for at least three hours per week. Since they were asked to use Busuu at home, the way the researcher can ensure their participation in Busuu is by monitoring how far they have finished the assignment in the application. Students reported their progress in Busuu learning every week. Lecturer also reminded them to use Busuu via WhatsApp group. Therefore, students keep using Busuu for two months.

Data collection was done by asking students to write an essay telling their perceptions after doing the listening assignment in Busuu for two months. Students wrote 300–500-word writing describing their experience using a mobile phone, particularly Busuu for learning to listen. The data in this part was analyzed using thematic analysis. Data presentation is divided into two parts. The first part highlights the advantages of Busuu from the perspective of students. The next part is about the benefit of using a mobile learning application.

Results and Discussion

This section is the main part of the article. This is where the author/s should explain in words what he/she discovered in the research. It should be clearly laid out and in a logical sequence. The results of the research presented in this section are the result of a clean process of data analysis such as statistical calculations and testing process or other processes for the achievement of its research. State the findings of the research concisely. If you want to display a table, use the following format.

The results and discussion in this study is divided into the description of aspects that students perceived to be supported by Busuu such as widening vocabulary range, providing listening practices, having attractive and interactive features, and fostering learning autonomy and the benefits of MALL according to students’ perspectives.

Helwa (2017) argues that the most important skill in English is vocabulary. MALL has proven its contribution to students’ vocabulary acquisition. Previous studies have described that MALL makes vocabulary learning easier (Do, 2020; Nguyen, 2016; Vam & Thanh, 2021). The success of vocabulary learning using mobile technology is
assumed to be the result of the retention of words students find the applications (Zhang, Song, & Burston, 2011). Students wrote:

“I learn many new vocabularies” – Participant 15 (Theme: widening vocabulary range)

“The task provides new vocabularies that enrich my vocabulary collection” – Participant 30 (Theme: widening vocabulary range)

The results of this study confirm previous studies (Bárcena, et al., 2015; Samara, 2021; Shibata, 2020; Susanto et al., 2022) that Busuu supports vocabulary enrichment. Susanto et al. (2022) describe that Busuu simplifies the learning process by tracking the number of words learned, the level of fluency, and the length of the learning day. According to Van and Thanh (2021), Mobile-mediated technology may help students increase their vocabulary knowledge, and the words learned while participating in technology-assisted activities were retained without significant attrition two weeks later. In addition, the complete feature of the smartphone makes it easier for students to look up online dictionary when they need to find the meaning of new vocabularies.

This corroborates Sharples (2006) that mobile learning is a customized learning experience that is adaptable and suitable to the learner’s needs. The adaptability of mobile devices provides language learners with multiple learning opportunities as well as fast feedback (Afzali et al., 2017). The advantages of mobile apps included MALL qualities such as ease, interaction, immediate feedback, and the usage of real resources (Nino, 2015). Learning opportunities and instant feedbacks are the primacy of mobile learning. Mobile learning is there, whenever and wherever students need them.

The next theme is that Busuu provides attractive and interactive features. Not only mobile learning provides numerous applications with interesting features, but it also allows interactivity and a communicative approach. Learning a language through a mobile application is said to allow a more successful communicative approach (Walsh, 2019). Darsih and Asikin (2020) describe that by using mobile applications, students will not only interact with each other but also they can interact flexibly with their mobile phones. Hence, MALL attracts students to use the features for learning as well as support interactivity within the activities. Regarding attractive and interactive features of using Busuu, students express.

“The application is colorful, I like it” – Participant 21 (Theme: having attractive and interactive features)

Yedla (2013) underlines the interactive environment that MALL provides for students. The development of new pedagogy through the use of mobile technology opens up a new avenue for creating a more interactive environment in the classroom in an interesting and innovative way, thereby making teaching more and more effective (Yedla, 2013). Teaching and learning require media for a fun, effective, and efficient process (Kuning, 2020).

The next theme is regarding the support of Busuu on students’ learning autonomy. Learner autonomy is one of the influencing variables in students’ learning performance (Darsih, 2018). Students can use their smartphone as a weapon to conquer their difficulty in English since it allows self-directed practice and burgeoning options of language learning applications.

“I can learn according to my need and want.” – Participant 23 (Theme: fostering learning autonomy)

Rosell-Aguilar (2018) and Ctryasa (2019) confirm the results of this study that Busuu as a mobile application encourages students’ learning autonomy. Busuu is regarded as a valuable resource for language learning, which increases students’ motivation to be self-directed learners (AlDakhil & AlFadda, 2022). A study conducted by Rizqiyah and Drajati (2020) explains that Busuu promotes autonomous learning by assisting students in taking control of their learning management, freely managing their time to study, cognitive processing, and learning strategies by reflecting on how well they have learned. This self-regulated learning can be feasible due to the feature provided by Busuu, which is weekly progress reports that allow users to reflect on and track their language learning (Shibata, 2020). The next theme is that Busuu provides listening practices. Students elaborate:
There are dozens of listening tasks” – Participant 1 (Theme: providing listening practices)
“I can select task according to my level” – Participant 17 (Theme: providing listening practices)

Studies have agreed that Busuu has a significant impact on students listening skills. Literature corroborates that MALL has a positive effect on students’ listening skills (Alzieni, 2020; Hasan & Islam, 2020). Listening skill is very important as it facilitates the acquisition of other language skills: writing, reading, and speaking (Helwa, 2017). Mobile phone capabilities enable successful listening skills (Azar & Nasiri, 2014). Busuu application has been proven to enhance students’ listening skills (Samara, 2021).

After selecting which skills that mostly supported by Busuu, students mention what they like most about using mobile phones for learning English. The answers were analyzed thematically obtaining four themes which are practicality, portability, flexibility, and accessibility.

There are some answers provided by students that reflect the four themes. I tool several comments representing students’ answers.

“Busuu is easy to use. I just need to use the application using my mobile phone. I do not need to turn on the computer” – Participant 12 (Theme: Practicality)
“I can take Busuu everywhere with me, I can study when I can: - Participant 27 (Theme: Portability)
“I can use Busuu anywhere and anytime I want” - Participant 3 (Theme: Flexibility)
“It is free to download, I use the free version” - - Participant 28 (Theme: Accessibility)

The findings of this study is in line with previous research that MALL provides practicality and accessibility for students (Inggit, Ivone, & Saukah, 2019; Lenhart, 2015; Shibata, 2020; Yudhiantara & Nasir, 2017). As a useful
educational tool, mobile phones play an important role in helping students learn English in both formal and informal settings. Using the mobile application, students practice their communication skills on their own and enjoy learning through their mobile phone due to its portability, convenience, and ease of use (Nafa, 2020; Yudhiantara & Nasir, 2017). In addition to offering flexibility (Hung & Zheng, 2012; Nafa, 2020), mobile application fosters individuality, connectivity, social interactivity, and portability (Miangah & Nazareth, 2012). Viberg and Grönlund also (2012) and Darsih and Asikin (2020) report practical, accessible, interactive, and flexible aspects of MALL. This Mobile application scaffold students’ interaction. This is in line with AlDakhil and AlFadda (2022) who highlight the portability, interactivity, and time-saving learning of the Busuu application. Mobile applications such as Busuu open opportunities for easy access to learning as well as offer practicality (Mulyadi & Maesaroh, 2021).

Overall, Busuu, as an example of a MALL application, is very useful for supporting students' listening practice. Busuu can be used by students and teachers as an additional tool for learning, particularly outside of the classroom. Using Busuu in listening skills as a receptive skill can be very easy for students. They just need to plug in their earphone to learn English. If people say that listening to English songs can help students' English skills, imagine if students frequently listen to Busuu or other mobile applications on their phones. Since retention helps students’ listening skills, giving an interesting application to learn English is very crucial to make them attach to the application and use it every day.

All in all, despite Busuu can be helpful in terms of supporting students’ listening skills, technology will never be able to replace the roles of parents and teachers. Parents and teachers must act as decision-makers in guiding them in the selection of appropriate content that is not harmful to children but enhances their learning (Kim &d Smith, 2017). The support of teachers and parents will make the use of technology in language learning successful.

Conclusion

This study has depicted explanations on the merits of listening tasks in Busuu for students. Students mentioned that Busuu widens vocabulary range, provides listening practices, has attractive and interactive features, and fosters learning autonomy. Furthermore, students wrote that the use of the mobile application is very useful, due to its practicality, portability, flexibility, and accessibility. This study also highlights that learning language through mobile learning, especially Busuu allows for learning opportunity and immediate feedback. Therefore, Busuu is suggested to be used in supporting students’ listening comprehension since it provides lots of listening practice that can be selected according to the level of students. The support of teachers and parents for technology use in the educational context will surely give fruitful results to students’ learning achievement.

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