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IMPROVING SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH BUSUU-ASSISTED CLASSROOM LEARNING IN TARAKAN

PENINGKATAN KETERAMPILAN BERBICARA BAHASA INGGRIS SISWA KELAS VII MELALUI PEMBELAJARAN DI KELAS BERBANTUAN BUSUU DI TARAKAN

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ABSTRACT

Speaking proficiency remains difficult for many Indonesian junior high school learners, particularly in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and confidence. This study examined changes in seventh-grade students' English speaking performance following classroom activities supported by the Busuu language-learning application at SMP Negeri 09 Tarakan. A quantitative, pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design was employed. One seventh-grade class was selected from nine classes; 30 students completed both assessments. Students undertook a baseline oral test, four Busuu-assisted instructional meetings on everyday routines and activities, and a subsequent oral test. Speaking performances were assessed on fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension using a five-domain analytic rubric. Descriptive statistics and a paired-samples t-test were used to evaluate score changes. The mean total speaking score rose from 6.43 (SD = 1.52) to 11.67 (SD = 2.20), with a mean increase of 5.23 points. The paired comparison was statistically significant, $t(29) = -21.13$, $p < .001$. Classroom observations also indicated increasing participation, alongside persistent internet-access and device constraints. The findings suggest that Busuu-supported speaking tasks can accompany meaningful short-term improvement in oral performance. Because the study lacked a comparison group, the observed gain cannot be attributed exclusively to the application. The study contributes classroom-based evidence on mobile-assisted language learning in an Indonesian junior high school context.

Keywords: Busuu, English speaking skills, junior high school, mobile-assisted language learning, pre-experimental study.

ABSTRAK

Kemampuan berbicara masih menjadi tantangan bagi banyak siswa sekolah menengah pertama di Indonesia, khususnya dalam aspek kosakata, tata bahasa, pelafalan, dan kepercayaan diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perubahan kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris siswa kelas VII setelah mengikuti kegiatan pembelajaran di kelas yang didukung oleh aplikasi pembelajaran bahasa Busuu di SMP Negeri 09 Tarakan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain praeksperimental satu kelompok melalui tes awal (*pretest*) dan tes akhir (*posttest*). Satu kelas dari sembilan kelas VII dipilih sebagai sampel, dengan 30 siswa yang menyelesaikan kedua tes tersebut. Siswa mengikuti tes lisan awal, empat kali pertemuan pembelajaran berbantuan Busuu dengan materi rutinitas dan aktivitas sehari-hari, serta tes lisan akhir. Kemampuan berbicara siswa dinilai berdasarkan lima aspek, yaitu kelancaran, pelafalan, kosakata, tata bahasa, dan pemahaman, dengan menggunakan rubrik analitik lima aspek. Statistik deskriptif dan uji t berpasangan (*paired-samples t-test*) digunakan untuk mengevaluasi perubahan skor. Rata-rata skor total kemampuan berbicara meningkat dari 6,43 (SD = 1,52) menjadi 11,67 (SD = 2,20), dengan rata-rata peningkatan sebesar 5,23 poin. Hasil perbandingan berpasangan menunjukkan perbedaan yang signifikan secara statistik, $t(29) = -21{,}13$, $p < 0{,}001$. Hasil observasi kelas juga menunjukkan peningkatan partisipasi siswa, meskipun kendala akses internet dan ketersediaan perangkat masih ditemukan. Temuan ini

menunjukkan bahwa tugas berbicara yang didukung oleh aplikasi Busuu dapat menyertai peningkatan kemampuan berbicara dalam jangka pendek yang bermakna. Namun, karena penelitian ini tidak menggunakan kelompok pembanding, peningkatan yang diamati tidak dapat diatribusikan secara eksklusif pada penggunaan aplikasi tersebut. Penelitian ini memberikan bukti empiris berbasis praktik pembelajaran di kelas mengenai pembelajaran bahasa berbantuan perangkat seluler dalam konteks sekolah menengah pertama di Indonesia.

***Kata kunci**: busuu, keterampilan berbicara bahasa Inggris, sekolah menengah pertama, pembelajaran bahasa berbantuan perangkat seluler, studi praeksperimental.*

INTRODUCTION

English speaking is a central component of communicative competence because learners must produce comprehensible, appropriately structured language while responding to interlocutors. For learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), speaking development requires simultaneous attention to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. Communicative tasks offer opportunities to turn linguistic knowledge into oral performance, but students may hesitate to speak when their lexical resources are limited or they anticipate errors and negative evaluation (Güneş & Sarıgöz, 2021; Ningrum & Listyani, 2022; Purwati et al., 2023). Assessment therefore needs to capture several dimensions of speaking rather than rely on a single holistic impression (Tavakoli et al., 2020).

Teaching speaking is particularly demanding in settings where English is rarely used beyond the classroom. Conventional instruction can introduce vocabulary and grammatical patterns but may leave insufficient time for repeated individual practice. Teachers consequently need learning media that make practice accessible, motivating, and connected to familiar conversational situations. Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) provides one possible response: smartphones and language-learning platforms can make instructional materials available beyond scheduled lessons and offer varied listening and speaking tasks (Kacetl & Klímová, 2019). Digital tools may also increase learner engagement when integrated with clear classroom guidance rather than treated as substitutes for teaching (Haleem et al., 2022).

Busuu is a mobile and web-based language-learning platform that presents graded language lessons and interaction opportunities. Its approach emphasizes practical vocabulary, sentence patterns, exercises, and community-oriented feedback. Evaluations of Busuu have discussed its pedagogical potential and learner acceptance (Nushi & Jenabzadeh, 2016; AlDakhil & AlFadda, 2021; Winans, 2020). The application can support repeated exposure to everyday expressions and provide a structure for speaking practice. Its educational value, however, depends on the content selected, how activities are facilitated, learners' access to suitable devices and connectivity, and how achievement is evaluated.

Previous work has reported positive experiences or learning outcomes associated with Busuu in EFL settings. Citrayasa (2019) examined junior high school learners' experiences of using the platform, whereas Mulyadi and Maesaroh (2021) investigated Busuu in speaking instruction. Firdaus (2023) also considered Busuu-assisted speaking pedagogy. These studies suggest promise, but they do not eliminate the need for studies situated in particular learner groups, curricula, and classroom environments. Local evidence is useful because technological resources, beginning proficiency, teaching routines, and opportunities to practice can differ considerably across schools.

A preliminary investigation at SMP Negeri 09 Tarakan identified difficulties among seventh-grade learners in using English vocabulary, pronouncing unfamiliar words, constructing sentences, and expressing ideas confidently. Teacher interviews and classroom observations reported anxiety about mistakes and limited use of interactive English-learning media. Students were studying familiar communicative topics in the Merdeka Curriculum, including daily routines, school subjects, and exchanging information. These circumstances offered a practical context for

connecting app-based exercises with classroom speaking tasks. Everyday activities are especially suitable for novice students because topics are recognizable and can support short descriptions, personal responses, and simple dialogue.

The study therefore examined speaking performance before and after a sequence of Busuu-assisted lessons among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 09 Tarakan. Specifically, it investigated whether students' overall rubric scores changed significantly following the lessons and described shifts across fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. The research contributes context-specific evidence on the feasibility of integrating a commercially available language application with teacher-led EFL speaking instruction. Because the design involved only one group, improvement was treated as a within-group association rather than definitive causal evidence of application effectiveness.

METHODS

Research Design and Setting

The study used a quantitative, pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design (O1–X–O2). The research site was SMP Negeri 09 Tarakan, North Kalimantan, Indonesia. A preliminary investigation preceded implementation. The pretest was administered on 6 March 2025, followed by four instructional meetings during March–April 2025; the posttest was conducted on 24 April 2025. The research examined change within the participating class and did not include a non-Busuu comparison condition.

Participants and Sampling

The seventh-grade population consisted of nine classes with a reported total of 288 learners (32 students in each class). A class-selection spinner was used to select class VII-8. Although the selected class had 31 students at testing, one was absent from the pretest; the analysis included 30 students with the reported paired observations. The random procedure selected a class, not individual participants, and the final analytical sample therefore represents one intact classroom.

Speaking Assessment

Students completed individual oral tasks related to their daily activities. The pretest prompts addressed morning routines, breakfast, travel to school, school subjects, and evening routines; posttest prompts addressed weekend or free-time activities, favorite subjects, balancing study and recreation, homework, and after-school activities. The prompts were related but not identical. Each student was given approximately three minutes for the speaking assessment. Oral performances were recorded and assessed by the researcher and a school English teacher according to the thesis description.

An analytic rubric adapted from Brown (2004, as cited in the source thesis) evaluated fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension on five-point scales from poor to excellent. The possible summed score across five dimensions was 5–25. The thesis describes expert review and pilot reliability checking of the instrument but does not provide a numerical inter-rater reliability coefficient or sufficient information to evaluate scoring consistency independently.

Busuu-Assisted Instructional Procedure

Four instructional meetings combined teacher-led activities with Busuu exercises. First, students were introduced to the application and practiced vocabulary, pronunciation, and short descriptions of morning and school routines. Second, longer utterances and partner speaking activities addressed fluency and free-time routines. Third, conversational practice, dialogues, and paired or group speaking focused on evening activities. Fourth, short presentations and discussion addressed weekend activities and more extended responses. Meetings included reviews, guided practice, teacher feedback, and encouragement to continue practicing independently. Device limitations and unstable internet access were observed, particularly at the beginning of implementation.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarized total speaking scores before and after the lessons. A paired-samples t-test compared the same

students' scores at the two testing points, using the significance threshold α = .05. The source thesis reports normality checks and a Shapiro–Wilk significance value of .091 for paired differences in its narrative; its displayed normality table, however, does not independently verify that particular result. Homogeneity tests reported in the thesis are not required for a simple paired-samples t-test and were not used to interpret the primary within-person comparison. Statistical values in the present article are reported from the thesis output, without reconstructing unavailable student-level paired data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Treatments Using Busuu Application

The instructional treatment was implemented over four meetings using the Busuu application as a supplementary medium for developing students' English-speaking skills. Each meeting focused on a different communicative topic relevant to students' everyday experiences. The first meeting introduced the application and provided vocabulary and pronunciation exercises related to daily routines before and after school. The second meeting emphasized fluency development through descriptions of students' free-time activities and school routines. During the third meeting, students practiced expressing their evening and night routines, integrating vocabulary acquisition, grammatical structures, pronunciation exercises, and oral communication. The fourth meeting concentrated on weekend activities, encouraging students to produce longer spoken descriptions and demonstrate greater confidence in expressing their ideas. Throughout the intervention, students engaged in application-based exercises, teacher-guided practice, and oral presentations, followed by corrective feedback and reflection. Students were also encouraged to practice independently using Busuu outside classroom hours. The instructional activities progressively moved from basic vocabulary and sentence production toward more extended oral expression, addressing five speaking assessment components: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension.

Treatments' Reflection

1. First meeting: Students experienced difficulties operating Busuu because of unfamiliarity with the application, limited smartphone capabilities, and unstable internet connectivity.
2. Second meeting: Students became more familiar with the application and demonstrated greater engagement, although difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, and speaking confidence remained.
3. Third meeting: Students appeared more confident and active in speaking activities, with improvements observed in sentence construction and pronunciation practice.
4. Fourth meeting: Students demonstrated greater participation, fluency, and vocabulary use, although grammatical errors and occasional hesitation persisted.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Paired-Samples Test for Total Speaking Scores

Measure	Pretest	Posttest
Participants (n)	30	30
Mean	6.43	11.67
Standard deviation	1.524	2.202
Median	6	11
Mode	5	11
Minimum–maximum	5–10	9–17

Paired difference (pretest − posttest): M = −5.233; SD = 1.357; 95% CI [−5.740, −4.727]; t(29) = −21.130; p < .001 (reported as .000).

Change in Overall Speaking Scores

Speaking performance increased between pretest and posttest. **Table 1** shows the summary statistics and paired comparison. The mean difference, expressed as pretest minus posttest, was negative because scores were higher at follow-up. The corresponding confidence interval excluded zero, supporting

a statistically significant within-group change. However, without a comparison group, practice effects, maturation, teacher feedback, and other concurrent learning cannot be separated from the contribution of Busuu.

Speaking-Component Performance

The baseline assessment concentrated heavily in the lowest two rubric categories across all dimensions. Following instruction, a larger share of learners reached the fair or good categories, although the pattern differed by dimension (**Table 2**). Improvement was especially evident in the movement out of the poor category for fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Grammar remained more challenging, with some students still assessed as poor after the lessons. These distributions indicate broad shifts in assessed performance but do not provide paired, dimension-specific hypothesis tests.

Table 2. Distribution of Speaking Ratings Before and After Busuu-Assisted Instruction (n = 30)

Component	Pretest: poor / weak	Posttest: poor / weak / fair / good
Fluency	24 / 6	0 / 25 / 2 / 3
Pronunciation	16 / 14	0 / 15 / 15 / 0
Vocabulary	25 / 5	0 / 25 / 5 / 0
Grammar	29 / 1	8 / 18 / 4 / 0
Comprehension	13 / 17	0 / 7 / 20 / 3

Paired Samples Test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the participants. The table also shows the results of the paired t-test between the pre-test and post-test scores of 30 participants (df = 29). The mean difference between the pre-test and post-test was -5.233, indicating that the post-test score was significantly higher than the pre-test (as the subtraction result is negative). The standard deviation of this difference was 1.357, and the standard error was 0.248, which means that the data was fairly consistent and did not spread too far from the mean difference.

The 95% confidence interval of the score difference was in the range of -5.740 to -4.727, which did not include zero, indicating a significant difference. The calculated t-value was -21.130 with a significance value (p-value) of .000, well below the general significance limit (0.05). This indicates that there was a highly significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. In other words, the intervention or treatment gave to participants had a significant positive impact on improving test results.

Classroom observations and interpretation

Observations across the four meetings described a change from uncertainty about the application to greater familiarity with app-supported activities. Students initially needed substantial technical help, partly because some devices were unsuitable and internet connectivity was unreliable. Subsequent lessons appeared to elicit greater participation, more willingness to describe routines, and stronger engagement in paired speaking. Nevertheless, learners continued to make pronunciation and grammar errors and some hesitated when asked to speak in front of peers. These observations provide useful implementation context but were not collected as a separately validated outcome measure.

Several pedagogical processes could plausibly explain the observed gains. Repeated encounters with everyday vocabulary may have expanded students' accessible lexical repertoire, while oral repetition and dialogue practice may have supported pronunciation and continuity of speech. Writing short descriptions before speaking may have helped students organize ideas and reduced the cognitive demands of spontaneous production. Teacher encouragement and feedback were integral to the intervention, so any educational gains are better understood as outcomes of a combined instructional approach than as effects of software alone. This interpretation is consistent with the wider MALL literature on flexible practice and the need for appropriate instructional integration (Kacetl & Klímová, 2019; Haleem et al., 2022).

The findings broadly correspond with reports of favorable student experiences using Busuu (Citrayasa, 2019) and prior investigations of the application in speaking pedagogy (Mulyadi & Maesaroh, 2021; Firdaus, 2023). This study adds evidence from an intact seventh-grade classroom in Tarakan, with ratings reported across five oral-performance domains. At the same time, the study cannot establish that Busuu would outperform conventional instruction or another application. The short intervention period, single-class sample, non-equivalent speaking prompts, missing rater-reliability estimates, and unresolved details in the normality-test output constrain interpretation and generalizability. Further research should use comparison groups, matched oral tasks, blinded scoring where feasible, and longitudinal follow-up to test sustainability and relative effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The study found a significant improvement in seventh-grade students' assessed English speaking performance after four meetings integrating the Busuu application with teacher-guided classroom activities. Gains were apparent across oral-performance dimensions, although grammar difficulties remained and inconsistent connectivity and device access limited implementation. The findings contribute localized classroom evidence that structured mobile-assisted practice may complement English speaking instruction in Indonesian junior high schools. Nevertheless, the absence of a comparison group prevents a definitive attribution of improvement to Busuu, and further controlled studies are needed before making broader claims about its comparative effectiveness.

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