

IMPROVING STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL USING A MOBILE LEARNING APPLICATION

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Abstract

Writing is claimed to be the most difficult skill for second language and foreign language learners. Thus, it needs an effective model of teaching to improve the students' writing skill. This study aims to describe the use of a mobile learning application Busuu to improve students' writing skill. This is a classroom action research (CAR) that was conducted into two cycles. Each cycle consisted two meetings and involved four steps namely planning, action, observation and reflection. The data were collected by using technique of observation, test, and interview. The subject of the research was fourteen students of Widya Kartika University. The result showed that there was an improvement in students' writing skill. It can be seen from the result of writing test in each cycle which was improved. Mean score of the students' writing in cycle 1 was 61.14 and the mean score of the students' writing was 71.42 in cycle 2. In addition, the results of the interview showed that the students had a positive attitude toward the implementation of mobile learning application Busuu in the activities of learning writing.

Keyword: writing skill, mobile learning, mobile application, Busuu

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing skill is one of the language skills that is very important for university students because of the academic purpose. The students are required to write their academic text such as essays, projects, reports, lecture notes, and theses related to their programs. In the university level, students are expected to utilize their prior knowledge on writing and be able develop their ideas to complete the writing tasks (Ruhmann, et al, 1999). This is in line with Husin & Nurbayani (2017) stating that writing is a part of the English skills that

need to be mastered by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in order to have a capability of communicating in written forms with various specific objectives.

However, there have been some studies reveal that Indonesian college students face a serious challenge in learning English writing skills. Persada (2016) investigated that university students face difficulties in writing an essay in term of grammar, content, vocabulary, organization, and the mechanism including

the spelling and punctuation. In line with Persada, Wigati (2015) showed that the college students struggle in writing English argumentative essay in the matters of spelling, language use, and style. In addition, Rasyidah and Antoni (2014) also reported that the students have difficulties in developing the ideas and paragraphs along with the diction problems.

According to Ariyanti (2016), the phenomena are caused by some relevant problems such as student habit in learning in term of the seriousness of academic writing class and reading-writing culture of Indonesian people in general. In addition, several studies also revealed that traditional teaching method are the reason for the students' poor skill in essay writing. Reid (2013) stated in his study that many teachers do not have much knowledge of learning styles and strategies. The materials and methods used and applied by the teachers are only based on their own preferred learning without considering the students' needs. Conventional methods are not helpful for students in mastering writing skill because they need cooperative learning strategies to maximize the results of their writing performance.

There are numerous strategies that can possibly adopted in the process of English learning especially in order to improve the students' writing skills. Recently, technology has an important role in enhancing and facilitating English language teaching and learning (Jassim et al, 2019). Consequently, teachers opt to use technology into English classroom. Stone (2010) added that technology has its own impact not only on the way students seek for educational information but also how it can also be incorporated into the teaching learning process. Therefore, it is possible for teachers to integrate the

technological devices into teaching learning process. One of the recent technology that is widely becoming popularized is mobile learning (M-Learning), it is mainly described as a learning method where users use mobile platforms to learn (Rezai & Pesaranghader, 2013). Jacob & Isaac (2008) added that M-Learning possibly makes a learning atmosphere more joyful and could also be an additional learning medium.

Regarding to realizing obvious difficulties in improving the writing skills, it is important for students to acquire the skill through different approach and strategy. M-Learning provides the privilege for the students to utilize their smart phones in order to acquire writing skill more efficiently (Yusuf & Hamidun, 2015). As the mobile phones have integrated into youth's life and became a main part of their life, it is believed that the use of mobile phone in learning is convenient, fast, and brings high efficiency so it could be beneficial for the students. (Taylor, 2002). One of the best English learning application is Busuu. The application is available on web, IOS, and Android that allows students to practice their language skills by providing the exercises such as speaking, pronunciation, grammar, listening, writing, dialogue, memory, and vocabulary. In fact, not all the sections are free in the application, but there are enough free sections to use. The numerous topics and words with specific language training and the offline mode that allows the learners to learn anytime, anywhere makes Busuu as a machine learning technology is believed to make mastering English language worthy, helpful, more effective and entertaining. Therefore, this study is aimed to investigate the use of Busuu to enhance

the students' writing skills of Widya Kartika University, Surabaya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Writing skill

Writing is a complex skill that requires students to not only explore their ideas or thinking into words but also apply the strategies in expressing their ideas to make their thoughts visible (Ruhama & Purwaningsih, 2018). This is in line with Brown (2000) arguing that writing involves students' skills on generating ideas, organizing them in a coherent way, using appropriate references and rhetorical convention to put a cohesive written text, revising text to avoid ambiguity, editing for the use of appropriate grammar, and finally producing the written product. Moreover, Richards and Renandya (2002) stated the writing process has four main stages namely planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Planning refers to an activity encouraging the students to write their ideas. In drafting process, students start to gather their ideas. Then, revising stage allows the students to do a review based on the feedback given. Lastly, editing is the process of preparing the final draft using the accurate spelling, punctuation, diction, grammar, and sentence structure.

One of the various writing models learnt is writing an essay. There are two aspects in writing essays that should be understood by the students. First, the students should be able to transform the idea into a writing form, this is a process to present the meaning of an idea. Second, the students should have a comprehensive understanding about the components of the writing namely content, organization, language use, vocabulary, and the mechanics (Prihatmi, 2017). This is also supported by Juardi and Utami (2017) who

claimed that to make a complete and understandable essay the students have to be able to organize and connect their sentences appropriately. That explanation concludes that the students should master in others skills to master in writing skill because writing skill requires an ability not only in arranging the ideas but also reshaping and revising them.

2.2. Busuu

Busuu is a mobile language learning application offering twelve different languages including English. The application can be downloaded on Iphone or Andorid. The application allows the learners to sign up for free or subscribe to a premium membership to have further features such as advanced grammar lessons, offline mode, and McGraw-Hill education certification. Despite the fact that not all the sections on Busuu are free, the users still can get benefit from the free sections. It contains lesson plans to help the learners to improve their English using audio, images, and text in each lesson. The application offers four sections namely, Beginner A1, Beginner A2, Intermediate B1, and Intermediate B2. Each section provides the features that help students to learn the basic vocabulary and grammar, listening exercises through audio dialogue, language games, pronunciation practice, and interactive lesson. The learners are also able to do the test in the form of fun and quick quizzes and get the instant feedback to see how much they have learnt. In addition, the premium feature offers direct feedback on written and spoken lessons from Busuu worldwide community that connects with learners and English native speakers.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research applies the principles of classroom action research (CAR). The objective of CAR is to find and solve the problems found during teaching and learning process. Kemmis and McTaggart (2014) stated that action research occurs through a dynamic and complementary process consisting of four essential moments namely planning, action, observation, and reflection. This study focuses on efforts to improve the students' writing skills by using two cycles that each cycle consists of four stages; planning, implementation, observation, and reflection with the following details:

1. Planning

As the teachers, the researcher prepared the lesson plan including the teaching media (Busuu mobile application) that was collaborated with learners-centered method to be implemented in the teaching learning process. The students' tests were also planned along with evaluation sheet.

2. Acting

In this stage, the planning was implemented. The teaching was done in four meetings divided into two cycles. The process of teaching writing skill involved the use of Busuu and learners-centered activities

3. Observing

The observation systematically conducted by the researcher to see the process occurring during the class including impact and the problem of using the method. The peer and teacher assessments were also applied to see the results of writing tasks and measure how the students were able to do self-evaluation. Therefore, the results of the observation defined the next process which was evaluation.

4. Reflecting

This level evaluated the process of teaching learning with the implementation of Busuu and learners-centered method. The interview was also conducted to see the students' perspective toward the method. The reflection helped the teachers to make an improvement for the learning teaching process in the next cycle.

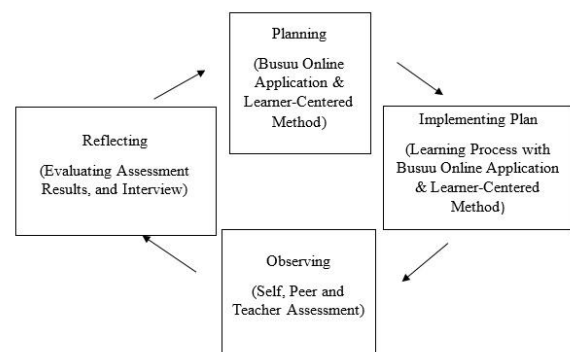


Figure.1 Cycle of Classroom Action Research

The research was held at Widya Kartika University, Surabaya. The participants of the research the fourteen students of Widya Kartika who are intermediate level EFL students. In collecting data procedure, the instruments used in this research were observation, writing test, and interview. The observation was conducted to deepen the information and descriptions about the actions in the classroom. In addition, the students were required to complete the self-evaluation sheet to see the activity of self-learning while they were using Busuu on their mobile phone. The timed writing task was used to measure the students' progress in writing. The students were required to write an essay based on the relevant topics that had been learnt on Busuu. The students' writing were evaluated using the analytical scoring

system by Jacob et al' (1981) which elaborated the students' composition into five components namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Lastly, the interview was conducted to get the information about the students' perspective toward the use of Busuu mobile application in learning English writing skills.

4. RESULT & DISCUSSION

4.1. The Improvement of Students' Writing

The researchers conducted the writing tests after implementing Busuu mobile learning application in teaching writing. The students were suggested to make an essay based on the topic given which was related to the materials on Busuu. The aspects of students' writing measured were organization, content, language use, vocabulary, and mechanics. The researchers also get the students involved in assessing their friends' writing by doing peer assessment. In the first cycle, the highest score was 81 and the lowest one was 52. The students got improvement in cycle two with the highest score was 91 and the lowest one was 62.

Table 1: The Improvement of Students' Writing

Mean Scores	Cycle One Test	Cycle Two Test	Gain	Percentage of Improvement
	61.14	71.42	10.28	16.81 %

The table above shows the result of students' writing test in cycle one and two, the result was increased in cycle two. The mean score was 61.14 in cycle one and it increased to 71.42 in cycle two, it increased 16.81%. It indicated that teaching writing using Busuu mobile

application improved the students writing skill. The students' interest in learning writing using Busuu learning application can be seen in the first cycle. In this session, the teacher asked the students to use their smart phones to do the self-learning by listening to the dialogue and practicing some grammar and vocabulary on Busuu with topic titled "How Was Your Trip" in Intermediate B1 level. Next, the teacher asked the students complete the self-evaluation sheet to see the results the students' self-learning. The grammar point taught in this session was Simple Past Tense. Then the teacher explained about the structures of essay including how to write the thesis statement followed by the supporting sentences. The teacher also provided an example of good essay to make it easier for the students to understand what the essay should present.

The students showed their enthusiasm in the self-learning process because they rarely explored their smart phone to support teaching learning activities in the classroom by using language learning application. In the beginning, it was quite hard for the students to use the application because they were not familiar with the layout. However, they showed their curiosity by asking the questions to the teachers. They also completed the evaluation sheet honestly and seriously while they were doing their self-learning practicing vocabulary, grammar exercise, and listening to the dialogue from Busuu. Based on the evaluation self-completed by the students, it showed that the students did not face significant difficulties, they were able to answer most of the questions correctly in vocabulary, listening, reading, and grammar exercise on from Busuu. Since self-learning allowed students to take control over their own learning, they became more interested in learning.

Beside the enthusiasm in practicing self-learning, the students found difficulties in writing an essay. Lack of vocabulary and inappropriate grammar use were the main problems faced by them. This indicated that it was very complicated and difficult for the students to write sentences with correct structure of English and chose correct word for certain sentence context. Some students also encountered difficulties in paragraph organization, the length of the paragraph was inappropriate since they wrote too many sentences and they only had one or two sentences for a paragraph which did not meet the required number of sentences in a paragraph.

During the implementation of Busuu in teaching and learning process, the students did not only do self-learning by completing the exercises with relevant topic provided on Busuu but also do the peer assessment by evaluating their friends' essay writing. Since all students were not familiar with the activity of peer assessment, the teachers gave brief explanation related to scoring system for each component in writing based on the rubrics. The students participated actively in assessing their friends' writing using the writing rubrics given. By doing the peer assessment, the students were encouraged to critically reflect each other's work. Therefore, they were motivated to have better understanding each aspect in composition. In conclusion of cycle 1, the results showed that the mean score of students' writing was 61.14 which was categorized as fair. There were eight students or more than 50% of the total numbers of the students who got low scores, four students who had the medium scores and two students who got good scores in writing an essay. In conclusion, the students still needed the improvement

in their writing, thus the cycle 2 needs to be conducted.

The treatment in the second cycle was similar to the first cycle. The teaching and learning process implemented mobile learning application Busuu but the topic was different from the one in the previous cycle titled "The World Biggest Sport Events". The students also learnt independently about the use Comparative & Superlative Degree. After that, the students were asked to complete the self-evaluation sheet while they were doing their self-learning practicing vocabulary and grammar exercises and listening to the dialogue. The students were also asked to write an essay based on the relevant topic from Busuu. After doing the writing task, the students did peer assessment in order to give and get the feedback from their friends. The feedback was expected to help the students to develop the writing quality and stimulate learner autonomy.

The improvement in students' participation can be seen from their enthusiastic in answering the question, doing the self-learning, writing an essay and assessing their friends' essays. The students actively participated in teaching learning process due to the mobile learning application used in the classroom. Based on the result of the students' writing, the mean score of the students' writing was increased to 71.42. There were six students who had high score, and there were eight students who had medium score. This indicated that the improvement of the students' writing skill was found in the second cycle.

4.2. Students' perception using Mobile Learning Application Busuu to improve English Writing Skill

In term of determining the students' perception towards the use of mobile

learning application Busuu to improve their writing skill, the researcher did the interview with the participants. Based on the data obtained of question one, most of them responded they had never been exposed to mobile learning application in English class before. It was the first time for them to apply mobile application Busuu in teaching and learning process. On the statement two asking how the students experienced Busuu in class, the students responded positively about their experience in implementing Busuu in their learning. They did not face major difficulties in doing self-learning on Busuu, they stated that the application is considered to be a friendly-used mobile learning application. Since Busuu provides the direct feedback, it allows the students to do the self-learning. Consequently, they got the benefits of doing the self-study such as feeling more encouraged to further explore the topics and more motivated to learn.

The obtained data of the statement three questioning the students if the application supports them to understand the materials showed that the majority of the students agree to Busuu as a tool facilitating them in enriching their vocabulary and using the appropriate grammar. Consequently, on the statement four most of the students responded that the application helped them to write an essays in terms of vocabulary and language use. On the last statement the data obtained showed that all students responded positively to use Busuu as mobile learning application in learning and teaching process in other English classes. Beside the positive attitude toward the use of Busuu in English class, all students agreed that the application could be better if it provides more materials and exercises to be accessed for free.

5. CONCLUSION

The researchers conducted the teaching and learning activity using Busuu as the mobile language learning application to help the students enhance their writing skills since they faced difficulties in writing an essay. Busuu offers an opportunity to the users to do the self-learning, so they can learn anytime and anywhere. The study also introduced the student to do the peer assessment, it is expected that the peer assessment are beneficial for the students to learn more from their friends' work. Based on the results of the study, the researchers can conclude that students could use Busuu for their learning activities in writing very well. Their writing skill was improved when Busuu was applied in writing learning process that can be seen from the mean score of students writing in cycle one was only 61.14 and the mean score increased to 71.42 in cycle two. The use of Busuu made the atmosphere in learning writing to be more relax because they have space to learn independently. In addition, the interview conducted with the students revealed that they enjoy learning using Busuu, the application was the new and fresh way to not easily get bored in class. As a result, the students gave the positive feedback toward the use of Busuu in class.

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