

Let's Read Application Improves Junior High School Students' Reading Skills

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Background (General): Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in language learning, essential for academic success and lifelong learning. **Background (Specific):** In the Indonesian junior high school context, students often struggle with reading comprehension due to limited access to engaging and interactive learning tools. **Knowledge Gap:** Despite the increasing availability of digital media, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of mobile reading applications like *Let's Read* in improving students' reading comprehension remains limited. **Aims:** This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the *Let's Read* application as a digital learning tool to enhance reading comprehension among eighth-grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah Pagar Alam. **Results:** Using a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test assessments, findings revealed that students in the experimental group—who used *Let's Read*—demonstrated significantly higher gains in identifying main ideas, understanding contextual vocabulary, and making inferences compared to those taught with conventional methods. **Novelty:** The study provides new evidence on how interactive digital applications can enhance specific reading sub-skills in a formal educational setting. **Implications:** These results underscore the potential of integrating digital reading platforms into English language instruction to foster more effective and engaging learning experiences for junior high school students.

Highlights :

- Demonstrates the effectiveness of *Let's Read* in enhancing reading sub-skills.
- Fills the gap in research on digital reading tools in Indonesian schools.
- Recommends integrating digital media to improve English learning outcomes.

Keywords: Let's Read, Reading Comprehension, Digital Media, Junior High School, English Learning

Introduction

Reading is a foundational skill that plays a crucial role in students' educational development, alongside listening, speaking, and writing. Among these, reading serves as a primary gateway to knowledge acquisition across disciplines [1]. It is more than the recognition of printed words—it is a complex cognitive process involving decoding symbols, constructing meaning, and connecting new information with prior knowledge [2]. Thus, reading comprehension is vital for enabling students to effectively extract, process, and apply information.

Proficient readers not only decode words but also use background knowledge and strategies to understand meaning. Zipke [3] emphasizes that comprehension requires active engagement and metacognitive skills. Furthermore, the OECD [4] stresses that fluent reading supports higher-order thinking, making reading comprehension not just an academic necessity, but also a critical life skill.

In Indonesia, improving students' reading comprehension remains an urgent challenge. The PISA 2018 results ranked Indonesia 74th out of 79 countries in reading literacy, scoring 371 compared to the OECD average of 487 [5]. This alarming gap highlights the need for innovative and engaging reading instruction, especially in junior high schools, where students experience significant cognitive and emotional development.

At SMP Muhammadiyah Pagar Alam, field observations and teacher interviews revealed persistent difficulties in vocabulary, sentence structure, pronunciation, and motivation. These challenges are exacerbated by limited parental support and the appeal of digital entertainment, which often outweighs educational engagement [6]. Although students are active users of mobile technology, its potential for supporting reading instruction remains largely untapped.

In response, there is growing interest in leveraging students' digital habits through educational technology. One such tool is the Let's Read application, a multilingual digital reading platform designed to foster literacy through age-appropriate stories, illustrations, and audio narration. According to Putri & Savitri [7], this platform enhances both language acquisition and reading comprehension, particularly for EFL learners.

While studies at the senior high school level [8] [9] report positive outcomes in terms of motivation and comprehension, limited research exists at the junior high school level, particularly in rural or semi-urban settings like Pagar Alam. Moreover, few studies have employed a controlled experimental design to examine measurable improvements in reading comprehension.

1. Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on digital tools in language learning, empirical studies focusing specifically on the use of the Let's Read application to enhance reading comprehension among junior high school students in Indonesia are still scarce [10]. No existing research has examined its application at SMP Muhammadiyah Pagar Alam using a controlled experimental approach. This gap provides an opportunity to explore the impact of mobile-based reading interventions in EFL contexts.

2. Purpose of the Study

Given this context, the present study aims to determine whether the implementation of the Let's Read application as a digital reading medium significantly improves reading comprehension among eighth-grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah Pagar Alam. It also seeks to offer practical insights into integrating digital tools into English language instruction, particularly in under-resourced schools [11].

Method

A. Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent control group pre-test and post-test model. This design was chosen due to the inability to randomly assign students to groups, as classroom structures were already established. The study involved two groups: the experimental group, which received instruction using the Let's Read application, and the control group, which was taught through conventional reading methods [12].

B. Population and Sample

The population consisted of all eighth-grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah Pagar Alam in the academic year 2024/2025. A purposive sampling technique was used based on teacher recommendations and class availability [13] [14]. Two classes were selected, with one assigned as the experimental group and the other as the control group, totaling 60 students (30 students per group).

C. Research Variables

- a) Independent Variable: Use of the Let's Read application.
- b) Dependent Variable: Students' reading comprehension ability.

D. Instrument of the Study

Data were collected using a reading comprehension test composed of multiple-choice questions based on narrative texts, specifically fables. The test assessed students' understanding of main ideas, vocabulary in context, inferences, and detail recognition. The same test was administered as both a pre-test and a post-test to evaluate students' progress [15].

The test was validated by experts in English education and its reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of ≥ 0.70 , which indicates acceptable internal consistency.

E. Data Collection Procedure

The procedure followed three main steps: [16]

1. Pre-test: Both groups were given the same reading comprehension test to assess baseline abilities.
2. Treatment: [17]
 - a. The experimental group used the Let's Read application for four weeks, engaging with selected narrative texts both in class and at home under teacher guidance.
 - b. The control group received instruction using traditional printed texts and teacher-led discussions.
3. Post-test: Both groups completed the same reading comprehension test to measure learning outcomes after the intervention.

F. Data Analysis Technique

Data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included mean scores, standard deviations, and gain scores [18] [19]. An independent samples t-test was used to determine whether the difference in performance between the two groups was statistically significant. The significance threshold was set at $p < 0.05$. All analyses were conducted using SPSS software [20].

G. Summary of Research Results

Group	N	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Gain Score
Experimental	30	59.87	82.43	22.56

Control	30	60.23	69.40	9.17
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Table 1. Mean Scores of Pre-Test and Post-Test

Note: Gain Score = Post-Test Mean - Pre-Test Mean

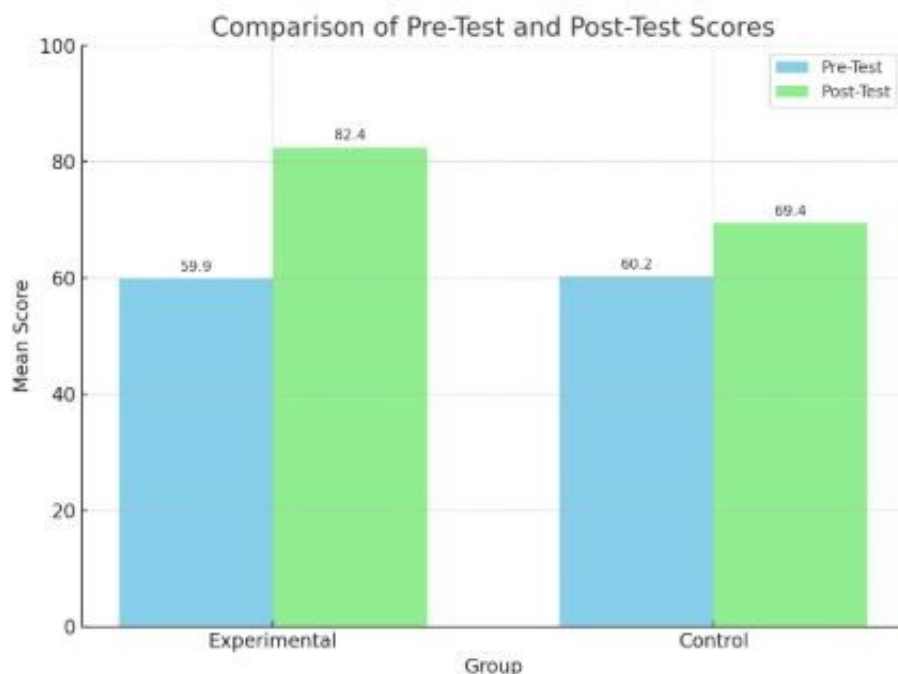


Figure 1. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Interpretation :

As illustrated in the table and figure above, the experimental group exhibited a substantial improvement in reading comprehension, with a gain score of 22.56, compared to only 9.17 in the control group [21]. This indicates that the use of the Let's Read application significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension performance compared to conventional methods [22].

Result and Discussion

A. Research Findings

This study aimed to investigate whether the Let's Read application could significantly improve the reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah Pagar Alam. To measure the effectiveness of the application, the researcher administered pre-test and post-test assessments to both experimental and control groups [23].

1. Students' Reading Comprehension Scores

The results of the reading comprehension tests are summarized in the following table : [24]

Group	N	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Gain Score
Experimental	30	59.87	82.43	22.56
Control	30	60.23	69.40	9.17

Table 2. *Reading comprehension test results*

The experimental group—which was taught using the Let’s Read application—achieved a mean gain score of 22.56, which is significantly higher than the control group’s gain of 9.17. This indicates that students in the experimental group showed more substantial improvement in reading comprehension compared to those taught with conventional methods.

2. Statistical Analysis

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the difference in post-test scores between the two groups was statistically significant.

t-value = 4.982

p-value = 0.000 (< 0.05)

Since the p-value is less than the significance level (0.05), it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in reading comprehension between students taught using the Let’s Read application and those who were not.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Let’s Read application is an effective tool for enhancing students’ reading comprehension. The significant improvement observed in the experimental group aligns with previous studies [25] [26] that highlighted the role of digital reading platforms in increasing student motivation, engagement, and understanding.

Several factors contributed to the success of the Let’s Read application:

- a) Visual and auditory features in the app made texts more engaging and comprehensible, particularly for visual learners.
- b) Access flexibility, allowing students to read at their own pace both at school and home.
- c) Content variety, offering culturally relevant stories that connected with students’ interests and backgrounds.

Moreover, the use of this application responds well to the learning characteristics of Generation Z, who are digital natives and more receptive to technology-based educational tools [27]. The interactive nature of the application also fostered greater reading motivation and reduced students’ anxiety when facing complex texts.

On the contrary, the control group showed only a modest increase, which suggests that conventional reading instruction may no longer be sufficient to meet the needs of today’s learners—especially in developing countries with low literacy levels like Indonesia [28] [29]

This research supports the integration of digital literacy tools in the classroom, particularly in alignment with Indonesia’s Merdeka Belajar program that encourages innovation and technological integration in learning [30]

C. Implication of the Study

The findings of this study have both pedagogical and practical implications:

a) For teachers: The Let's Read application can be used as an alternative media to make reading instruction more enjoyable and effective.

b) For curriculum developers: Integrating digital reading platforms into formal curricula may address the literacy gap more efficiently.

c) For students: Engaging with digital texts can help develop independent reading habits and improve comprehension skills critical for academic success.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and data analysis, it can be concluded that the Let's Read application significantly enhances students' reading comprehension. The experimental group demonstrated greater improvement compared to the control group, indicating that the application's interactive features, visual design, and accessibility contributed positively to students' engagement and understanding of the texts.

This study reinforces the potential of digital reading platforms in English language instruction, particularly for Generation Z learners who are naturally inclined toward technology-based tools. Besides improving comprehension, Let's Read also promoted students' motivation and independent learning.

Therefore, the use of Let's Read is recommended as an effective and practical digital medium in junior high school settings, especially to address persistent reading comprehension challenges in Indonesian education.

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