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Fostering Motivation and Learner Autonomy Through Busuu: Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences

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Abstract

Digital technology enables learners to engage with English beyond the classroom, and applications such as Busuu offer interactive features that may support motivation and autonomy. This qualitative study explored the role of Busuu in fostering motivation and learner autonomy among seven pre-service English teachers, focusing on their perceptions and experiences. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews and analyzed thematically. Participants generally had positive experiences. Six of the seven reported increased motivation because of daily reminders, learning goals, and progress tracking, and most reported that Busuu supported their autonomy by allowing them to manage their pace, select materials, set goals, and monitor progress. All seven reported improved speaking experiences, particularly in pronunciation practice and speech recognition, which increased their confidence. Challenges included unstable internet connections, restricted advanced materials in the free version, and limited feedback for some skills. Busuu can serve as a supplementary tool for promoting motivation, autonomy, and independent English learning, but it should complement rather than replace classroom interaction.

Keywords: Busuu; Learner Autonomy; Learning Motivation; Independent Learning; Pre-Service English Teachers

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the way English can be learned and practiced. Learning is no longer limited to activities conducted within the classroom, as learners can now access various digital resources through mobile devices and online platforms. These developments provide greater flexibility for learners to engage with English according to their individual needs, interests, and learning circumstances. In particular, language-learning applications have created opportunities for learners to practice English beyond formal classroom instruction and to become more actively involved in their own learning process. Consequently, the integration of digital technology into English learning has increasingly emphasized not only access to learning materials but also learners' active participation and responsibility in managing their learning.

Among the factors that influence successful English learning, motivation plays an important role in determining learners' willingness to participate and sustain their efforts (Shurovi, Yahaya, Hajimia, & Hasan, 2025; Wei, 2022). Motivated learners are more likely to engage actively in learning activities and to continue practicing even when they encounter difficulties (Wei, 2022). This becomes particularly important in digital learning environments, where learners enjoy greater flexibility but also face distinctive challenges (Chompurach, Kotmungkun, & Piriyapithakporn, 2025). First, limited interaction with teachers and peers can reduce opportunities for feedback and practice, both of which support self-regulated language learning (Chompurach et al., 2025; Hunutlu, 2023). Second, learners are easily distracted, particularly when studying in home environments that are not designed for focused learning (Chompurach et al., 2025). Third, the absence of direct supervision demands a higher level of self-discipline, and learners with weak self-regulation may become passive or lose their academic discipline (Chompurach et al., 2025; Hunutlu, 2023). Because these challenges can weaken learners' engagement over time, strong motivation becomes essential for helping them stay committed, manage their own learning, and persist until their goals are reached (Hunutlu, 2023; Shurovi et al., 2025) (Hasni,

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2023) emphasize that motivation is an important factor in English language learning because it is closely related to students' willingness and engagement in learning activities. Therefore, maintaining learners' motivation is essential when English learning increasingly involves independent and technology-mediated activities.

Alongside motivation, learner autonomy is increasingly relevant in technology-mediated language learning (Lai, Saab, & Admiraal, 2022). Learner autonomy refers to learners' capacity to take an active role in managing their learning, including making decisions about when, where, and how they engage with learning activities. In practice, autonomous learners show observable behaviors: they set their own learning goals, manage their study time, seek help from peers or online communities when they face difficulties, and evaluate their own progress (Hunutlu, 2023). They also decide which materials suit their needs, for example by choosing English podcasts, videos, or reading applications that match their proficiency level and interests. Digital resources can provide conditions that allow learners to exercise greater control over their learning because they can access materials and practice opportunities without being fully dependent on classroom instruction. For instance, learners use mobile phones, tablets, and computers to practice English independently outside the classroom (Kimsesiz, 2023). However, such freedom does not automatically lead to effective learning, since learners still need well-organized self-directed learning practices on digital platforms (Kimsesiz, 2023). (Prawiyata, 2025) demonstrate that digital learning resources can provide learners with opportunities to engage with English beyond conventional classroom activities, supporting greater independence in the learning process. Thus, technology can create opportunities for autonomous learning, although learners still need motivation and personal responsibility to make effective use of these opportunities.

One of the digital platforms that provides opportunities for independent English learning is Busuu, a language-learning application that offers structured lessons and activities that learners can access through digital devices. The application provides learners with opportunities to practice English at their own pace and access learning activities outside the classroom. Its use is therefore relevant to the development of autonomous learning, particularly when learners are expected to manage their own learning time and participation. (Wulandari, 2024) found that students had positive perceptions of Busuu as an autonomous English learning medium, particularly because the application provided opportunities for flexible and independent learning. These characteristics make Busuu a relevant digital resource for examining how learners experience technology-supported English learning beyond formal classroom instruction.

Beyond supporting independent learning, the use of language-learning applications may also influence learners' motivation to engage with English. Digital applications can provide structured activities and immediate opportunities for practice, which may make learning more accessible and engaging for students. Busuu has been examined as an online learning platform in relation to students' motivation in learning English vocabulary. (Susanto, 2022) found that the use of Busuu was associated with students' vocabulary-learning motivation and vocabulary achievement. This suggests that Busuu may offer more than simple access to language materials, as its learning activities can also encourage learners to remain engaged in the learning process. However, learners' experiences with an application may differ depending on how they perceive and use the available features in their individual learning contexts.

Previous research has provided evidence that learners generally perceive Busuu positively as a language-learning application. (AlDakhil, 2022) for instance, examined learners' perceptions of Busuu and found that the application was perceived as useful and easy to use, with positive attitudes toward its potential to support autonomous language learning. However, much of the existing research has focused on general learner perceptions, technology acceptance, or particular language-learning outcomes. Less attention has been given to how pre-service English teachers themselves experience Busuu as they use it for independent English learning, particularly in relation to the development of motivation and learner autonomy. Pre-service teachers represent an important group to examine because their experiences as language learners may influence how they understand and potentially use digital learning resources in their future teaching practices. Therefore, exploring their perceptions and experiences can provide a more detailed understanding of how Busuu may contribute to motivation and learner autonomy in English learning.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to explore the role of the Busuu application in fostering motivation and learner autonomy in English learning among pre-service English teachers. Rather than measuring the effectiveness of Busuu through test scores, this study focuses on learners' perceptions and experiences while

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using the application. A qualitative approach is employed to explore how participants perceive Busuu, how they experience its use in their English learning activities, and how the application may support their motivation and ability to engage in independent learning. By examining these experiences, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the potential role of Busuu in supporting autonomous and motivated English learning among future English teachers.

Literature Review

Learner Autonomy and Learning Motivation

Learner autonomy is an important concept in language learning because it emphasizes learners' active involvement in managing their own learning process. Autonomous learners are expected to make decisions about their learning activities, organize their learning time, monitor their progress, and take responsibility for their development. In technology-mediated learning environments, these responsibilities can become more visible because learners often have greater control over when, where, and how they practice the target language. However, having access to digital learning resources does not automatically result in autonomous learning. Learners also need sufficient motivation to initiate learning activities, maintain their engagement, and continue learning when difficulties arise.

The relationship between motivation and autonomous learning becomes particularly important in self-directed language learning. When learners have greater control over their learning process, their continued participation depends partly on their ability to maintain interest and commitment. (Chamani, 2023), through a longitudinal study of self-directed mobile-assisted language learning, showed that learners' motivational and emotional states can change throughout the learning process. Their findings highlight that independent language learning is not a static process but involves continuous engagement and changes in learners' motivational experiences. Therefore, learner autonomy and motivation can be understood as closely connected dimensions of independent language learning, particularly when learners use digital tools without continuous supervision from teachers.

Technology-Based Language Learning

Technology-based language learning refers to the use of digital tools and platforms to facilitate learners' engagement with language materials and activities. The integration of technology can provide learners with more varied forms of interaction and practice than those available through conventional classroom activities. Digital platforms may include language-learning applications, interactive websites, multimedia resources, and other tools that allow learners to practice language skills through flexible and accessible activities. The interactive nature of these technologies can also influence how learners participate in the learning process, particularly when digital activities provide immediate responses, structured tasks, or opportunities for repeated practice.

The use of interactive digital media has been associated with greater learner involvement in English learning. (Prawiyata Y. D., 2025) found that the use of Wordwall as an interactive medium could make English vocabulary learning more engaging and attractive while encouraging students' involvement in the learning process. This suggests that the value of digital technology in language learning is not limited to providing access to materials but also lies in its ability to create engaging learning experiences. Such characteristics are relevant when examining language-learning applications such as Busuu, which similarly provide structured and interactive activities that learners can access through digital devices.

The Busuu Application in English Learning

Busuu is a digital language-learning application that provides structured activities for learners who want to develop their language skills through independent practice. The application combines different types of learning activities within a digital environment, allowing users to engage with language materials according to their own learning pace and availability. For English learners, such an environment can provide opportunities to practice vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, and speaking through activities that can be accessed outside the classroom.

The use of Busuu is particularly relevant to the present study because its learning environment places learners in a position where they can decide when and how frequently to practice English. This flexibility may allow learners to incorporate English practice into their daily routines and develop greater responsibility for their

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learning. At the same time, the effectiveness of such independent practice may depend on learners' willingness to use the application consistently and their perceptions of the learning activities provided. Therefore, examining users' experiences is important for understanding not only what Busuu offers as a digital learning platform but also how learners perceive and incorporate the application into their English learning practices.

In the context of pre-service English teachers, the use of Busuu provides an interesting setting for exploring the relationship between technology, motivation, and learner autonomy. As future English teachers, pre-service teachers are expected to develop their own English proficiency while also becoming familiar with different approaches and resources for language learning. Their experiences with a language-learning application can therefore provide insights into how digital tools may support independent learning and sustained engagement with English. For this reason, the present study focuses on users' perceptions and experiences rather than treating Busuu simply as a technological tool or measuring its effectiveness through standardized achievement scores.

Literature Synthesis

The literature reviewed above indicates that technology-based language learning can provide learners with greater opportunities to engage with English independently and flexibly. Learner autonomy and motivation are particularly relevant in this context because digital learning environments require learners to take an active role in organizing and sustaining their learning activities. Language-learning applications can provide the resources and structure needed for independent practice, but learners' experiences and willingness to engage with these resources remain important factors in determining how the applications are incorporated into their learning routines.

Within this context, Busuu provides a relevant environment for examining how digital language learning is experienced by learners. Its structured activities and flexible access may support learners in practicing English beyond classroom instruction while allowing them to manage aspects of their own learning. However, the role of an application cannot be understood solely from its available features. Learners' perceptions, experiences, motivation, and learning practices also need to be considered. Therefore, the present study approaches Busuu from the perspective of its users, focusing on how pre-service English teachers experience the application and perceive its contribution to their motivation and learner autonomy in English learning.

Research Questions

This study addresses three research questions: (1) how pre-service English teachers perceive the use of the Busuu application in supporting their motivation to learn English; (2) how they experience the use of Busuu in developing their learner autonomy; and (3) what experiences they have when incorporating Busuu into their independent English learning practices.

Research Objectives

Based on these research questions, this study aims to explore pre-service English teachers' perceptions of Busuu in supporting their motivation, to examine their experiences of using Busuu in developing learner autonomy, and to describe how they incorporate Busuu into their independent English learning practices.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore pre-service English teachers' perceptions and experiences of using Busuu in relation to their motivation, learner autonomy, and independent learning practices. This approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences and reflections rather than measure effectiveness through numerical scores. The participants were seven pre-service English teachers who had experience using Busuu and who, as both English learners and prospective teachers, could reflect on digital technology as a learning resource. Data were collected through questionnaires, which obtained information about participants' experiences and perceptions, and interviews, which provided more detailed information about their motivation, learner autonomy, and the ways they incorporated Busuu into independent learning. The data were analyzed thematically by examining responses to identify recurring patterns related to motivation, learner autonomy, perceptions of Busuu, and independent learning experiences, and the resulting themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Participants' Perceptions of the Busuu Application

The findings showed that the seven participants generally had positive perceptions of the Busuu application as a digital resource for learning English. All participants described Busuu as easy to use and having a user-friendly interface. Five of the seven participants specifically reported that they could access the learning materials easily and monitor their learning progress through the application. These responses indicate that the accessibility and organization of the application were important aspects of the participants' experiences. Rather than depending entirely on classroom activities, the participants were able to access English learning materials and monitor their own progress through the application.

The participants also identified several features that they considered useful in their learning. Speaking practice and speech recognition were among the most favored features because they provided opportunities to practice pronunciation independently. One participant explained, "I like the speaking section because I can check my pronunciation. It feels like real communication" (Participant 3). This response suggests that the speaking feature was perceived not only as a practice activity but also as an opportunity to experience English communication in a more direct way. Feedback from native speakers was also viewed positively because it provided correction and encouraged participants to continue learning. In addition, progress tracking and goal-setting features helped participants monitor their learning activities and maintain consistency.

These findings indicate that the participants generally perceived Busuu as a useful and accessible application for supporting their English learning. The combination of speaking practice, speech recognition, feedback, progress tracking, and goal-setting features provided participants with opportunities to practice and monitor their learning independently. The participants' responses therefore suggest that Busuu was perceived positively, particularly because its features allowed them to engage with English learning in a flexible and more independent way.

Busuu and Learners' Motivation

The findings showed that Busuu generally supported the participants' motivation to learn English. Six of the seven participants stated that using the application increased their motivation to continue learning English. The participants described several features that contributed to this experience, particularly daily reminders, learning goals, and progress reports. These features encouraged them to maintain their learning activities and provided a sense of progress while using the application.

One participant explained, "The app reminds me to learn every day. It helps me stay on track even when I'm busy" (Participant 5). This response indicates that the reminder feature helped the participant maintain regular engagement with English learning despite having other activities. The application therefore became a means of encouraging participants to return to their learning activities and maintain their learning routines.

The participants' responses also showed that motivation was connected to their ability to see their progress. The progress-tracking feature allowed them to monitor their learning activities and provided an indication of their development. For some participants, being able to see their progress encouraged them to continue using the application. The combination of reminders, learning goals, and progress tracking helped make English learning a more regular activity.

However, the findings also revealed that the effect of Busuu on motivation was not entirely positive for all participants. One participant reported experiencing decreased motivation because of the limitations of the free version of the application. This suggests that access to learning features can influence participants' willingness to continue using the application. Although most participants experienced Busuu as motivating, limitations in access to certain features could reduce their motivation and affect their continued engagement with the application.

Busuu and Learner Autonomy

The findings indicate that Busuu supported the participants in developing greater independence in their English learning. Most participants reported that they could learn through the application without direct

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supervision from lecturers. The participants described the flexibility of Busuu as one of the factors that allowed them to take greater control over their learning activities.

The participants particularly valued the opportunity to determine their own learning pace. They could decide when to practice and continue learning outside regular classroom activities. One participant stated, "Now I can learn at my own pace. I don't have to wait for class to practice speaking" (Participant 2). This response reflects the participant's ability to initiate English practice independently rather than relying solely on scheduled classroom sessions.

The participants also reported that features such as learning goals, material selection, and progress tracking supported their independent learning activities. These features allowed them to organize aspects of their learning according to their own availability and needs. As a result, Busuu was not only used as a source of English learning materials but also as a tool through which participants could manage their own learning activities.

Overall, the participants' experiences suggest that the flexibility and self-directed features of Busuu encouraged them to take greater responsibility for their English learning. The ability to choose when to practice, access materials independently, and monitor learning progress gave participants greater control over their learning process. However, the degree to which Busuu supported autonomy varied according to how consistently participants used the application and engaged with its available features.

Independent English Learning Experiences

The participants' responses also revealed that Busuu became part of their independent English learning activities. Six of the seven participants reported that the application helped them develop more regular learning habits. The participants described using Busuu as an additional opportunity to practice English outside classroom activities, particularly when they had free time or were unable to practice directly with lecturers or classmates.

The participants' experiences indicated that regular access to the application made it easier for them to maintain their English practice. Daily reminders, learning goals, and progress tracking encouraged participants to return to the application and continue their learning activities. Although the frequency of use differed among participants, the application provided a learning environment that could be incorporated into their individual routines.

Speaking practice was another important part of the participants' experiences. All seven participants acknowledged improvements in their speaking skills after using Busuu. In particular, they reported benefits from pronunciation practice and speech-recognition activities. One participant stated, "I feel more confident now when I speak in class because I already practiced using Busuu" (Participant 4). This response suggests that repeated practice through the application helped the participant feel more prepared and confident when speaking English in classroom situations.

The participants also perceived speaking practice through Busuu as an opportunity to practice without depending on other people. They could repeat pronunciation activities and check their performance independently. This was particularly useful for participants who wanted additional practice before speaking English in class. The experience therefore extended their opportunities to use English beyond formal classroom activities.

Despite these positive experiences, the participants also encountered several challenges when incorporating Busuu into their independent learning. Internet connection problems were mentioned as one limitation, while restricted access to some advanced materials in the free version also affected the learning experience. Participants suggested improvements such as providing more free speaking practice, introducing an offline mode, and offering more detailed progress reports. These suggestions indicate that although Busuu supported independent learning, participants still expected greater accessibility and flexibility from the application.

Challenges and Suggestions

Although the participants generally reported positive experiences with Busuu, they also identified several limitations during its use for English learning. The most frequently mentioned challenges were limited access to some advanced materials in the free version and the need for a stable internet connection. These limitations

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affected the participants' ability to access certain learning activities and, in some cases, influenced their motivation to continue using the application.

One participant specifically reported a decrease in motivation because of the limitations of the free version. This indicates that participants' experiences were not determined only by the learning activities provided by Busuu but also by the accessibility of its available features. When some features or materials were restricted, participants had fewer opportunities to explore additional learning activities.

Internet connectivity was another challenge reported by the participants. Because Busuu is accessed through a digital device and requires an internet connection for its learning activities, unstable connectivity could interrupt the learning process. This was particularly relevant for participants who used the application as part of their independent learning routines, as interruptions could make it difficult to maintain consistent practice.

The participants also identified limitations in the availability of feedback for some language skills, particularly writing and listening. While speaking practice and pronunciation activities were viewed positively, participants felt that other areas could receive more detailed support. Based on these experiences, the participants suggested several improvements, including providing more free speaking sessions, adding an offline mode, and offering more detailed progress reports.

Overall, these findings show that the participants viewed Busuu positively while also recognizing areas that could be improved. The application provided useful opportunities for independent English practice, but access limitations, internet dependence, and differences in the amount of feedback available across skills affected the overall learning experience. These findings provide an important basis for discussing both the potential and limitations of Busuu in supporting motivated and autonomous English learning.

Discussion

Busuu, Motivation, and Learner Engagement

The findings indicate that Busuu can support learners' motivation by providing an accessible and structured environment for English practice. Most participants reported increased motivation, particularly because of features such as daily reminders, learning goals, and progress tracking. These features appeared to encourage participants to return to the application regularly and maintain their engagement with English learning. The findings suggest that motivation in digital learning is not only related to the learning materials themselves but also to how the application organizes and supports learners' participation.

The participants' positive perceptions of Busuu are consistent with (Amelia, 2024), who found that EFL learners generally responded positively to the use of Busuu and perceived the application as a useful medium for language learning (AlDakhil & AlFadda, 2022). It is important to distinguish three related but separate constructs. Perception refers to how learners evaluate an application, for example whether they find it easy to use and useful. Motivation refers to learners' underlying desire and willingness to commit effort to learning (Wei, 2022). Engagement refers to what learners actually do, namely their active involvement in learning activities (Hiver, Al-Hoorie, Vitta, & Wu, 2024). In the present study, participants similarly viewed Busuu as easy to use and useful for supporting their English practice, which reflects positive perceptions. However, the findings also demonstrate that positive perceptions do not necessarily mean that all aspects of the application are equally motivating. One participant experienced decreased motivation because some advanced materials were unavailable in the free version. This is consistent with previous research indicating that the purposefulness, attractiveness, effectiveness, and usefulness of digital tools can influence learners' motivation (Wei, 2022), and that the value of language learning applications depends on how well they nurture learners' curiosity and sense of autonomy (Saragih, Rusyfa, & Redjeki, 2026). When access restrictions limit learners' freedom to choose materials that match their level, their motivation may decline even though they still regard the application as useful. This suggests that learners' motivation may also be influenced by the extent to which they can access the features they consider useful, and that reduced motivation could, in turn, affect how consistently they engage with the application.

The findings further indicate that Busuu supported learner engagement by allowing participants to integrate English practice into their individual routines. Participants could access learning activities when they had available time rather than depending entirely on classroom schedules. This flexibility appeared to make

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English practice more manageable for participants with other academic responsibilities. Flexibility may have influenced participants' motivation in three ways. First, being able to decide when and where to practice gives learners a sense of control over their own learning. From a self-determination perspective, this supports the need for autonomy, which has been shown to be positively related to learners' intention to continue using mobile learning for English (He & Li, 2023). Second, flexibility reduces the competition between language practice and other academic responsibilities. Flexibility of time has been identified as a condition that supports learners' self-regulation in online language learning, together with strategies such as time management and goal setting (Hunutlu, 2023). When practice fits into learners' schedules, it is less likely to be perceived as an additional burden, which makes regular practice easier to sustain. Third, when flexibility is combined with structured learning activities and progress monitoring, learners can set goals and see how far they have progressed, which may strengthen their sense of competence (He & Li, 2023; Hunutlu, 2023). Therefore, Busuu's contribution to motivation can be understood through the combination of accessibility, structured learning activities, progress monitoring, and opportunities for learners to practice according to their own circumstances, which together support learners' autonomy, sense of competence, and ability to practice regularly.

At the same time, the participants' experiences show that technology alone does not guarantee sustained motivation. Although most participants reported positive motivational experiences, limitations in the free version and internet connectivity created barriers to continued engagement. Thus, the role of Busuu in fostering motivation appears to depend on both the supportive features provided by the application and the conditions under which learners use them.

Busuu and Learner Autonomy

The findings suggest that Busuu supported the development of learner autonomy by giving participants greater control over their English learning activities. Most participants reported that they could use the application without direct supervision from lecturers and could decide when and how they wanted to practice. This finding can be interpreted through the concept of learner autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981). Holec described this ability as involving decisions about learning objectives, content, methods and techniques, and the monitoring and evaluation of progress. Benson (2011) similarly conceptualized autonomy as learners' control over learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content. The participants' decisions about when and how to practice correspond mainly to control over learning management, since they determined the timing, pace, and manner of their practice. This indicates that Busuu created learning conditions in which participants could take a more active role in managing their own learning, in line with previous findings that learners use digital tools for self-directed practice outside the classroom (Kimsesiz, 2023) and that decisions such as managing time and setting goals are central to self-regulated learning in online environments (Hunutlu, 2023). At the same time, working without supervision does not in itself mean that learners are autonomous, since autonomy also involves reflection on and responsibility for one's own learning (Little, 2007). The fact that some advanced materials were unavailable in the free version suggests that participants' control over learning content was limited, so the autonomy they exercised was strongest in managing their practice and weaker in selecting what to learn.

One important aspect of autonomy identified in the findings was the ability to learn at an individual pace. Participant 2 stated, "Now I can learn at my own pace. I don't have to wait for class to practice speaking." This experience demonstrates that the application allowed the participant to initiate learning independently rather than relying on scheduled classroom activities. The flexibility to practice outside the classroom also gave participants opportunities to fit English learning into their individual schedules.

The findings further show that learner autonomy was supported through the participants' use of learning goals, material selection, and progress tracking. These features allowed participants to make decisions about their learning activities and monitor their progress. However, autonomy in this context should not be understood simply as learning without a lecturer. Instead, the participants' experiences suggest that autonomy involved having greater control over the timing, pace, and continuity of their English practice.

At the same time, the findings indicate that access to technology does not automatically guarantee autonomous learning. Participants still needed to decide to use the application, maintain their learning routines, and respond to challenges such as unstable internet connections and restricted features in the free version.

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Therefore, Busuu can provide opportunities for autonomous learning, but the development of autonomy also depends on learners' active involvement and willingness to take responsibility for their learning.

Overall, the participants' experiences demonstrate that Busuu functioned as a supportive environment for independent English learning. Its flexibility allowed participants to practice beyond formal classroom activities, while its goal-setting and progress-monitoring features provided structure for their learning. This combination of flexibility and structure appears to be particularly relevant for pre-service English teachers, who need opportunities to develop both their own English proficiency and their ability to manage independent learning. Three abilities in particular may be supported. First, regular independent practice can contribute to pre-service teachers' own English proficiency and communicative competence, which remains a concern in teacher education because teachers' limited proficiency can affect how effectively they teach the language (De Jager, 2021). Second, goal setting, time management, and self-evaluation, which Busuu's features encourage, are strategies associated with self-regulated learning in online language learning (Hunutlu, 2023). Pre-service teachers who practice these strategies in their own learning are better prepared for lifelong professional development after graduation. Third, using an application as learners gives pre-service teachers firsthand experience of how digital tools work in language learning, which may inform their later decisions about integrating technology into their own teaching (De Jager, 2021). In this sense, Busuu may help pre-service teachers experience autonomous learning for themselves before they are expected to guide their future students in doing the same.

Busuu and Independent English Learning Experiences

The participants' experiences demonstrate that Busuu provided opportunities for English practice beyond formal classroom activities, particularly in developing speaking skills. All seven participants reported improvements in their speaking ability, with pronunciation practice and speech-recognition activities being among the features they found most useful. The participants also described how repeated practice helped them feel more prepared and confident when speaking English in classroom situations.

The finding is also in line with (Bukit, 2025), who found that the use of a language-learning application supported students' speaking development, particularly in pronunciation and confidence. Although their study examined Duolingo rather than Busuu, the finding suggests that digital language-learning applications can provide learners with additional opportunities to practice speaking in a less intimidating environment. Similarly, the participants in the present study reported that Busuu allowed them to practice pronunciation independently and helped them feel more confident when speaking English.

The experience of Participant 4 illustrates this finding: "I feel more confident now when I speak in class because I already practiced using Busuu." This response suggests that independent practice through the application may help learners develop greater confidence before participating in face-to-face speaking activities. Rather than waiting for opportunities to speak during class, participants could practice pronunciation and repeat speaking activities independently. In this way, Busuu extended their opportunities to engage with spoken English.

This finding can be viewed alongside (Prawiyata Y. D., 2026), who reported that the use of a digital language-learning application for speaking practice provided learners with opportunities to practice speaking, improve fluency and vocabulary, and develop greater confidence. Although the application examined in that study was different from Busuu, the finding is relevant because it demonstrates how digital language-learning environments can provide additional opportunities for speaking practice outside conventional classroom interaction.

The participants' experiences also suggest that the value of digital speaking practice extends beyond the technical improvement of pronunciation. Being able to practice independently appeared to reduce the pressure associated with speaking in front of others. Participants could repeat activities and check their performance before using English in classroom situations. This may explain why the participants connected their use of Busuu with greater confidence when speaking.

However, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that Busuu alone directly caused improvements in speaking ability. The data reflect the participants' perceptions and experiences rather than objectively measured changes in speaking proficiency. The findings therefore suggest that Busuu served as a

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supportive environment that provided additional opportunities for speaking practice, while the participants' own engagement and repeated use of the application remained important parts of their learning experience.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the role of Busuu in fostering motivation and learner autonomy among seven pre-service English teachers. In terms of motivation, six of the seven participants reported that Busuu increased their motivation through daily reminders, learning goals, and progress tracking, although limitations in the free version reduced motivation for one participant. In terms of autonomy, most participants reported that Busuu allowed them to learn at their own pace, choose materials, set goals, and monitor progress without depending entirely on lecturers or classmates. In terms of independent learning experiences, Busuu became part of participants' practice outside the classroom, and all seven reported improved speaking experiences, particularly in pronunciation and speech recognition, which increased their confidence; these findings reflect perceptions rather than measured proficiency. Challenges included unstable internet connections, restricted advanced materials in the free version, and limited feedback for some skills. Overall, Busuu can serve as a supportive supplementary tool for motivation, learner autonomy, and independent English learning among pre-service English teachers, but it should complement rather than replace classroom learning and interaction.

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