

The Comparative Study Between Readable and Let's Read Applications toward Students' Reading Skill

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Abstract: English is an international language and a foreign language to Indonesians, mastering it is essential. In this digital era, learning English is quite accessible. People are aware of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which uses mobile technology to teach language skills and extends learning in a new environment. This study compared the effectiveness of Readable and Let's Read applications in improving students' reading skill. Using mixed methods, the study integrated qualitative data methods into a quantitative comparative model to measure the effect of using digital reading applications, the participants are three students of STAIDAZ (Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Darel Azhar). Both applications enhance students' reading comprehension and fluency and proved effective in improving reading comprehension, fluency, and motivation among the participants.

Kata Kunci:

Mobile-Assisted
Language Learning
(MALL), Keterampilan
Membaca, Readable,
Let's Read,

Abstrack: Bahasa Inggris adalah bahasa internasional dan bahasa asing bagi orang Indonesia, menguasainya sangat penting. Di era digital ini, belajar bahasa Inggris cukup mudah diakses. Orang-orang menyadari Pembelajaran Bahasa Berbantuan Seluler (MALL), yang menggunakan teknologi seluler untuk mengajarkan keterampilan bahasa dan memperluas pembelajaran di lingkungan baru. Penelitian ini membandingkan efektivitas aplikasi Readable dan Let's Read dalam meningkatkan keterampilan membaca siswa. Dengan menggunakan metode campuran, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan metode data kualitatif ke dalam model komparatif kuantitatif untuk mengukur efek penggunaan aplikasi membaca digital, pesertanya adalah tiga mahasiswa STAIDAZ (Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Darel Azhar). Kedua aplikasi tersebut meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan dan kefasihan siswa dan terbukti efektif dalam meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan, kefasihan, dan motivasi di antara para peserta.



Introduction

English is a lingua franca (Fang, 2017), the worldwide spread of English, its popular use in many international economic and cultural arenas, and the spectacular rise of electronic communication have allowed English to reach a position of global or international language (Marlina & Xu, 2018). Therefore, learning English nowadays is a necessity (Tillayeva, 2020). Learning a language is about learning its skills, and in English requires four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The first two are referred to as orality, while the other referred to as literacy. And Linguistic is shaped by these two aspects (Qamili, 2023). Reading is the most important skill in second language acquisition (out of four) (Jacob, 2016).

Language experts recommend reading as the most effective approach to learn and expand vocabulary, as words and phrases can have several meanings in different contexts. Consistent reading of textbooks, literary works, reference books, newspaper, magazines, and journal can help develop language skills (Chandra, 2021). And it is related to Celik (2019) that reading is very important to strengthen students' vocabulary and grammar knowledge (Celik, 2019). On other hand, (Celik & Altun, 2023) mentioned that reading improves language skills, including vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension of a language. Reading helps broaden one's vocabulary. Reading introduces language learners to new words. Exposure to new terminology increases both knowledge and practical application. Furthermore, reading enhances grammar and sentence structure. Understanding syntax and sentence structure is essential for improving language skills. Reading enables us to express our ideas and thoughts effectively and rationally.

According to Harmer (2011), reading is an important skill to have for teaching and studying other languages. Reading is an interactive process that involves the reader, the text, and the context. The reader interprets the text, not the other way around. Readers' interpretation of a book is influenced by their prior knowledge. However, the context also plays an important function since it establishes the reason or instruction for reading. To read effectively, readers should connect what they already know to what they need to learn from book (Aripovna, 2020). Reading is a crucial source of such input, reading is a skill learned via conscious effort and the learning process typically begins in the first language (L1) around the beginning of formal education, with a large proportion of the population succeeding (Watkins, 2017). Reading skills refer to linguistic processing abilities, such as word recognition and syntax processing. According to Anderson (1995), Proctor and Duta (19995); and Schunk (2000), skills are typically viewed as learning outputs from goal-driven tasks that are gradually automated (Grabe & Stoller , 2011). Davis (1968) defines reading skills as a set of eight basic skills that allow readers to engage with the text effectively, they are: 1) Recalling word meaning, 2) Drawing inferences about the meaning of a word in context, 3) Finding answers to questions answered explicitly or in paraphrase, 4) Weaving together ideas in the content, 5) Drawing inferences from the content, 6) Recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude, tone and mood, 7) Identifying a writer's technique, 8) Following the structure of a passage (Alderson, 2000).

Technological innovations have had a profound effect on education, influencing practically every aspect of it. While considerable focus is placed on technology-mediated teaching and learning, MALL is a sector that has demonstrated benefits and is increasing (Van & Thanh, 2021). According to Hockly (2013), MALL employs mobile technology to provide language learning anytime and anywhere. MALL's versatility sets it apart from typical language learning approaches, making it highly effective tool (Shaheen, Soomro,

& Ali, 2024). Viberg & Grönlund (2012) stated that Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has received a lot of interest recently. MALL has been employed in a variety of settings and setups to help learners. MALL is strongly related to other applied linguistics study areas, such as autonomy in language learning and teaching specific language skills (Ali, Yunus, Alshaikhi, & Aliia, 2022).

The use of MALL and mobile applications in reading instruction boosts students' interest and passion. It also helps students understand the English material more easily. MALL also increases students' participation and interaction while learning to read. Furthermore, it improves students' reading comprehension skills, such as vocabulary recognition, word decoding, and retention, as well as reading skills such as determining explicit information, word meaning, contextual reference, categorizing information, outlining, synthesizing information, predicting outcome, main idea, implicit information in the text, and determining cause and effect relationships (Dewi & Santosa, 2022). According to Rafiq et al. (2021), MALL can take various forms, including mobile games, language learning apps, and language learning content. Teachers who use MALL indicate that it enhances the teaching and learning process by providing additional materials and promoting self-paced learning (Chandran & Ismail, 2023). Among the numerous MALL programs and applications, Readable and Let's Read have garnered popularity for their distinct methods to improve reading comprehension and fluency.

Readable: Read English Stories is an application designed to help learners improve their English language skills by providing a large library of stories targeted to different reading levels. It offers a new and exciting way to learn English through pleasure reading (Uptodown, n.d.). the readable app is a digital platform that helps people learn English by delivering simplified stories in a variety of genres, as well as audio and word translation services (Jannah, Dewi, & Johan, 2024). Readable engage in fictional storylines and customized daily news across many topics and genres. Auditory support enhances reading experience and improves pronunciation and intonation comprehension. Stories are categorized into A1, A2, B1, or B2 levels, with 300 most common English words to help students select content that matches their language skills. Instant language support is available to help students anytime they face problems, ensuring a seamless reading experience (Aisyah, 2024).

And Let's Read created by The Asia Foundation is a program to create and translate digital books for children. Collaboration among local authors, illustrators, and editors creates high-quality books, increasing opportunities for Asian children to read using their devices. Teachers can use several devices, including smartphones, PCs, and projectors. The app offers graded reading materials accessible via mobile devices. It offers a diverse selection of reading material on many topics. Students have the freedom to select their reading level and content (Lestari, 2021). Let's Read provides children's stories in multiple language, including English, Bahasa Indonesia, and Balinese. The stories are from folktales to modern narratives, are enhanced with appealing elements such as narration and beautiful visuals. The software categories content by reading levels, allowing children to select stories based on their skill and proceed to difficult text (Pratiwi, Padmadewi, & Dewi, 2023).

Considering their varied characteristics, both applications aim to improve students' reading skills. This comparative study investigates their efficacy by analyzing participants' interactions with each application. Particularly, the study investigates how Readable and Let's Read affect reading comprehension, fluency, and overall engagement, providing insights into their strengths and limits. And to inform best practice for using

digital tools to improve reading instruction by recognizing Readable and Let's Read distinct contributions.

To understand the comparative advantages of these applications is important for teachers who want to use technology into reading teaching. (Aisyah, 2024) found that Readable application improved narrative text comprehension for 10th students at SMA Muhammadiyah 18 Ciputat in 2023/2024 academic year. On other hand, (Azara & Fadhilawati, 2024) found that Let's Read significantly improves reading skills of 11th grade students at SMAN 1 Kademangan Blitar. Both applications could enhance students' reading skill, and this study would compare both applications in improving students' reading skill, particularly the students of STAIDAZ (Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Darel Azhar). This study aimed to investigate their perceptions of each app's advantages, disadvantages, and overall effectiveness in improving their reading skill and this study seeks to examine the ways in which each application affects certain reading subskills through participants' observations, interviews, and performance assessments.

Research Method

The study uses mixed methods, the combination of quantitative and qualitative method (Creswell, 2013), the study integrated qualitative data methods into a quantitative comparative model to measure the effect of using digital reading applications (Readable and Let's Read) on students' reading comprehension. Qualitative data were obtained through observation, interviews, and performance tasks (Oranga & Matere, 2023), which played a secondary role in supporting the quantitative data derived from students' reading skill assessments.

The study analyzed students' proficiency in eight reading subskills (Davis, 1968) by comparing their median scores across both applications. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of how digital tools influence reading comprehension, combining statistical analysis with qualitative insight into students' engagement and learning experiences.

Over two weeks, the participants (three students of STAIDAZ) interacted with both Readable and Let's Read applications. During this duration, their reading behaviors, interaction patterns, and any difficulties they faced were recorded. Alongside observation, semi-structured interviews were carried out to collect insight into participants' experiences. The participants are three students of STAIDAZ (Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Darel Azhar). They were chosen by purposive sampling based on their willingness to engage and improve their English, particularly reading, and had similar reading competence levels.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative Data Collection

The assessment is a reading comprehension test based on Davis's (1968) eight reading subskills that were administered before the intervention. The test was conducted in a single session using two digital reading applications, Readable and Let's Read. The score was recorded to serve as pre-test data.

Following the pre-test, students engaged with digital reading materials for designated period. During the intervention, students completed assigned reading tasks and engaged with the applications independently. Their reading progress was monitored through their interactions with the content, task completion, and engagement levels.

At the end of the study, the same reading comprehension test was re-administered as a post-test to evaluate improvements in reading skills across both applications. The post test was conducted under the same conditions to maintain reliability and validity. The result was then analyzed by comparing the median scores of each subskill across two groups.

Qualitative Data Collections

Qualitative research is focused on understanding people's experiences in a simple, accessible and analytical approach and seeks answer to research questions utilizing a systematically pre-defined set of techniques. Its aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena in their natural environment which analyze non-numerical data (Ugwu & Eze Val, 2023). The qualitative data collection involved two main instruments: observation and interviews.

On observations, the researcher closely monitored students' engagement with both applications. Using both direct and indirect methods, this study observe the research happening in front of the eyes in the moment occurring while indirect observation was relying on observations of others or recordings of past events in the form of documentation, videos, and so on (Ciesielska, Boström, & Öhlander, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were conducted following the intervention (Adams, 2015). Three students are interviewed by the researcher to explore students' experiences, preferences and perceptions of Readable and Let's Read.

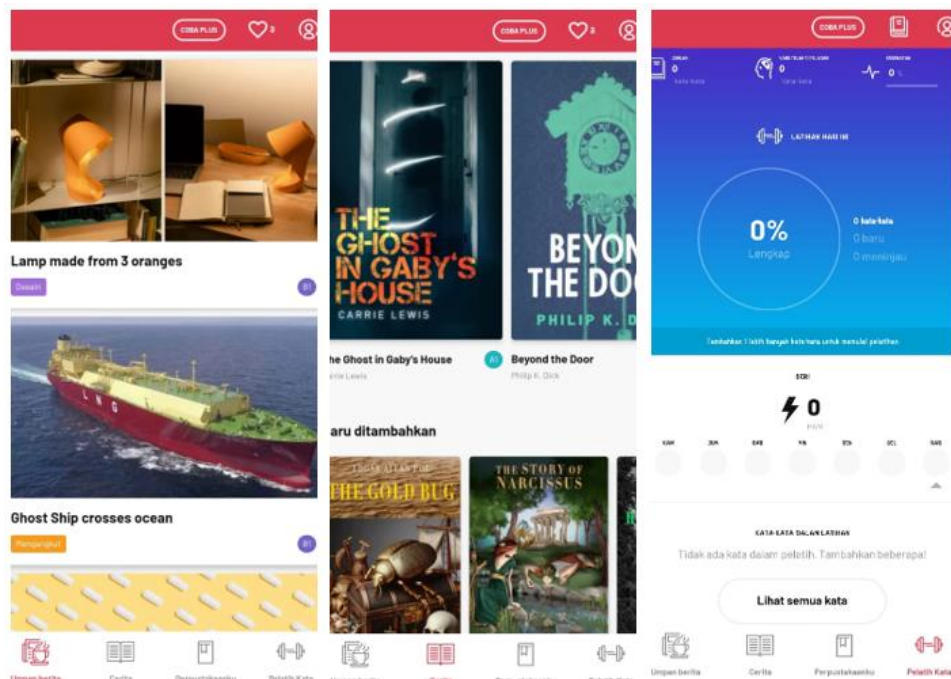
Findings

This part presents the result of the comparative study of Readable and Let's Read applications, with a focus on their effectiveness in increasing students' reading skills. The objective is to determine which app best promotes the growth of reading comprehension, fluency, and motivation. Three participants were interviewed by the researcher, the participants' reading practices before this study varied greatly.

1. Students' Experiences with Readable and Let's Read

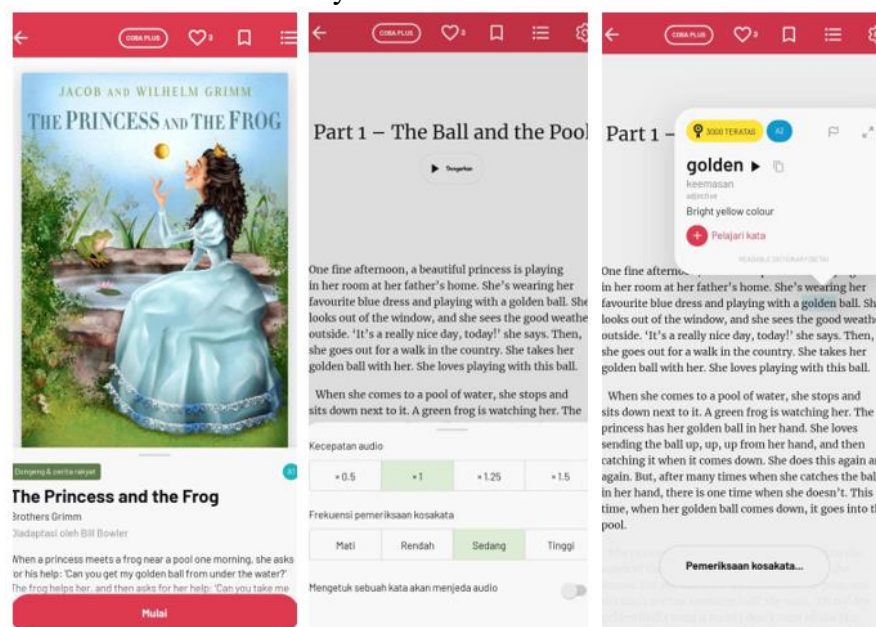
Student I practiced reading on mobile applications but struggled with vocabulary. Student II preferred reading stories and novels, which had similar language challenges. And student III struggled to read music and book lyrics due to lack of motivation. All participants were familiar with the digital resources for learning English and reported comfort with mobile applications which is on the rise (Klimova & Zamborova, 2020), indicating a willingness to participate in both Readable and Let's Read.

Readable is a mobile application used in enhancing students' reading skills enabling students to identify and correct their mistakes. Readable motivates users to engage with reading activities, gamifying features such as progress tracking and achievement badges.



Pic. I Readable homepage, text and stories classification, and progress tracking page

Readable provides audio files with text, stories, and word meanings. Students can listen to the audio files of the text or story and adjust the audio playback speed. Every word has its meaning. This feature helps students understand and add new vocabulary.



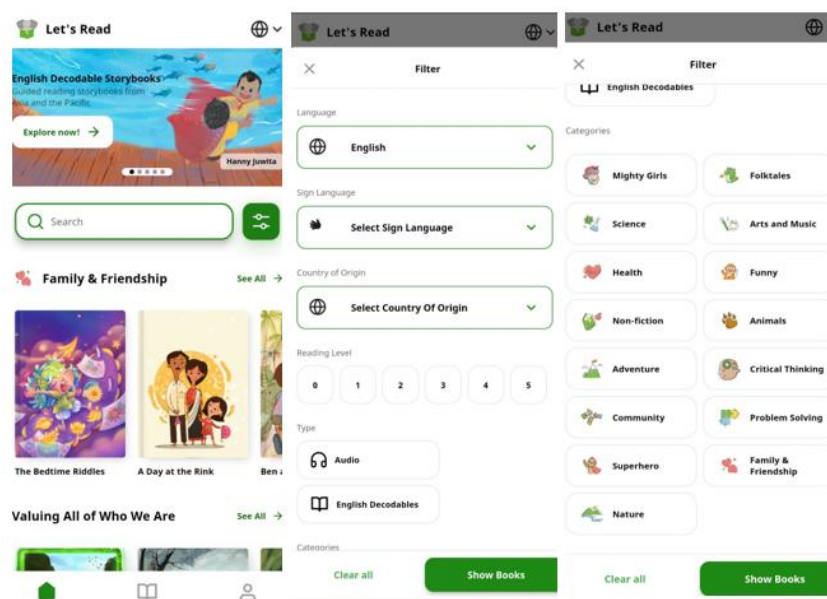
Pic. II Readable story page, adjustable audio, and meaning of the word feature

All participants found Readable app useful, especially the audio option, which helped them pronounce the words and the meaning features is useful for them to understand the vocabulary. The participants viewed the experience as

enjoyable and engaging, they had similar feelings, emphasizing the app's value in providing clear audio and improving their vocabulary knowledge.

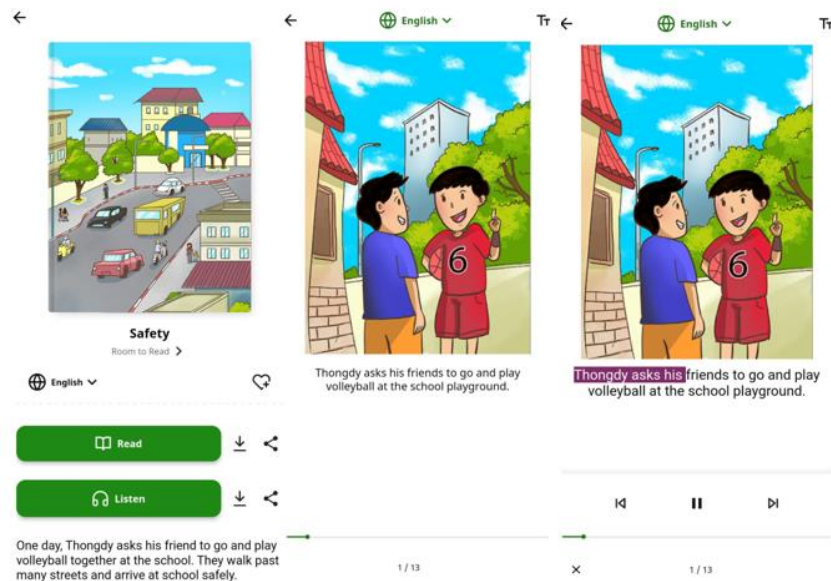
Besides its benefits, participants remarked that one key obstacle was the need to become a member, which could be financially prohibitive. This is what makes it difficult for them to access some texts and not be able to read the whole text.

Let's Read app was praised for its use of pictures and audio, which improved story comprehension and made reading more engaging. It offers a selection of accessible graded reading materials via mobile (Lestari, 2021). And it offers a diverse selection of readings, covering many subjects categorized into many aspects. The participants have the freedom to select their reading levels and grades.



Pic. III Let's Read homepage and filter page picture

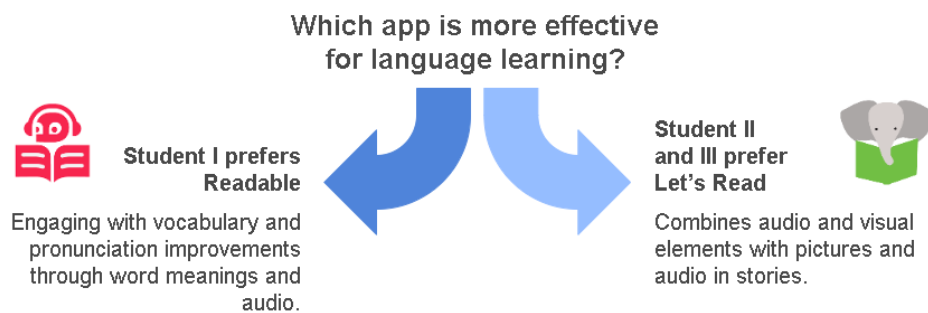
To facilitate comprehension and help users acquire pronunciation, the stories are presented with eye-catching illustrations, and some even include audio.



Pic. IV The Let's Read story page with two accessible and downloadable text and audio

Student I felt it was wonderful to be able to see the pictures and hear the audio at the same time, while student II regarded the experience as amazing, with visual assistance improving her understanding. And student III appreciated the new experience provided by the app, which allowed her to see and hear the story, improving her reading process. Even if the picture helps them to understand, there is a challenge that participants found, they need to access dictionary to find the meaning of the word.

All participants acknowledge that Readable and Let's Read contributed more significantly to their reading improvement. Student I found Readable more engaging, particularly in vocabulary and pronunciation improvements, because the app provides the meaning of each word and the audio in each stories and text, while student II and III preferred Let's Read for its perfection, because the app shows pictures and put the audio in every story, it combines the audio and visual in one app. Student III proposed combining the audio and pictures features from both apps to create a more comprehensive learning tool.



Pic. V Participants selection illustration

2. Impact on Reading Skill

Participants found improvements in reading comprehension and fluency, which they had given to the audio, visual features and interactive material of both apps. It's related to (Loviasyuni & Bhuna, 2023) where this media can increase their reading motivation with new experience.

Reading Skill (Davis, 1968)	Readable			Median	Let's Read			Median
	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3		Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	
Recalling word meanings	85	80	80	81.7	85	80	85	83.3
Drawing inferences about word meaning in context	85	85	85	85	90	85	85	86.7
Finding answers to explicitly stated or paraphrased questions	80	85	85	83.3	85	85	90	86.7
Weaving together ideas in the content	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
Drawing inferences from the content	75	70	75	73.3	75	75	75	75
Recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude, tone, and mood	75	70	70	71.7	75	75	70	73.3
Identifying a writer's technique	80	75	75	76.7	80	80	80	80
Following the structure of a passage	80	85	85	83.3	75	75	75	75
TOTAL SCORE	645	635	640	641	650	640	645	645

Table 1. Comparative analysis of reading skills based on Davis (1968), use 10-100 (low-high) score

This table is based on qualitative assessments such as observations, interviews, and performance tasks. The table compares students' reading skills based on Davis's (1968) eight reading subskills, using two distinct reading applications: Readable and Let's Read. Three students are assessed to determine their proficiency in recalling word meanings, making inferences, answering explicitly stated questions, weaving ideas, recognizing a writer's intent, identifying strategies, and comprehending passage patterns. The performance of three students was assessed using both applications, and their score was calculated to get the median for each skill category. The cumulative median score shows that students fared slightly better with Let's Read (by point 645) than with Readable (by point 641), indicating a little advantage in reading comprehension and critical thinking development when using Let's Read.

Let's Read had higher median score in Recalling word meanings (83.3 vs 81.7), drawing inferences from word meaning in context (86.7 vs 85), and responding to explicitly stated questions (86.7 vs 83.3). This shows that Let's Read could be more helpful in assisting students to extract meaning from texts and develop their inference-making abilities. However, Readable outperformed the other two in terms of following the structure of passage (83.3 vs 75), implying that it may be more useful in understanding text organization and coherence. Furthermore, both applications produced comparable outcomes in weaving together concepts (85), making inferences from information (75), and identifying a writer's method (80), showing that both platforms contribute equally to these specific reading skills.

Both applications improve students' reading skills, Let's Read has a slight advantage in vocabulary development, inferencing, and answering explicit questions, all of which are important for reading comprehension. Readable may be more beneficial in helping students recognize text structures. Future research could explore how these applications affect long-term reading comprehension and critical thinking development in different learner demographics.

Conclusion

This comparative study emphasizes the unique advantages and challenges of utilizing Readable and Let's Read applications for enhancing students' reading skills. Both applications proved effective in improving reading comprehension, fluency, and motivation among the participants. Each application presented distinct features: Readable received special commendation for its audio capabilities, which supported vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation, while Let's Read was praised for integrating audio and visual elements, making the reading experience more engaging and understandable.

Let's Read has modest advantage over Readable in terms of vocabulary development, inference skills, and comprehension of explicit material. The use of visual assistance and audio narration in Let's Read increases engagement and aids in meaning extraction, as seen by higher median scores for memorizing word meanings, generating inferences, and answering explicitly stated questions. In contrast, Readable is more effective in teaching text structure comprehension, indicating its strength in assisting students in analyzing and organizing textual materials. Furthermore, both programs produce similar results in areas such as weaving ideas, detecting a writer's method, and forming content inferences, demonstrating their complimentary function in reading skill development.

Both applications were enjoyable and useful for increasing speech, vocabulary, and comprehension. However, issues such as subscription hurdles in Readable and lack of built-in word definition in Let's Read were raised. Both applications help students strengthen their reading skill effectively. And future research might investigate long-term effects on reading fluency and comprehension across diverse learner demographics.

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