



## Students' Perceptions of Memrise App Use in Learning Vocabulary

Mirdad<sup>1</sup>, Abdul Halim<sup>2</sup>, Azwar Abidin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>English Education Department, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kendari, Indonesia

Corresponding e-mail: [azwarabidin@iainkendari.ac.id](mailto:azwarabidin@iainkendari.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the students' perceptions in using Memrise app in learning vocabulary. To achieve this aim, this research applied qualitative methodology as qualitative research. The participants of this study were 20 students with non-English major study programs. The data of this study were obtained from students' written reflections through Google form that spread by WA Group. Thematic analysis was implemented in this study based on the concept of students' perceptions. The result of the analysis showed that students' perceived usefulness in learning vocabulary with the Memrise application has positively increased. The students also felt entertained in learning vocabulary, such as playing a game. The result also revealed that students implemented their words knowledge in speaking, pronunciation, listening and writing. The students were satisfied in learning vocabulary after exposing them with range of built-in features of the application, such as videos, audios, pronunciation guidance and reviewing learning systems. The pedagogical implication of this study is that the teacher/lecturer, university, and students can utilize this application as learning and teaching media to bridge them to acquire good range of lexical.

**Keywords:** *Learning Vocabulary; MALL; Memrise App; Students' Perceptions*

### INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary learning in foreign language teaching and learning has been an area of interest and research for decades. Learning vocabulary considers knowledge of words and word meaning (Nurdiansyah, Asyid, & Parmawati, 2019). To be continued, Stahl (2005) disclosed that vocabulary knowledge is knowledge of a word not only implies a definition but also implies how that word fits into the world. Various studies also suggested that to increase English vocabulary proficiency and comprehension, it is better to put vocabulary in context with "easy-to-understand explanations" (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). The learning easy-to-understand explanation method must be utilized such technology or mobile device because they can operate learning vocabulary by relying on their willingness to learn. Situated language learning is a means for achieving goals such as more meaningful learning (Comas-Quinh, Mardomingo, & Valentine, 2009) or context-dependent vocabulary learning. (Wong, Chen & Liu, 2010). In this case, technology provides many opportunities for students to improve literacy



skills, including vocabulary strategies, and it also offers students technologically driven practices of reading and writing instruction (Reutzel & Cooter, 2013). Some researchers also have recently found that the use of new technology certainly is a powerful vocabulary instruction ally and aid to all readers when they use listening, speaking, and interacting application (Watts-Taffe & Gwinn, 2007) to practice parts of speech (verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs) for language structures (Reutzel & Cooter, 2013).

Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) has largely been an interesting field of research for scholars from the beginning of the 21st century. One of the aspects of MALL which has largely been emphasized in different studies is the mobility of devices that allows users to have unlimited access (Cherian & Williams, 2008). Burston (2014) validated that while mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has existed now for nearly 20 years, the capability of mobile devices has improved enormously, particularly with mobile telephones which have incorporated the functionality of hand-held computers and audio-video recorders and players. Previous reviews have shown (Burston, 2014; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008) that pedagogically MALL has been constrained to a behaviorist, teacher-centered, and tutorial applications. It has likewise been slow to exploit the communicative potential of available technology. Meanwhile, Zhang, Song, and Burston, (2011) confirmed that mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) offers students a convenient approach to the intentional study of high-frequency words that could incorporate a range of theoretically sound study methods such as automated spaced learning, computer adaptive flashcards, and receptive or productive quizzing. It has been claimed to play an important role in enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition. In Indonesia, certain research shows such as Sato and Burden, (2020) confirmed that mobile assisted language learning (MALL) is a tool for language learners to learn language because of its utility both within and outside the classroom. In mobile assisted language learning (MALL), there is a new vocabulary software program which is called Memrise application that not only provides students with visual information in establishing vocabulary competence but also supported struggling readers in improving their decoding and spelling skills. While working on software programs or in the Memrise application, the students could highlight any unknown words, and the system of the program would break the words up and pronounce them slowly (Huang, 2015).

Memrise is a language learning application developed by an American company of language technologies that enable users to master a foreign language with their Mobiles without the help of a teacher (Nuralisah & Kareviati, 2020). The application guarantees the users they can learn a language much quicker and easier than ever previously. This application also serves various underpinning features that comprise multiple-choice, audio-listening, speaking, spelling, and rearranging words and sentences. Karjo and Andreani (2018) classified the challenge features or items into five types: word translation, flashcards, challenges for audio choices, the typing question, and phrase translation. Memrise application grows rapidly and now more than 50 million people in various countries around the world are learning languages with this application. Karjo and Andreani (2018) continued that the Memrise application is a vocabulary-building online learning platform that was founded by Ed Cooke and Greg Detre that offers 20 languages, including English, Korean, French, Spanish, Japanese, German, Russian, Chinese,



Vietnamese, Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Arabic, Dutch, Indonesian, Italian, Polish, and Turkish. Neither students nor people can use the Memrise application to learn vocabulary in a variety of languages (Chau & Huong, 2021).

Concerning Zhang (2019) the Memrise application is built on three scientific principles that help users to learn new words. The first principle is elaborative encoding that assists users to connect each new word with its meaning by using “mems” which are like mnemonics, etymologies, amusing videos, photos, and some instance sentences. The “mems” stimulate users’ senses, imagination, and emotions to make their memories last longer. The second principle is choreographed testing with various testing types to strengthen the memory and keep learning interesting. The third principle is scheduled reminders which help users to revisit what they have learned right before the memory fades completely or on a history feature where they could find the time and target of their learning progress. Every level is designed for thematic vocabulary such as “we are family”, “let’s eat”, “and traveling” and so on. Several researchers on the use of the Memrise application to learn vocabulary have yielded considerable results. Walker (2015) discovered that the Memrise application was more effective in enriching students' vocabulary. Other researchers such as Nushi and Egbali (2017), and Jacob and Daniel (2018) have noted that the most crucial reason why the Memrise application is the most acceptable application for students to possess a rich vocabulary in a foreign language, particularly in English, is that it is designed in the gamification learning process, such as first, it made learning new words into a game where users grow a garden of flower-memories. Whenever users start to learn a new word, they plant a new seed of memory, and every time users review a word, they help the flower to grow a little bit until it finishes growing after completing ten successful tests or some kind of questions. Users need to review words periodically to keep the flowers from fading. Second, users earn points by learning and reviewing all the courses they are learning, and as they gain more points, they go up a badge level. Memrise application could be a great supplementary tool for learners who would like to strengthen the memory of the vocabulary items they have already learned elsewhere, or for learners who would like to expand their vocabulary in the target language due to learners are given the option to customize their own learning pace whether to opt-out of tests using audio or the rearranging test type, and to freely select among available activities such as learn new words, classic review, speed review, listening skills, learn with locals, chatbots, and grammar bots (Hamer, 2021).

This study aims to discuss the use of the Memrise application in learning vocabulary. The Memrise application has a pleasant occupation in this study, which is to facilitate and serve the vocabulary learning process for the non-English major students who have experienced utilizing this application. Memrise application has widely been used in MALL (mobile assisted language learning) as an educational tool. It allows the students to study a variety of subjects online (Luczak, 2017). Memrise application has enormous attention from researchers such Jacob and Daniel (2018) who discovered that the Memrise app assisted the students in acquiring vocabulary, establishing the students’ self-directed learning, and can also be a motivating factor for vocabulary acquisition with certain students’ competitiveness, especially was found to be potentially linked with the desire to learn more words. In like manner, the students can utilize the



Memrise application to learn various aspects and specifications, such as vocabulary, grammar, and so on, when learning languages in particular. However, the focal point of *the* Memrise application setting is to enlarge students' vocabulary acquisition or lexical learning process. In other words, the program of the Memrise app is designed to build up long-term memory of vocabulary through systematic and frequent testing of vocabulary items.

Several recent studies on an international scale have been undertaken, such as Walker (2015) who centralized his study on Latin vocabulary that is facilitated by the Memrise app, he discovered that the implementation of the Memrise application in the class was slightly limited as it was not able to separate the well-known phenomenon of learning by regular assessment, from any potential extra benefit from using Memrise application. Esmaeili and Shahrokhi (2020) added that the majority of previous studies conducted in experimental research that take a long time and did not excavate the cognitive aspect rely on students' perceptions during the learning process. Jacob and Daniel (2018) added that the previous study limited the scope to examining affective and cognitive responses amongst university English majors studying with Memrise application outside of the classroom.

In the Asian context has been also conducted such Chau and Huong (2021) either conducted research in Vietnam about the efficiency of Memrise application in vocabulary learning of EFL students, in this case, they focused on EFL students as the participants. Meanwhile, in the Indonesian context, some researchers have shown some studies about mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and Memrise mobile applications in vocabulary learning. The majority of studies were using Memrise application to learn English vocabulary which is applied at the senior high school level, not at the university level, such Arifin (2020) who did quasi-experimental research about the effectiveness of Memrise application to teach adjectives at SMA Kartika Banyubiru, Indonesia, indicated good result the Memrise app was effective for learning vocabulary. Nuralisah and Kareviati (2020) also researched seventh-grade students in junior high school which showed that the Memrise app was good tool for learning vocabulary.

Therefore, the study of students' perceptions of using the Memrise app is still less known whether in international, Asian, or Indonesian contexts in terms of building the students' mindset of vocabulary learning concepts facilitated by Memrise application with non-majors English students. To counterattack those gaps, this current study attempts to focus on non-English major students' cognitive and affective responses in learning vocabulary using the Memrise app or how do they perceive learning vocabulary using the Memrise app?

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies qualitative research, which is used for presenting the data, interpreting, validating, and indicating the potential outcomes of the study. This qualitative research will use reflexivity as inquirers reflect about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The number of participants of this current study is twenty university students with non-English major students at IAIN Kendari (ESY = 7, PGMI=6, FISIKA = 7 participants) with ( $N=$  15 females and 5 males)





who are voluntarily involved in this study. The recruitment is based on inclusion criteria (Lin & Lin, 2019) such as the participants intend to be involved in this study, and in this study, students should be first-year students, or they have listed on the Bahasa Inggris 1 or Bahasa Inggris 2 classrooms.

The instrumentation of this study applies written reflections using Google Form that shall be distributed online via Whatsapp groups to elicit the students' perceptions of using the Memrise application in learning vocabulary. Written reflection refers to a written story template that entails a series of questions and blank spaces where participants drop their answers and responses such google form (Barkhuizen, 2014). The data will be gathered by using several procedures, firstly, the reflective questions are designed in Google form. Secondly, after several days the participants' answers and responses will be collected. Thirdly, checking and collecting the participants' responses clearly if be found unclearly data, then the participants will follow up interview as the triangulation data to elicit more detail and accurate information (Xiao & Yang, 2019), the fourth stage is that coding the data based on students written reflection.

In analyzing the data, this study uses thematic analysis by adopted Michelle and Lara (2020) framework as an appropriate method of analysis for seeking to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across the data set. This study analyzes the data of students' perception from themes emerging in their answers and responses in reflection that has been filled out through Google form. Moreover, in earning the end results in terms of categorizations the themes will be implementing the coding procedures by using Saldana's (2016) framework. In his framework that is called code, code is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.

## **FINDINGS**

The results from the thematic analysis structure are presented here in relation to the students' justifications as the relevant data. There are five themes' distinctions as presented as follows:

### **3.1 Students' Perceptions of the usefulness of Memrise App**

Most of students perceived that the use of Memrise application in learning vocabulary enhanced their vocabulary. It can be proven from the following respondents' quotations:

“It increases my new vocabulary, because in Memrise we are taught a lot of new vocabulary and correct sentence construction”. (P02)

“I think using Memrise is very helpful in increasing my very limited vocabulary and I do that by memorizing the vocabulary I learned in the application”. (P03)

“Yes, because when using the Memrise application, it made me know some vocabulary that I didn't even know before”. (P15)

“Memrise application is very helpful to find out frequently used vocabulary”. (P20)

Such data above claims that the students increased their vocabulary due to the sentence construction exercises employed in the Memrise application to empower students'

comprehension of vocabulary learning. It is in line with Walker's (2015) experimental study that discovered that the Memrise application was more effective in enriching students' vocabulary. Other than that, students increased their vocabulary due to a myriad of vocabulary available in the Memrise application that is enabling them to memorize easier, this is concerning Zhang (2019) who revealed that the design of this application could strengthen users' memory in learning vocabulary.

In addition, Zhang (2019) continues to show that each level of this application is designed by relying on thematic vocabulary such as family, let's eat, etc. The words depend on the level, the higher the level, the higher the difficulty. This confirms the students' justification that they acquire low-frequency words that are rarely used in daily conversation routines. In addition, students also learn high-frequency words that are routinely used in conversation. Low-frequency words they earned only when they are at a higher level and vice versa also high-frequency words they elicited at a low level.

### **3.2 Students' Perceptions of the entertainments learning with Memrise app**

Most students feel entertained with this application in learning vocabulary. It can be seen from the following respondents' reflections:

"Yes, I'm happy, because I can play while learning English vocabulary using the Memrise app". (P02)

"I am really happy with this Memrise application, because it's not only increases vocabulary, but this application also provides daily targets and gives points from the results we are studying on". (P03)

"Yes, I feel happy using this application in learning English vocabulary, when I am not doing anything and I am open to learn English". (P07)

"Yes, I really enjoy it, because in the Memrise application there is a lot of new vocabulary through videos which is easy to understand". (P12)

"I feel bored learning English vocabulary using the Memrise application, because each lesson is too long". (P01)

Concerning the students' feeling entertained, it can be stated that students are very happy to learn vocabulary utilizing the Memrise application due to there is a gamification system that allows learning while playing a game. This is supported by Nushi and Eqbali (2017), and Jacob and Daniel (2018) that the most crucial reason why *the Memrise application* is the most acceptable application for students to possess a rich vocabulary in a foreign language, particularly in English, is that it is designed in the gamification learning process. The Gamification system works in testing learning forms, which tests range from listening, unscrambling words, guessing, and pronunciation. One test or lesson consists of 10 questions. If the students can answer all questions correctly, they will obtain a high point and uplift level. It is also agreed with the study by Abarghou and Taki (2018) who stated that this kind of learning established the competitive circumstances.

Likewise, some daily targets and scores enable the students to compete, collecting as many points as others, Zhang (2019) backed up that the rank system in this application enables the students to compete with other students in learning vocabulary. Therefore, those atmospheres

offer the students' willingness emerge to learn vocabulary rely on their desire to learn. In addition, students also feel happy because they mind learning through the video feature which contains videos explaining vocabulary and sentences indicating that learning was not boring. In contrast, one of the students stated that was unhappy due to the learning method being quite long which seems boring. It works such 10 questions being reviewing every question that made the students feel boring.

### **3.3 Students' perceptions of practicing language skills with Memrise app**

The implementation of the students' vocabulary learning with the Memrise application is one of the crucial units in this study. Most of the students responded that they implemented their vocabulary being studied into macro and micro skills, the valid data could be seen in the following quotations:

"Yes, because in this Memrise we are taught some long sentences that are used in daily conversation and we can understand and use in our environment." (P04).

"Yes, because we are also asked to practice directly how to pronounce it and after that we can know whether our English pronunciation is correct or still need to be improved". (P15)

"The skill I practice is listening, because there are many audios available in the Memrise application for practicing listening". (P19).

"From this application, I learned to compose words and sentences from listening to writing vocabulary and starting to learn to speak in English". (P12).

The data above revealed that the students learn speaking skills because the Memrise application presents simple words, phrases, and sentences that can be used in speaking practices with companions or family in daily conversation. The students practiced interpersonal communication. In addition, students also drill pronunciation skills due to in the Memrise application there are many audios, videos, and pronunciation exercises that can be imitated and followed. This is in line with Nuralisah and Kareviati, (2020) stated that the Memrise application guarantees a variety of features such as audios, videos, etc. to serve pleasure learning circumstances.

Another point to consider is that students also practice listening skills because a lot of audios is available, so they can practice the correct listening to English vocabulary. In the end, students practice writing words and composing sentences in English. Those data are related to the study undertaken by Wang, Teng, and Chen (2015) which showed that one of the effectiveness of the mobile application is learning different skill of English learning.

### **3.4 Students' perceptions of satisfactions learning with Memrise app**

The students agreed that the Memrise application has many advantages and also disadvantages that affect the students' satisfaction in learning vocabulary. Findings also reveal that the participants were extremely satisfied, while the rest stated that they showed dissatisfaction with the learning process using the Memrise application. The quotations from students who stated satisfaction are presented in the following statements:

“The advantages of this Memrise are many interesting features contained in the Memrise material, such as conversations in English, writing vocabulary in English and many more advantages of this application”. (P09 of Q4)

“The advantage is that there is a pronunciation guide to make it easier for us to practice pronunciation”. (P12 of Q4)

“Yes, besides being easy, the application is also free, making it easier to learn English vocabulary”. (P07 of Q1)

“The advantage is that the teaching concept in the Memrise Application is repeated, so that it is very helpful in remembering every important vocabulary”. (P15 of Q4).

The statements upward concede that the students are enthusiastic in learning English vocabulary due to many advantages. Primarily, the application has interesting features that enable easier English vocabulary. It is supported by Nuralisah and Kareviati, (2020) stated that the Memrise application guarantees the users they can learn a language much quicker and easier than ever previously. It seems that the Memrise application offers a new path to learning English. Similarly, this Memrise application provides pronunciation guidance for students stemming from the easy to the challenge one. On top of that, this Memrise application can assist in increasing students' vocabulary because it can be accessed at any time for free. The final point that is the Memrise application also can increase the students' English vocabulary, namely by reviewing the learning system which is employed to serve words-double check. However, the data also mentioned that most respondents feel dissatisfactions; those are recorded in the following statements:

“The disadvantage of Memrise application is that the network is not good, sometimes the network makes learning in the application delayed” (P01 of Q4)

“The disadvantage of this application is that the pronunciation is still too fast for beginners”. (P02 of Q4)

“The disadvantage of this application is that it can't translate Indonesian like the translate application”. (P13 of Q4)

“The disadvantage of this application in my opinion is that sometimes the sound is late” (P18 of Q5).

“The disadvantage of Memrise app is that I think the scoring is quite a bit”. (P20 of Q4)

In contrast, the blackness of the Memrise application is that it relies on a stable network which causes frequent delays in learning English vocabulary. It is suggested that learning vocabulary effectively should be in a stable network area. Meanwhile, accent usage is quite arduous for beginners and requires comprehending vocabulary while learning. Likewise, this application does not have a translation feature that can assist students in better understanding the meaning of the words being studied. Alongside, the audio sound that occasionally sounds late makes low comprehension with the pronunciation of the words. It links with the study by Karjo and Andriani (2018) who discovered that audio choices and word translations included the challenges in the Memrise application used. However, other perspectives such Jackson and Amvela (2007) criticized the lack of translation trouble; it can be prevented by exerting the





dictionary to seek the meaning of unknown words. The final point is that the scores given are quietly lacking as one of the shortcomings of this application which extinguished students' motivations in learning English vocabulary using the Memrise application.

### **3.5 Students' perceptions of behavioral intention learning with Memrise app**

The variety of responses proved that the majority of students access the Memrise application to learn vocabulary based on convenience and possible situations such as in the morning, evening, afternoon, and so on. It can be seen in the following quotations:

"I usually do it in the afternoon around 2 hours because it is more comfortable while relaxing. I don't like to access this app at night or during the day because of many activities". (P01 of Q5)

"I prefer to study at night because it is more comfortable and the longest I study is an hour". (P05 of Q5).

"I accessed the application during the day, because my brain can learn better, than at night, because the night can be used for taking a rest". (P16 of Q5)

"The time I used to learn Memrise is in the morning because there is no busy schedule, and the time I it's less than 5 minutes". (P19 of Q5).

"I am in any comfortable situation to learn English vocabulary using the Memrise application, in a day I can spend 1-2 hours using the Memrise application". (P18 of Q5)

The above data reported that most students are comfortable learning in the afternoon while relaxing. Relaxing made them enjoy learning with the Memrise application. Furthermore, students learn at night due to more comfort and without distractions. Another pertinent point, students accessed the Memrise application at noon because the brain works more effectively that indicates stores, and understands vocabulary well. Another interesting point to consider is that students learned vocabulary in the morning due to no other activities which enables more focus on learning vocabulary. The final point, students access the Memrise application to learn vocabulary in any situation. Those data evince that each student has divergent perceptions in locating their learning atmospheres. This is commensurate with the study by Zoghi and Deghan (2012) who stated that students learning vocabulary with Memrise application have a role as an active learning manager.

In this case, the students' behavioral intentions in learning are concerning students' self-regulated learning. This self-regulated learning phenomenon is in line with the prelude study undertaken by Fathi, Alipour, and Saeedian (2018) who discovered that learners self-regulate their own pace of learning vocabulary through the Memrise application which enables them to customize their learning and access the materials anywhere and anytime as long as they have a stable network. In conclusion, this Memrise application promotes the self-regulated learning concept which is one of the current learning style discussions in education nowadays. In addition, the Memrise application is not meant to replace direct language instruction, but its purpose to serve as an effective supplement to state language instruction (Abarghou & Taki, 2018).



## CONCLUSION

This study reports that the students' perceived increasing their vocabulary positively through constructing words and sentences and memorizing either high or low-frequency words. Other than that, students are entertained in learning vocabulary utilizing Memrise applications by learning like playing games; words daily target, scoring system, and learning with videos. In addition, students are well perceived of interesting features such as guides' pronunciations, videos, audio, and reviewing learning systems. However, there is a respondent who perceived those long lessons occasionally created a lackluster learning atmosphere.

This study also revealed that students perceived that Memrise assisted them in practicing receptive and productive aptitude such as speaking with friends, learning to compose sentences, drill pronunciation, and listening to the audio. Furthermore, Memrise application provoked students to be self-directed learners, in that case, the finding showed that each student has inconclusive occasion in learning, there is in the evening due to more comfortable, in the morning to start the day by learning vocabulary, in the noon which is suitable because the brain works effectively for feeding the brain with words, and also in the afternoon while relaxing. Hence, students have perceived that the Memrise application is suitable for learning vocabulary for the non-English major studies programs.

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