

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF U- DICTIONARY TO SUPPORT VOCABULARY RETENTION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out the students' perception on the use of U-Dictionary toward the vocabulary ability. In research, a well-structured research design is essential. The results of this study indicate that students' perceptions of the use of U-Dictionary were generally positive. The majority of respondents stated that U-Dictionary is effective in helping their vocabulary ability, especially because of features. Contextual features such as example sentences and synonyms play an important role in vocabulary retention. Accessibility was the main reason for using U-Dictionary. The app's ability to be used in offline mode was considered a major advantage, especially for students with limited internet access. U-Dictionary has a greater impact on their vocabulary ability and reading comprehension, but is less significant in developing overall speaking and writing skills. Preferably students can maximize to utilizing U-Dictionary not only as an instant translation tool, but also actively utilizing supporting features.

Keywords: Students, Perception, U-Dictionary, Vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary retention remains a critical challenge for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as it underpins long-term language proficiency, communicative competence, and overall academic success. Many EFL students face difficulties in this area due to insufficient exposure, ineffective memorization techniques, and limited opportunities for real-world practice (Dan et al., 2024b)

In the Indonesian context, EFL learners often struggle with vocabulary retention because traditional classroom instruction emphasizes grammar rules over practical vocabulary building and application. This imbalance results in students who are proficient in structural aspects but deficient in lexical depth, making it challenging for them to sustain vocabulary knowledge beyond immediate lessons (D. Wulandari & Handayani, 2020). Factors such as large class sizes teacher-centered approaches, and limited access to authentic English materials exacerbate this issue, leading to high rates of vocabulary attrition among

university students. (Çakmak et al., 2021). Consequently, there is a pressing need for innovative interventions that can support sustained vocabulary learning in this demographic.

Mobile apps enable learners to engage with vocabulary through multimedia elements, gamification, and on-demand access, which can enhance memory consolidation and recall (Meniado, 2023). Studies have demonstrated that such tools foster self-directed learning, increase motivation, and improve retention rates compared to conventional methods. (Richardson, n.d. 2025).

Specifically, mobile dictionary applications serve as efficient aids for vocabulary retention by offering instant definitions, pronunciation guides, example sentences, and collocation information. These features minimize cognitive disruptions during learning and promote deeper processing of words, which is essential for long-term retention (Dan et al., 2024).

U-Dictionary, a popular mobile dictionary app, stands out for its comprehensive features tailored to language learners, including offline translation in 58 languages, Oxford dictionary integrations, word games, and practice exercises. These elements align well with retention strategies such as spaced repetition and gamified learning, potentially enhancing users' ability to maintain vocabulary knowledge. For instance, studies on Indonesian students have shown improvements in vocabulary acquisition through U-Dictionary, but the focus has often been on immediate gains rather than sustained retention.

From several studies about students' perception on the use of u-dictionary, the author has found some results regarding this topic. The research by Sri Wulandari (2022) aims to find out whether there is a significant influence on the vocabulary mastery of class II students at SMP N 10 Tapung who used U-Dictionary compared to students who did not use U-Dictionary. Researchers conducted tests in the form of pretest and posttest vocabulary mastery to measure students' vocabulary mastery. There is a significant difference between the vocabulary mastery of students who use U-Dictionary and those who do not. Then research from Azhar Zaki (2023) on 4th semester students with the PGSD study program from Makassar University, researchers looking to know about what usage The U-Dictionary digital dictionary is effective or not for improving non-English students' vocabulary mastery. This research uses pretest and posttest, based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that the use of the U-Dictionary digital dictionary is effective in teaching vocabulary.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' perception on the use of U-Dictionary to support vocabulary retention.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Perception is the process through which we interpret the world around us based on sensory input, cognitive filters, and previous experiences that shape how we view the environment (Bower, 2002). According to Qiong (2017) perception can be broken down into several key stages, which are interconnected and often occur simultaneously in our brain. These stages include: sensation, organization, and interpretation.

Vocabulary learning is such an important aspect to learning a foreign language, especially English. Vocabulary plays an important role when learning a language, both first language and second language (Yudha & Mandasari, 2021). According to Montgomery (2007) vocabulary development begins with the acquisition of spoken vocabulary (listening and speaking), which forms an essential foundation for the subsequent building of written vocabulary (reading and writing). There are the 4 types of vocabulary: Listening Vocabulary, Speaking Vocabulary, Reading Vocabulary, and Writing Vocabulary.

U-Dictionary is a versatile and user-friendly word translation application that can be easily downloaded and installed on smartphones. It is designed to help users quickly translate words, phrases, or even full sentences between a wide variety of languages. One of its key features is the ability to function both online and offline (Li, 2022). Advantages of U-Dictionary: User-Friendly Interface, Great for Language Learners, and Supports Multiple Languages, Offline Access, Accurate Translations, and Free and Ad-Free (Premium Version)

METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative design. In this research, there is only one variable that is the focus, namely Students' Perception on the use of the U-Dictionary to Support Vocabulary Retention. These research was conducted in English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University. The respondents of this research were fourth-semester undergraduate English Education students of Sriwijaya University for the 2024/2025 academic year, who often had tight academic schedules. A total of 40 students participated in the study, drawn from four different classes: Palembang A, Palembang B, Indralaya A, and Indralaya B, with each class consisting of 10 students. The researcher used purposive sampling. In this research, data were collected through a semi-structured interview method.

FINDING

U-Dictionary was seen as most impactful on receptive skills (reading comprehension and vocabulary retention), with limited effects on productive skills (speaking and writing).

R3 explained:

‘...bukan cuman arti dari kosakata aja yang ditampilkan tapi juga kaya contoh kalimat terus penggunaan dari kosakatanya juga.’ (*‘not only the meaning of the vocabulary but also provides example sentences and the usage of the vocabulary.’*)

R3 added:

‘...you don’t just get the meaning, but also get the example sentences and synonyms, which helps you understand how to use that word.’

Respondents identified several advantages over the other English learning apps. The offline mode feature was the most frequently mentioned advantage, especially considering the limited internet access students sometimes experience.

R2 stated:

‘...U-Dictionary itu lebih praktis karrena dia bisa dipake buat offline...’ (*‘...U-Dictionary is more practical because it can be used in offline.’*)

R28 also stated that she rarely has internet quotas, so U-Dictionary is kinda helpful.

‘Aku sendiri tuh biasanya jarang punya kuota internet. Nah, kebetulan aplikasi ini tuh bisa disediakan offline. Jadi, itu salah satu kelebihanannya sih.’ (*‘I rarely have internet quota. Well, this application can be provided offline. So, that’s one of its advantages.’*)

Despite its various advantages, respondents also identified several shortcomings in the U-Dictionary application. Excessively intrusive advertisements were the most dominant complaint, expressed by 32 out of 40 respondents (80%).

R21 complained:

‘...cuman masalahnya itu aplikasi ini sering banget munculin banyak iklan apalagi kalo misalnya kita lagi on kuota atau wifi yang mana kadang-kadang mengganggu...’ (*‘...the problem is, this application very often shows many ads, especially when we are using quota or wifi, which sometimes quite disturbing.’*)

R32 stated even more strongly:

‘I think only one thing that always piss me off, that is the advertisement...’

The accuracy of translations for complex sentences and idioms was also a concern for many respondents.

Most respondents (40 respondents) reported that using U-Dictionary had the most significant impact on reading comprehension and vocabulary retention but had less impact on speaking and writing skills.

As R12 reported:

‘...dia kan ada history pencarian dari setiap kata yang pernah kita cari, menurutku cukup membantu aku untuk preview kata-kata baru maupun yang sudah pernah aku cari. Jadi ya skills vocabulary aku lumayan improve sih.’ (*‘...it has a search history for every word we have ever looked up, which I find quite*

helpful for reviewing both new and previously searched words. So, my vocabulary skills have improved somewhat.')

R23 qualified her experience:

'Untuk pemahaman vocabulary lumayan meningkat, karena lumayan ngefek juga di pemahaman arti kalimat secara keseluruhan... untuk skills yang lain kaya listening ataupun speaking kayanya ga terlalu ngefek sih.' (*'Understanding of vocabulary has increased somewhat, because it has quite an effect on understanding the meaning of sentences as a whole... for other skills like listening or speaking it doesn't seem have much of an effect.'*)

The majority of respondents (30 out of 40) rated U-Dictionary as a fairly interesting application for learning English, primarily due to its clean interface and additional features like quizzes and learning videos.

As R10 stated:

'Yes, I think it is. I like the extra feature like articles and learning video.'

R7 added:

'Menarik sih untuk aku, karena tampilannya simple dan dia bisa dipake offline.' (*'For me its interesting because the application's display is simple and it can be used offline.'*)

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that students perceive U-Dictionary positively as a supportive tool for vocabulary retention, aligning with principles of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) that emphasize contextual exposure and repeated practice for long-term recall. The high perceived effectiveness (87.5%) stems from features like example sentences and synonyms, which facilitate deeper processing and contextual learning key in vocabulary retention (Nation, 2001). This echoes recent studies showing that mobile dictionary apps enhance retention through multimedia and contextual aids (Klimova & Polakova, 2020).

Frequency of usage emerged as a critical mediator: regular users reported stronger retention benefits, supporting evidence that consistent engagement with MALL tools amplifies outcomes via space; like repetition through history quizzes

Advantages such as offline access address contextual barriers in EFL settings like Indonesia, where internet limitations are common, making the app practical for sustained use (Simonnet, 2025). However, shortcomings like advertisement and translation inaccuracies reduced motivation and disrupted flow, consistent with perception that technical distractions impede engagement in mobile vocabulary. The app's stronger impact on repetitive over productive skills reflects its design as a lexical resource rather than a full production platform, aligning with findings that mobile dictionaries excel in retention boarder skill development mixed

engagement (interest vs. boredom) underscores that need for varied features to maintain motivation over time.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to explore students' perceptions of the use of U-Dictionary toward the vocabulary ability. The interview results showed that:

- a) The majority of respondents stated that U-Dictionary is effective in helping their vocabulary ability, especially because of features.
- b) Contextual features such as example sentences and synonyms play an important role in vocabulary retention.
- c) Accessibility was the main reason for using U-Dictionary.

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