

## UPGRADING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY THROUGH "MEMRISE" APP

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss some underlying theories and previous studies of vocabulary learning using online app. Vocabulary is a pivotal tool to master all of skills in English language. However, the fact reveals that this English component is neglected, and it is worsened with inappropriate teaching method which influences students' insufficient vocabulary. To solve the problem, online learning medium is the most proper solution for students to learn vocabulary individually. One of learning media that is believed to help students in English learning individually is Memrise. Memrise is an application through mobile learning that can expand the students' vocabulary beyond school time. In addition, Memrise is created in an educational application; therefore, it will engage the students in a fun learning experience. Thus, this paper comes to describe the theory of vocabulary and to describe the type of media for vocabulary learning. Furthermore, this paper will answer some questions about what is Memrise?, why do students need to use Memrise?, and how do students apply the application?. Previous studies will be provided in the next discussion to emphasize the effectiveness of Memrise. Then, it is expected that the paper can give a recommendation to use a good mobile assisted language learning for the English students to expand their vocabulary.

*Keywords: vocabulary; learning media; Memrise*

### Introduction

*"... While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed."*

*-Wilkins(as cited in Akdogan, 2018)*

As a quote stated by Wilkins above, without grammar a person still can understand a little bit of something; however, without vocabulary a person will not understand anything at all. In other words, vocabulary plays an important role in an English language, even vocabulary is assumed as the key all of the English skills. It is in line with Alqahtani (2015) who states that being the key language teaching, vocabulary plays an important role in English learning. It is also supported by Richards and Renandya (2002) who state that as a center of language ability, vocabulary presents as a language basic to measure the learners' capability in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Having good lexical knowledge will contrive students to understand English easily such as being easy to understand a text in reading skill, getting a convenience to comprehend what they hear in listening skill, feeling untroubled to write something in writing skill, and having an ease to communicate in speaking skill. Similarly, Asyiah (2017)

in her study states that students will be easy to master all of English skills if they possess an extensive vocabulary. Shortly, vocabulary knowledge is the determiner of students' success in English learning. It implies that having an extensive vocabulary means mastering English language.

However, in reality, not a few teachers underestimate the crucial role of vocabulary in English. Many studies found that lack of vocabulary is more influenced from teachers' learning method. Commonly, many teachers ignore vocabulary teaching in ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom; however, vocabulary teaching and learning is the continual problem that must be faced by teachers (Akdogan, 2018). One of the studies which is conducted by Akdogan (2018) notes that there are two main misconception teachers' learning method in vocabulary learning: using memorization method and having uninteresting learning process. Many vocabulary experts state that memorization method is ineffective to upgrade students' vocabulary as the students will forget the words that have been memorized in a short time later. In addition, the students will not understand part of speech of words that they have been recalled and cannot determine whether it is a noun, verb, adjective and so on. Another problem that affects students' vocabulary learning is the teacher has an uninteresting learning process. Making an interesting learning process is truly essential to raise students' enthusiasm in learning process. On the contrary, the fact tells that many students do not pay attention and feel bored with what their teacher explanations are in vocabulary learning. Therefore, the students do not learn well. A successful class is determined by how the teacher manages the class so that the students can comprehend the lesson simply. Teaching learning method is truly essential aspect to establish a success language learning class (Arung, 2016).

To overcome the problem, the students need an appropriate learning medium to learn individually out of the class to optimize their learning. The employing smartphone application is presumed as the effective way to possess an extensive vocabulary for the students. It is because in this Industrial Era 4.0, students as the millennial generation cannot be separated from their smartphones. Nowadays, smartphones can be utilized in language learning. Abarghoui and Taki (2018) state that people nowadays truly demand smartphone or other technology devices for the approaches of mobile language learning. Then, it is supported by Affandi and Syafi'i (2018) that some learning methods can be obtained by utilizing technology to expand the students' vocabulary knowledge. It means that technology advancement has changed learning paradigm in technology based learning; therefore, technology will make the students easier to learn something in English. This convenience is marked by created vocabulary application such as Memrise.

Based on the fact above, the writer is interested to present some theories and studies on how to upgrade students' vocabulary through Memrise application. Then, it is expected that this paper will be able to give a good recommendation for students' vocabulary mastery in English learning.

## **Theories of Vocabulary**

Due to vocabulary plays an essential role in foreign language, it will be better if students know the theories of vocabulary to avoid misunderstanding of vocabulary learning so that students can know how to upgrade their vocabulary. Definitions of vocabulary, types of vocabulary and difficulties in vocabulary learning will be explained below.

### ***Definitions of Vocabulary***

There are many definitions of vocabulary that have been stated by researchers. Ur (1991) states "Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than a single word: for example, *post office* and *mother-in-law*, which

are made up of two or three words but express a single idea.” (p.60). While Hatch and Brown (1995) defines “The term *Vocabulary* refers to a list or set of words for a particular language or a list or set of words that individual speakers of a language might use.” (p.1). Finally, vocabulary according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary is “a sum or stock of words employed by a language, group, individual, or work or in a field of knowledge.” <[www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com) [Accessed: May 31, 2019]>. Based on those definitions, it can be concluded that vocabulary is a numerous of words that become a core aspect in a foreign language which speaker use in any condition. By possessing rich vocabulary, it will assist students to communicate effectively and confidently. In other words, abundant vocabulary will give a big influence in a student’s speaking success.

### ***Types of Vocabulary***

As stated by Hieber and Kamil (2005), vocabulary can be categorized into two types: oral and print vocabulary and productive and receptive vocabulary

#### ***1. Oral and Print Vocabulary***

Oral vocabulary can be defined as a list of words that the learners know the meaning when they use those words to communicate with others orally. Students can be considered that they are using oral vocabulary when they are speaking with his/her friends or a teacher spontaneously. This kind of vocabulary is usually formed since they get used to employ some words every day in a simple conversation. Meanwhile, print vocabulary refers to numerous of words that the learners are able to understand the meaning when they write or read something silently. Generally, print vocabulary consists of more academic vocabulary than oral vocabulary which is applied in formal situations such as in school, in office, and other legal situations.

#### ***2. Productive and Receptive Vocabulary***

Productive vocabulary can be noted as words that consist of common and ordinary words and employed routinely which is utilized in speaking and writing. Basically, productive vocabulary has the same form as oral vocabulary. Conversely, receptive vocabulary can be addressed as words which contain less familiar and less frequently applied; nonetheless, the learners may be able to comprehend the words’ meaning in listening and reading skill. Receptive vocabulary generally can be found in an official situation or a scientific text such as in a conference or in a scientific article. However, students do not use those kinds of vocabulary spontaneously.

### ***Difficulties in Vocabulary Learning***

Thornbury (as cited in Rohmatillah, 2008) proposes some aspects that contrive students in vocabulary learning problems. They are as follows:

#### ***1. Pronunciation***

Many experts state that a word that has a difficult form to pronounce will contrive learners hard to recall the word. According to Brozak (2019), some example of difficult words to pronounce are: mischievous, draught, quinoa, onomatopoeia, and so on <[www.rd.com](http://www.rd.com) [Accessed: May 31, 2019]>. The form of those words have quite difficult to pronounce; moreover, students are unfamiliar with those words. While, the fact is human memory will be easy to remember something if it has a simple form and easy to pronounce.

#### ***2. Spelling***

The fallacy cause of pronunciation or spelling is often from sounds-spelling discrepancy evensometimes students are difficult to learn a word due to them. Silent letters of a word additionally become another problem for students in spelling for vocabulary learning such as foreign, listen, headache, climbing, bored, honest, cupboard, muscle, etc.

3. Length and complexity

Substantially, long and short words have no difference to learn since most of long words have short form that are more often found by students. It always happens in learners' vocabulary because the learners are often difficult to learn words when they discover the length and more complex one.

4. Grammar

Another distress is how to link grammar and a word so that it has a correct structure and a meaning in a sentence. Mostly, students are confused with some verbs like *enjoy*, *love*, or *hope* that can be followed by an infinitive (to swim) or an -ing pattern (swimming). In other words, Grammar can make students difficult in vocabulary learning.

5. Meaning

Learners are often confused of two words that have the same meaning of a case in point. For example, it usually happens between the word "make" and word "do": you *make breakfast* and *make an appointment*, but you *do the housework* and *do a questionnaire*.

6. Range, Connotation and Idiomaticity

The last difficulties in vocabulary learning is a word that has a general meaning that can be used in every context is considered easier by students than a word that has specific meaning accordance the context. For example, learners prefer to use the word "put" than use words that have specific meaning like *impose*, *place*, *position*, etc. The same difficulty occurs in connotation word. Word *propaganda* has negative connotation in English, but it has a meaning *publicity*. It also comes in idiomatic word (like *make up your mind*, *keep an eye on...*) will contrive learners difficult to comprehend the meaning than (decide, watch).

### Media for Vocabulary Learning

According to Indrasari et al, (2018), media for vocabulary learning can be divided into three types: visual, audio, and video.

1. Visual

Visual media for vocabulary learning is the most believed to upgrade vocabulary mastery. The type of this media is usually in book form. When a student has a hobby to read a book, she/he will have an extensive vocabulary continuingly. However, visual media are assumed as the most boring media to enrich vocabulary knowledge.

2. Audio

The second media is audio. This kind of media learning is in oral form. This media is used to improve students' vocabulary through for example an English song, English radio, language laboratory, English compact disk, etc.; moreover, it is quite succeeded to build students' enthusiasm in the vocabulary learning process.

3. Video

The last one is video media. Video media are the combination between visual and audio media such as in film form or short video form. This kind of media is considered the most interesting for students as it will make them enjoy the learning process.

### What Is Memrise?

Memrise according to [www.memrise.com](http://www.memrise.com), can be described as a language learning application that has different form with textbook teaching in a fun and beneficial learning. [Accessed: June 1, 2019]. According to Karjo and Andriani (2018), Memrise is created in 2005 and released in 2013 by Ed Cooke, a Grand Master of Memory, Ben Whately, and Greg Detre, a Princeton neuroscientist specializing in the science of memory and forgetting. The app provides more than 150 languages courses from 25 languages and it is accessible in some languages such as English, Korean, French, Spanish, Japanese, German, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Arabic, Dutch, Indonesian, Italian, Polish, and Turkish. In addition, it almost has the same arrangement with Duolingo application and over 20 million users have registered to this remarkable app. Like other application, Memrise has a slogan to make the users interesting to apply the app. It is “Unleash your learning superpower”.

Memrise has some features that consist of visual, audio and video media. In terms of features or item that is used to challenge Memrise’ users, Karjo and Andriani (2018) classify the challenge features or item into five types: word translation, the flashcards, challenge for audio choices, the typing question, and phrase translation.

#### 1. Word Translation

The word translation is the easiest question in Memrise. In this section, Memrise provides four to six answer boxes. The user has to choose similar meaning with the question word among some answer boxes. Memrise will give a big check mark if the user can answer correctly.

#### 2. The Flashcards

The next item is the flashcard. This item is created to help the user to recall a word that has been learned. Flashcard will appear after word translation challenge. The user can type anything in the flashcard to remember the word. Memrise do not always help the user to make a flashcard; therefore, the users have double tasks: make their own flashcard and memorize new words by themselves. Practically, many users avoid to contrive a flashcard.

#### 3. Challenge for Audio Choices

Memrise provides three audio choices in this challenge. Memrise’ user will be asked to choose one of audio choices in accordance with question words that have been given. To answer the question, users can click one by one the audio and listen the audio sound. Furthermore, user must tap the right answers and click “next”. Memrise’ user will be given the answer key directly by showing green color on the correct answer and red color for a wrong answer.

#### 4. The Typing Challenge

In this section, users have to type what they listen from audio voice. Memrise will train the user’ listening ability. For example, if the user listens *ti*, then she/he has to type *ti* on the answer place.

#### 5. The Phrase Translation

Memrise will give the user phrase of words as a question. Below the question, there are five answer choices that consist of a word of each answer and has different translation. The user has to

choose the correct one which has the same meaning as the question. Memrise will always ask the user to contrive a flashcard after this challenge section to recall the phrase.

### Why Do Students Need to Use Memrise?

Researches such as Nushi and Eqbali (2017), Reed and Hooper (2018), Abarghoui and Taki (2018) and others have noted that the most crucial reason why Memrise is the most acceptable application for students to possess a rich vocabulary in foreign language especially in English is that it is designed in the gamification learning process. Gamification of a learning media has been proven to build students' enthusiasm in learning. Memrise will contrive students like playing to plant a flower seed. Every correct answer will assist the seed to grow until fully blooming. In reality, many students have given a positive response for Memrise after they apply it. One of the students that has interviewed by Reed and Hooper (2018, p. 363) says that "it is easy for me to see that my vocabulary is 'growing'". In other words, the students will be in enjoyable learning without losing their "daily streak" and experience in a different situation than classroom through Memrise.

### How Do Students Apply the Application?

To apply the application, Memrise can be downloaded in Smartphones or IOS devices from Google play/iTunes. The steps to apply the app are as follows:

1. Students can register at [www.decks.memrise.com](http://www.decks.memrise.com) to make sure that the application is in English-Indonesian language settings.
2. After registering an account on the website, students can apply the application directly and tap "sign in now". Students do not need to choose language that they want to learn because it has been chosen when they register on the website. (See Figure 1)



Figure 1

3. Next, Memrise will ask the student's account to log in. Students can choose an account that is used in the registration section (see Figure 2).
4. After students have succeeded to log in, Memrise will display some items. To start the learning process, students can tap item "KATA DAN FRASA" (see Figure 3).

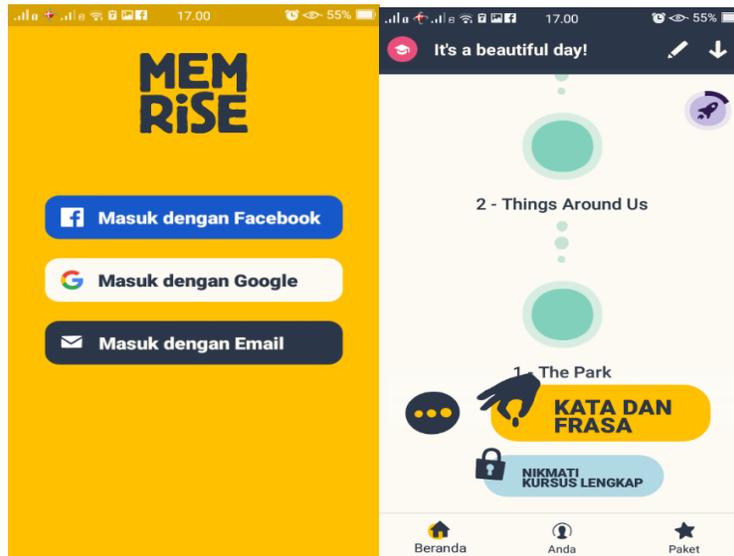


Figure 2. Student's account to log in  
 Figure 3. Some items before playing games

Literally, Memrise has many types of games to enrich students' vocabulary; therefore, students can feel fun learning experience during the games.

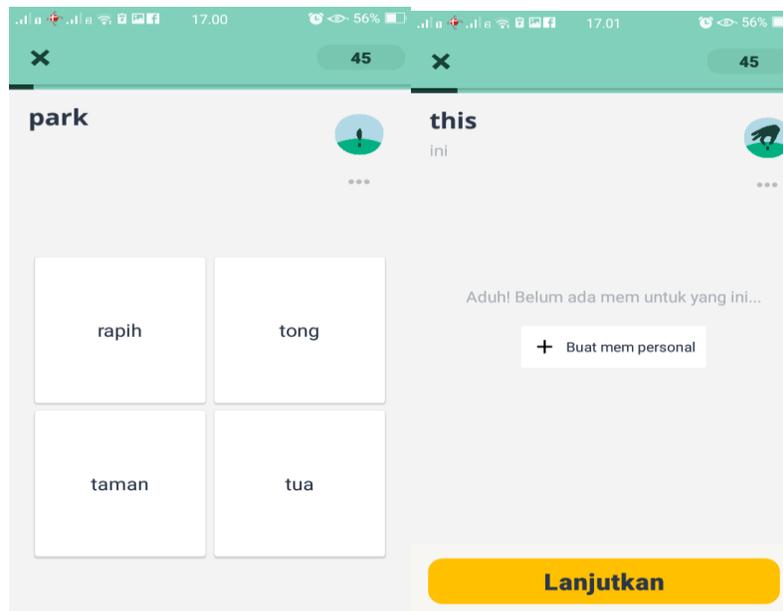


Figure 4. Word Translation Challenge

Figure 5. The Flashcard Item

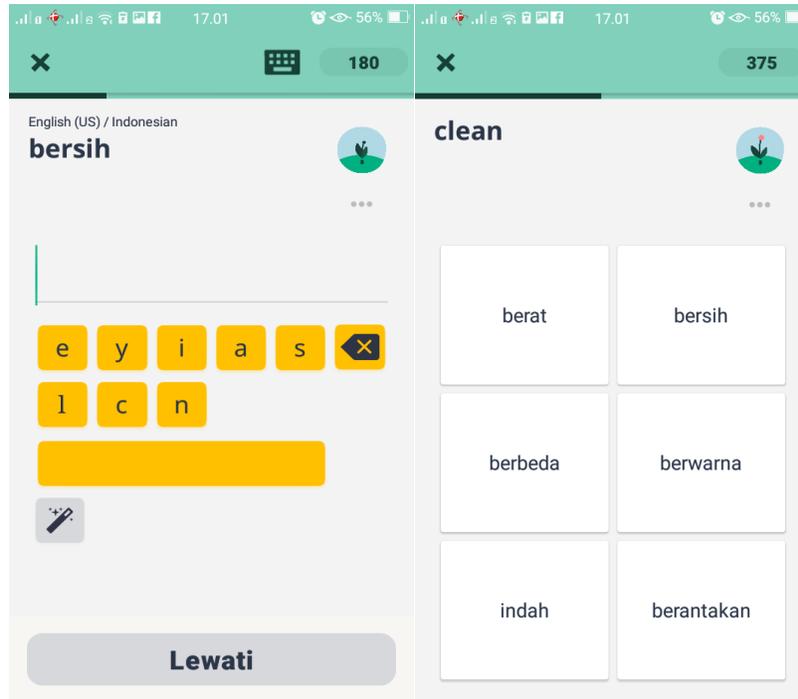


Figure 6. The Typing Challenge

Figure 7. The word Translation

### Previous Studies About Memrise Application

To emphasize the effectiveness of applying Memrise application to upgrade students' vocabulary, some related previous researchers on the effectiveness of Memrise will be discussed below.

The first study is done by Walker under a title "The Impact of Using Memrise on Students' Perceptions of Learning Latin Vocabulary and on Long-Term Memory of Words". The research is conducted in 2016 with subject eight students in years 8-11. To measure the effectiveness of Memrise, Walker used two methodologies: quantitative which is to compare students' vocabulary through Memrise and their normal self-study habits and qualitative which is to observe students' self-study habits and students' learning experience of applying Memrise. The aim of the research is to know whether Memrise is more effective in improving students' vocabulary test performance. The result tells over the Latin students reveal that Memrise is more effective to enrich their vocabulary even it has memorably for year 8 and 9 students.

The second study entitled "Measuring the Effectiveness of Using "Memrise" on High School Students' Perceptions of Learning EFL" is conducted by Abarghoui and Taki. The participants are divided into two groups, direct instruction group and control group, with 18 students each group which carried out in 2018. This purpose of the study is to analyze the students' opinion of direct instruction effectiveness of Mobile Assisted Learning Language (MALL). The data is obtained students' post-intervention perception in week 6. The result shows that Memrise is assumed highly effective as an instructional resource than direct instruction.

The last research is conducted by Reed and Hooper with 27 participants from two different classes which have different method of learning. One of the groups used original English definitions and the another group applied Japanese translation. The study is carried out in 2018 under a title “Student Perceptions of Mobile Learning of High frequency Vocabulary Using “Memrise” App”. The aim of the study is to compare two classes of EFL Japanese university students studying vocabulary from the New General Service List (NGSL) through Memrise which is measured in time sheets, questionnaires, and interviews. The researches have two results on their study: positive affect and negative affect. Those students from English-Japanese group mostly give positive response for Memrise. On the other hand, English-English students mostly give negative response on the applying Memrise.

Based on those studies, the results show positive result of the use Memrise to upgrade students’ vocabulary; therefore, it is clear that Memrise is considered as a great application to enrich students’ vocabulary in fun learning experience.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

Many studies about the use technology as vocabulary learning media have been presented nowadays even it will be more developed to find the best learning appliance technology based for students’ needs to face era that always changes every time. Memrise is one of development learning media evidence that has proven its effectiveness in language learning. Applying the application, it offers a different atmosphere in the learning process. Additional advantages are quicker to access, easy to use, and flexible. Limited internet access is the main problem of Memrise; therefore, the students must have internet access every time. Although it provides an interesting learning method and some advantages, students’ vocabulary will not upgrade if they do not use the application continually. Hopefully, many EFL teachers suggest their students to employ Memrise beyond school time so that students become more ready to study in the classroom. For next researches, the writer expects to examine the application further so that the students will be more interested to apply Memrise.

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