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Students' Perceptions of WordUp Utilization in Vocabulary Learning

Gilang Hizbullah[1*], Rahmah Fithriani[1]
[1]English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia.
✉ Author Corresponding: gilanghizbullah0304211022@uinsu.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Given the increasing role of mobile technology in language education, understanding students' perceptions of gamified vocabulary applications is essential for optimizing their effectiveness in EFL contexts. This study aims to explore junior high school students' perceptions of the WordUp application as a digital tool for enhancing vocabulary mastery and to identify its contributions to the field of mobile-assisted language learning. Employing a phenomenological approach, the research involved observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation with 12 students from an Islamic junior high school in Sumatra, Indonesia, and the data were analyzed by thematic analysis. The findings indicate that students generally reported positive experiences, including engaging and enjoyable learning activities, gamified vocabulary practice that fosters intrinsic motivation among teenagers, authentic multimodal contexts that support comprehension, and noticeable improvement in vocabulary mastery. Nevertheless, several challenges emerged, such as information overload, which sometimes hindered retention, and limited content coverage that did not always align with students' immediate learning needs. The study underscores the significant role of mobile applications in facilitating language learning and offers practical recommendations for improving the user experience of WordUp to better accommodate learners' preferences. By providing empirical insights into students' experiences, this research contributes to the understanding of how gamified mobile applications can be optimized to enhance vocabulary acquisition in English as a foreign language contexts.

Keywords: Gamified Learning; MALL; Students Perceptions; Vocabulary Acquisition; WordUp Application.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a world that is increasingly interconnected, where English serves as a global lingua franca, vocabulary mastery emerges as a pivotal facet of English language acquisition. The absence of adequate vocabulary impedes the process of learning English (Alqahtani, 2015). Vocabulary functions as a conduit between cognitive processes and linguistic expression (Wu, 2024). Without sufficient vocabulary, language learners will undoubtedly get lost and confused, unable to express their feelings and ideas when speaking, reading, writing, and listening. The acquisition of a language is contingent upon the mastery of its fundamental vocabulary (Rahimova & Dauletova, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative to emphasize the pivotal role of vocabulary in attaining proficiency in English, particularly in the contemporary digital era where information is disseminated through a myriad of media platforms (Meara, 1980).

Therefore, students must overcome challenges in building their vocabulary (Hasan, 2024). Lack of exposure to new words, the complexity of word meanings, and the requirement for constant repetition to reinforce learning are some of the challenges that frequently accompany the vocabulary acquisition process (Hasan, 2024). Although easy words are generally easier to remember than harder ones, the more difficult new terms can achieve higher accuracy in subsequent recall when fully mastered during training than the easier familiar words. This finding emphasizes how important it is to lay a strong foundation during early learning in order to overcome obstacles and enhance long-term retention (Rosyada-As & Apoko, 2023). It is imperative to acknowledge that the pressure of academic expectations and the fast-paced nature of modern education can further complicate students' efforts to expand their vocabulary (Kaphle, 2024). Consequently, it is essential to provide students with targeted support and innovative tools, such as mobile applications, that can facilitate their vocabulary acquisition and help them face these challenges more effectively (Simonnet et al., 2024).

The concept of MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) leverages the features of mobile devices to assist both teachers and students in the language teaching and learning process. Its handheld model makes it easier for teachers to carry out ELT activities either beyond or outside the classroom (Fithriani, 2021), and in recent years, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) tools have become increasingly popular for vocabulary acquisition, offering interactive, flexible, and engaging ways to learn new words (Lin & Lin, 2019). Using MALL can help overcome the constraints of time and place when it comes to teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, mobile devices are an integral tool for human beings, assisting with daily activities (Seroja Br Ginting & Fithriani, 2021). Thus, MALL enables students to access vocabulary materials anywhere and at any time via an app designed specifically to reinforce the recall of new words through spaced repetition and instant feedback (Koleini et al., 2024).

Concurrent with the evolution of educational technology, numerous studies have been conducted to evaluate the efficacy of mobile applications in learning English. With the rapid advancement of educational technology, there has been a growing body of research examining the effectiveness of mobile applications in enhancing language learning outcomes (Hao et al., 2021). Furthermore, numerous mobile applications have adopted these strategies, demonstrating greater effectiveness compared to traditional methods (Melati et al., 2024). These studies further emphasizes that mobile apps have been found to significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition through interactive exercises, multimedia features, and spaced repetition algorithms, providing contextualized learning experiences and immediate feedback (Lei et al., 2022). One such application is WordUp, which has been found to assist students in enhancing their vocabulary.

WordUp, an innovative mobile application designed to educate and enhance vocabulary, was created by Geeks Ltd., a London-based, award-winning software firm and the non-profit division of the Geeks Foundation (https://www.wordupapp.co/). WordUp's effective implementation of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is based on four key tenets: contextualized learning, high-frequency and high-utility words, self-assessment, and the discovery of new words (Ebrahimi et al., 2021). The program offers 25,000 words in 25 sets, ranging from the most to the least frequent 1000 words throughout many categories, and is suitable for students of all ages. Aghaei et al. (2021) noted that "Oxford and other trustworthy sources served as the foundation for the creation of these wordlists". WordUp application is a media for learning vocabulary that has been developed for use in the classroom by teachers (Topal, 2024). The application has been designed to facilitate the teaching of new and unusual English words to students, with the objective of making the learning of vocabulary more appealing (Vaseghi et al., 2024). This is

accomplished by offering suggestions for each word along with real-world spoken English examples (Aghaei et al., 2021). Students' interest in the learning process can be increased by the application's innovative and captivating approach to vocabulary acquisition (Maenza & Gajic, 2024).

In addition, prior studies have shown that the WordUp app helps students learn more words. It is a useful tool for learning English. For instance, the WordUp application has been shown to significantly enhance students' vocabulary acquisition through an interactive and personalized learning approach (Maenza & Gajic, 2024). Through features such as self assessment, new word discovery, and word usage in diverse contexts, the app not only helps students in recognize new words but also in understanding their effective usage, then gamification implemented in the app, such as word games, creates a competitive and engaging learning environment, which can increase students' motivation to learn (Topal, 2024). Moreover, previous research shown It has been demonstrated that students tend to hold a favourable opinion of the WordUp application in terms of its efficacy in enhancing their vocabulary acquisition (Vaseghi et al., 2024). Students' enthusiasm for the application reflects their aspiration to incorporate technology into the realm of language learning, as well as their desire for a more innovative and engaging method of vocabulary acquisition (Wu et al., 2020).

While the application offers myriad advantages, some students have also reported challenges, such as difficulty comprehending certain examples, which underscores the necessity for enhanced customization of the content (Aghaei et al., 2021). The findings imply that, while WordUp can raise students' interest and engagement in vocabulary learning, it is vital to constantly analyze and improve the user experience to better meet their learning needs (Iravi & Malmir, 2022). However, these previous studies were conducted in European and West Asian countries with the research subjects at the University level. There are still few previous studies conducted in Indonesia at the junior high school level. To address this gap, this research will focus on junior high school students' perspectives regarding WordUp's ability to help them expand their vocabulary.

In the digital age, this research is important to understand how mobile applications support language learning, especially in improving students' vocabulary. Mobile apps can make learning more engaging and enjoyable, which helps increase students' motivation (Xu & Weng, 2025). Knowing students' perceptions is also important because it helps teachers and developers see how useful and effective the app is from the learners' point of view. Their experiences can show whether the app meets their needs and makes learning easier. This study aims to explore junior high school students' perceptions of using the WordUp application to improve their vocabulary, and to provide new insights into how digital tools can support vocabulary learning in meaningful ways. Because of this, the study seeks to investigate what are students' perspectives on using WordUp to enhance their vocabulary and what are students' obstacles when using WordUp to help improve their vocabulary, thereby contributing to the understanding of mobile learning tools in Indonesian junior high school contexts.

2. METHODS

The purpose of this study is to investigate junior high school students' perspective on using the WordUp app to increase their vocabulary knowledge. Thus, this study using a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. According to Giorgi (2016), phenomenology concentrates on the core of people's experiences of a phenomenon, whereas descriptive research emphasizes current conditions, such as attitudes, behaviors, and perceived impacts. A phenomenological approach was thought to be the most suitable given the goal of the study, which

was to comprehend students' real-life experiences and the difficulties they encounter when using WordUp. It allows the researcher to explore how students engage with and make sense of WordUp in their daily learning, particularly within the context of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL).

The participants of this study are twelve students in the 12-13 age range from a junior high school. Participants were purposively selected based on the following criteria: active use of the WordUp application for at least 2 weeks, the participants' vocabulary proficiency are at the A2 level of English, and availability of smartphone access. The participants consisted of 5 male and 7 female students, with the aim of avoiding perspective bias. This research was conducted in one of the Junior Islamic School in Sumatra, Indonesia. The school integrated Merdeka curriculum with Islamic values, emphasising practical English learning for daily conversation, although it still often relies on conventional methods such as memorisation. It was conducted during the odd semester of the academic year 2024/2025.

Observations and semi-structured interviews and documentations were used to gather the data. Using the WordUp program continuously over a few weeks, participants were asked to submit their learning experiences and reflections over the research period. After students had been using the app on a regular basis, semi-structured interviews were held to provide them the opportunity to elaborate on their thoughts, difficulties, and significant experiences. Between thirty and fifty minutes were allotted for each interview, which was then recorded and transcribed for additional examination. The participants' Indonesian were selected for the interviews in order to guarantee clarity and reduce misunderstandings. This allowed for a deeper comprehension and more genuine answers.

In addition to data analysis, this research utilized thematic analysis. The process begins with familiarizing oneself with the data collected from observations, interviews, and documentation. This step involves reading and re-reading the material to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content. Once the researcher has become familiar with the data, they proceed to the next step: coding. During this phase, the researcher systematically assigns labels to significant segments of the data that reflect relevant ideas or patterns, aligning with the research questions. After coding, the researcher moves on to searching for themes, where similar codes are grouped together to form broader themes that capture key aspects of the data. These identified themes are then defined to ensure they accurately represent the core ideas within the data. Finally, during the reviewing themes stage, the researcher ensures that the themes are coherent and reflective of the data as a whole, making further refinements as needed to enhance consistency and clarity. The figure below exemplifies the process of thematic analysis, as shown in Figure 1. The validity of the data was ensured through triangulation of observations, interviews, and documentation, member checking with participants, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail to support the credibility and trustworthiness of the thematic analysis.

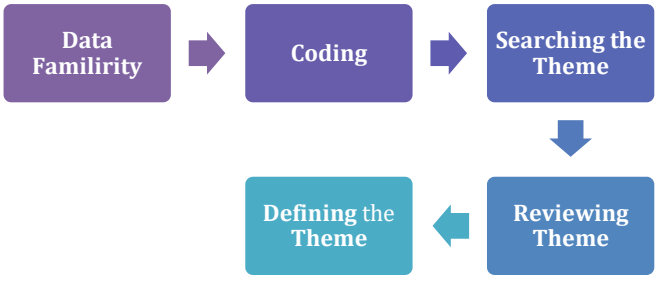

Figure 1. The process of data analysis

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of using WordUp to increase their vocabulary. The data collected in this study can be categorized into two main themes: first, students' perspectives on using WordUp to enhance their vocabulary; and second, the challenges students face when using WordUp to support their vocabulary development. The following are the results of the data analysis related to these two categories.

3.1 Students' Perspective on using *WordUp* to Increase Their Vocabulary

Based on the findings obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation, the researcher found that the participants had positive experiences while using WordUp in learning vocabulary. This was evident through four main themes, namely:

a. Theme 1: Fun Learning

Based on the results of observations conducted during vocabulary learning sessions using the WordUp application, it was found that the learning atmosphere tended to be enjoyable and not monotonous. The students appeared enthusiastic when trying to answer the daily quizzes and exploring the features of WordUp. This finding is supported by an interview with Participant 2, who stated that.

"I find this application very fun, sir, because the content is very exciting, I can learn while playing. (Student 2).

Student 2 revealed that WordUp provides a fun learning experience because it presents material in a game-like format. This format includes features like daily quizzes which made the learning process feel more like playing a game than studying. During the vocabulary sessions, students looked more enthusiastic and focused, especially when using interactive features like daily quizzes. This supports the studied by Ayuba (2025) fun learning experience seemed to reduce boredom and made students more motivated to learn. As a Hootstein (1994) said stimulating student curiosity and establishing relevance can make learning more interesting and relevant for students. In contrast, research conducted by Floria (2023) revealed that technology for learning formats do not always enhance student focus. In their study, some students were distracted by the technology elements and neglected the core instructional content. These findings suggest that while fun learning can boost initial enthusiasm, sustaining engagement requires additional strategies, such as reinforcing the relevance of the material and introducing varied challenges.

b. Theme 2: Gamified Vocabulary Learning that Triggers Intrinsic Motivation in Teen Learners

The role of gamified features in promoting intrinsic motivation was one of the most prominent themes that emerged from students' experiences with the WordUp application. Students described the process as engaging and enjoyable because of the game-like elements incorporated into the app, which seemed to activate internal drives like curiosity, competition, and a sense of accomplishment, which is especially relevant for adolescent learners. It shown from field note observation.

"One student clapped his hands excitedly after seeing his vocabulary score increase and said, 'Mantap! Naik level lagi!' Several others laughed and checked their progress right after." (Field note, observation 2, October 28th, 2024)

Students are independently motivated to interact with the learning material, rather than being driven by external rewards or pressure from teachers. Its suggest that the gamification elements have successfully transformed vocabulary learning into an enjoyable activity. In addition to observation, students revealed these findings in the following interview sessions.

"Each time I learned a word, the app quizzed me in different ways: fill-inthe-blank, multiple choice, and short typing challenges. That variety kept me from getting bored, especially the mini-games where you race against the clock to match words and definitions. I found myself competing with my own high score, trying to beat it every day after school" (Student 3).

Student 3, initially found learning English vocabulary boring, but he changed his perspective after trying WordUp. The program uses colorful cards with illustrations and relatable example sentences, as well as various quizzes, to make the learning process engaging and dynamic. Additionally, speed-fighting mini-games added a competitive element, encouraging the student to regularly improve his scores after school.

Studies show that interactive interfaces, real-world contexts, and gamification can transform the perception of vocabulary memorization from tedious to enjoyable, thereby boosting students' emotional engagement and motivation to expand their vocabulary. WordUp effectively enhances students' intrinsic motivation, turning vocabulary learning into a fun experience by gamified learning. This supports the studied by Yu (2023) that is, gamification contributes positively to the vocabulary acquisition process in high school students. And aligns complements earlier studies by Gajic & Maenza (2020), who maintained that students can benefit from more engaging and pleasurable language learning using interactive mobile applications. Then, the introduction of digital incentives in WordUp, in particular, supports Samortin (2020) claimed that gamified environments encourage sustained learner engagement and retention of information. Hence, the integration of gamification, interactivity, and real-world contexts in mobile applications like WordUp not only fosters greater learner engagement but also reinforces long-term vocabulary retention, making it a powerful tool for modern language education.

c. Theme 3: Authentic Multimodal Context

Authentic multimodal context refers to the use of multiple modes such as text, images, audio, and video to present learning material in varied and meaningful ways. In vocabulary learning, this approach helps students understand words more deeply by connecting definitions with sounds, visuals, and real-life usage. Observations showed that students were focused and engaged when using WordUp, particularly with features as shown in Figure 2, that combined videos and music. These elements made vocabulary learning more enjoyable and effective.

Figure 2. WordUp's music and video features

This was also reflected in the students' verbal responses during interviews. As student 9 explained:
"When the Harry Potter movie footage appeared while the word 'ambitious' was being explained, I immediately thought of Hermione. That's how the word stuck in my head." (Student 9)

Statement student 9 shown that strong character visualizations can serve as effective memory triggers, making words easier to remember. Using visual elements, such as movie trailers or familiar characters, in the English learning process can improve comprehension and recall of new vocabulary. Rather than just reading in textbooks or dictionaries, as stated by student 12.
"The fun thing about WordUp is that it's different from the books we use in school. In WordUp, there are song lyrics with words I've never heard before. Each lyric has a tone and melody that sticks in my head, so I automatically remember the words and their meanings." (Student 12)

Students' experiences suggested that incorporating musical elements into vocabulary learning can enhance memory and comprehension. Participant felt that this approach made learning more enjoyable, relevant, and attention-grabbing than traditional methods. Thus, the WordUp app was effective in providing users with a more interactive and engaging learning experience. The application's use of audiovisual resources, greatly aided in contextualizing language, which improved students' semantic comprehension and memory recal (Karadöller et al., 2024). Many students highlighted how they were able to connect new words with strong emotional resonance or vivid images when they saw or heard them in familiar contexts, such well-known songs or movies. This result is consistent with the dual coding theory, which holds that cognitive processing is

strengthened when verbal and visual stimuli are combined (Sadoski, 2005). Supporting this, Zhou et al. (2025) identified that multimedia input provides depth and relevance to vocabulary learning, enabling learners to internalize and retrieve words more efficiently. Consequently, integrating multimedia-rich strategies within vocabulary learning applications can serve as an effective pedagogical approach to deepen lexical acquisition and promote long-term retention.

d. Theme 4: Improved Vocabulary Mastery

The observations conducted throughout the vocabulary learning sessions with WordUp revealed that students showed gradual improvement in vocabulary mastery, both in recognition and usage. During follow-up class activities, students began using target vocabulary in appropriate contexts, both orally and in writing. In particular, they demonstrated confidence when encountering previously learned words in new texts or tasks, indicating long-term retention rather than short-term memorization. This finding was evident in the observation conducted on November 5th, 2024.

"Students were able to complete the vocabulary-matching task more quickly in the third session compared to the first. Some of them even recalled the definitions before opening the app." (Field Note, November 5th, 2024)

This finding indicated noticeable progress in students' vocabulary mastery. During the third session, several students were able to complete the vocabulary-matching task more quickly than in the first session, with some recalling word definitions even before accessing the application. In line with the observation results, interview data from two students also indicated an improvement in their vocabulary after using WordUp, they said.

"When used this app I managed to add 20 new vocabulary words in 2 weeks of continuing to use it too." (Student 12).

"Even after 1 week of used, I got 12 new vocabulary words, isn't that cool, sir? Hehe." (Student 3).

These responses suggest that WordUp effectively supports vocabulary development in a more motivating and enjoyable way. On the other hand, WordUp's support for academic achievement was also reflected in students' English midterm. This is proven by the documentation of their exam scores given by their English teacher and presentes in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Exam Scores

No	Scores	Status
1	90	Passed
2	85	Passed
3	85	Passed
4	77	Remedial
5	94	Passed
6	81	Passed
7	70	Remedial
8	74	Remedial
9	89	Passed
10	82	Passed
11	88	Passed
12	92	Passed

The documentation of students' English midterm scores, as shown in Table 1, indicated that the majority of students achieved satisfactory results. Out of the twelve students, nine obtained scores ranging from 81 to 94 and were categorized as Passed. And three student scored under 80 and was categorized as "Remedial," suggesting the need for further support. These results reflect a generally positive academic outcome, which may be attributed, in part, to the integration of WordUp in vocabulary learning. The consistent passing scores support the notion that vocabulary improvement contributes to better overall English performance. These findings imply that mobile learning applications, when well-designed and contextually relevant, can significantly enhance students' academic outcomes (Lytle et al., 2017). Additionally, research shows that mobile learning increases students' enthusiasm and positive attitudes, which further supports academic success (Xu & Weng, 2025). This supports Schmitt's (1997) proposition that vocabulary is foundational to all language skills reading, writing, listening, and speaking and that mastery of lexical items is critical for academic success (Wolin, 1992). Thus, the integration of targeted mobile-assisted vocabulary learning tools like WordUp holds promise as a sustainable strategy for fostering both lexical mastery and overall English proficiency. It also highlighted by students' interview:

"Alhamdulillah, I got 90 on yesterday's English midterm, which was enough to make me smile. It feels very different because I was often struggling before, especially with the vocabulary and writing sections. Since using WordUp daily, my vocabulary has grown, so when I read questions or write essays, it's as if I have a stockpile of words at my fingertips". (Student 11).

Student 11 also reported a notable improvement in academic performance, sharing that she scored 90 on the recent English midterm a result that brought personal satisfaction. Prior to using the WordUp application, the participant often struggled with vocabulary and writing tasks. However, consistent daily use of the app led to a significant expansion of their vocabulary repertoire. From a broader pedagogical perspective, the findings of this study support the growing body of literature advocating for the integration of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in vocabulary acquisition (Lin & Lin, 2019). The interactive, personalized, and flexible nature of applications like WordUp provides learners with opportunities for self-regulated learning that extends beyond the classroom (Maenza & Gajic, 2024). As shown in the works of Koleini et al. (2024), MALL not only enhances lexical knowledge but also fosters greater learner autonomy, motivation, and satisfaction. Furthermore, the WordUp app's use of spaced repetition, self-assessment, and daily progress features reflects best practices in vocabulary instruction, which prioritize long-term retention and meaningful application (Aghaei et al., 2021; Topal, 2024). It shown that WordUp effective in this classroom context offers practical implications for curriculum development especially for vocabulary learning. Its structured yet flexible learning pathways could be adapted into the national curriculum to complement existing vocabulary instruction either as an enrichment program or an integrated component of English lessons. Such integration would allow for personalization of learning pace, immediate feedback, and multimodal input, all of which are conducive to deeper lexical acquisition. Moreover, embedding app-based vocabulary learning into the curriculum could help address disparities in learners' vocabulary levels, especially if combined with teacher-led scaffolding for students requiring remedial support.

3.2 Obstacles when using the WordUp application

a. Theme 1: Overload Information

Based on the results of interviews, some students experience fatigue when using WordUp due to information overload. When students have reached a high level, it is not uncommon for WordUp to display a lot of vocabulary at one time so that some students are confused to understand it.This is in line with the statement from Student 2:

"Sometimes I get overwhelmed because there is too much information on one page. For instance, videos, new words, and grade statistics appear simultaneously. This makes me feel tired and unfocused. I just want to learn a few words, but instead, I have to look at a lot of things at once. When that happens, I get lazy and end up quitting the app" (Student 2).

Student 2 likes the WordUp application because it provided a lot of vocabulary, along with example sentences that facilitate learning. However, he feels overwhelmed when too much information, such as videos, new words, and score statistics, appears on one page at once. This makes him tired and makes it difficult for him to focus. As a result, student often feels lazy and eventually stops using the app. The excessive amount of information displayed simultaneously in the program interface which frequently comprised word lists, videos, and progress scores on a single screen confuriated some students. This overwhelmed certain users and reduced their concentration and willingness to continue (Zulkepli & Hamid, 2024). Such responses highlight the importance of simplicity in user interface design, particularly for younger learners who may be less adept at managing competing visual and cognitive demands (Senevirathne & Manathunga, 2021). As Weichbroth (2020) highlighted that in order to preserve their pedagogical relevance, educational applications need to strike a balance between extensive features and usability. This suggest, WordUp is a useful app for English vocabulary learning through authentic contexts, but is not suitable for beginner learners (Aghaei et al., 2021). Therefore, optimizing the app's interface to present information in a more structured and less cluttered manner could enhance its accessibility and effectiveness for novice users.

b. Theme 2: Limitations in Content

Some students felt that the content provided in the app is not always relevant to their needs. Students seemed less interested in some words or phrases that were considered uncommon or not often used in daily conversation. Notes from observation and interview sessions showed that students preferred vocabulary related to the topics they studied at school. Like, participant 6 viewed;

"Although WordUp successfully helped me in my final exam, many of the vocabularies that WordUp presented were irrelevant to what was taught at school. So I skip the vocabulary because I don't think it's time to learn the word". (Student 6).

Student 6 rated WordUp as an effective app. He acknowledged that the vocabulary he learned from the app helped him on his final exams. However, she also pointed out that most of the vocabulary in WordUp was not related to the material studied in school. Feeling that it was "not the right time" to learn these words, P6 chose to skip them instead of incorporating them into her study routine. Comparison with student 7 experience:

"In my opinion, some of the content in this app is not very relevant. For example, there are many words that I rarely hear in school or in everyday conversation. I'd rather learn words that I can use in class or when talking to friends". (Student 7)

Student 7 said that WordUp's content was "not very relevant" to his needs. He cited the presence of vocabulary that is rarely used in school or daily conversations. For this student, the priority is learning terms that can be used immediately, both in class and with friends. Therefore, he chose to ignore words that were not useful right away.
"I skip about 5–10 words a week because they feel useless for me as a beginner. Like 'loquacious'why not just say 'talkative'? It's faster and everyone understands." (Student 11)

Student 11 revealed that she skips about 5-10 vocabulary words in WordUp every week because they are considered "useless" for beginners. For example, she said that the word "loquacious" is useless because choosing a simple equivalent, such as "talkative," is more practical because it is faster to pronounce and understood by everyone. This view demonstrates students' tendency to prioritize familiar and immediately applicable vocabulary. Thus, the perceived insignificance of some vocabulary items was another barrier that students mentioned; according to some participants, some words were either too complex for their current level or infrequently used in their daily conversations or school curricula. This led to a tendency to skip unfamiliar or seemingly impractical words, indicating a disconnect between the app's content and the students' immediate learning context (Weichbroth, 2020). These sentiments are consistent with the findings of Klimova & Poláková (2020), who stated that content alignment with local syllabi and real-life communication needs is essential for maximizing the utility of mobile-assisted language learning tools in formal education settings. Therefore, ensuring that vocabulary content in mobile-assisted learning platforms is both level-appropriate and contextually relevant is critical to sustaining learner engagement and promoting long-term lexical retention.
Despite these strengths, this study is not without limitations. The small and localized participant pool twelve students from a single Islamic junior high school in Sumatra, Indonesia, limits the generalizability of the findings to broader cultural and institutional contexts. Furthermore, the short duration of the intervention constrains the ability to evaluate the long-term impact of WordUp on vocabulary retention and overall language proficiency. The exclusive focus on student perspectives, while offering rich insights into user experience, also narrows the analytical scope. Incorporating the viewpoints of teachers, curriculum designers, and parents could provide a more holistic understanding of the application's pedagogical alignment, curricular relevance, and potential for systemic adoption. Addressing these limitations in future research will be crucial for validating and extending the applicability of the present findings. And Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, integrate longitudinal tracking, and include multi-stakeholder perspectives to validate and expand these findings. Nevertheless, the results of this study provide meaningful contributions to the growing body of literature on mobile-assisted vocabulary learning, particularly by demonstrating how gamification and multimodal content can foster learner engagement in formal education settings. These insights not only advance theoretical understanding in technology-enhanced language learning but also offer a foundation for refining digital vocabulary tools to better serve diverse educational contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

This study successfully achieved its objective of exploring students' perceptions of using the WordUp application to enhance their English vocabulary. Through a combination of classroom observations, student interviews, and documentation analysis, the research addressed both the primary research questions: students' perspectives on using WordUp and the challenges they faced while using the app. The findings revealed that students generally had positive experiences with WordUp, particularly due to its engaging features, game-like elements, and use of multimodal contexts. WordUp created a fun and motivating learning environment, which contributed to increased enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation among learners. Most participants reported noticeable vocabulary gains over a short period of use, and these improvements were also reflected in their academic performance, as seen in test scores and self-reported confidence during English tasks. These results affirm that WordUp is a valuable tool for supporting vocabulary development in a more dynamic, personalized, and learner-centered way. Furthermore, this study identified two main challenges information overload and limitations in content relevance which highlight the need for thoughtful interface design and curriculum alignment in mobile-assisted vocabulary learning tools. Despite these challenges, the overall results strongly support the integration of digital tools like WordUp in vocabulary instruction, particularly when the goal is to foster autonomous, engaging, and effective language learning experiences.

The findings of this study have important implications for vocabulary teaching and the use of educational technology in junior high schools. Teachers are encouraged to use mobile applications like WordUp to make vocabulary learning more engaging and effective. The gamified and multimodal features of WordUp can help increase student motivation and vocabulary retention. However, teachers should also guide students in managing digital content to avoid overload. App developers are advised to design simpler interfaces and align content more closely with school curricula to ensure relevance. Overall, WordUp shows strong potential to support vocabulary learning, but thoughtful use and proper support are essential for maximizing its benefits in the classroom.

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