

LEVERAGING THE BUSUU APPLICATION FOR AUTONOMOUS ENGLISH VOCABULARY ACQUISITION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the potential of the Busuu application as a self-study tool specifically for enhancing the English vocabulary of university students. A strong lexical foundation is critical for academic success, yet it remains a significant challenge for many learners. This conceptual paper analyzes how mobile learning applications can bridge this gap. The research objectives are: first, to identify and analyze the specific features within Busuu that target vocabulary acquisition, such as its structured lessons, visual aids, and interactive review exercises. Second, to evaluate how these features align with established theories of vocabulary learning, including spaced repetition, learning in context, and active recall. The methodology involves a qualitative analysis of user interviews with university students and a synthesis of existing literature on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and Busuu. Key findings regarding Busuu's systematic and engaging approach to autonomous vocabulary expansion are presented, alongside user-identified strengths and weaknesses. This paper argues that Busuu's focused approach offers a systematic and engaging method for students to autonomously expand their English lexicon. As a supplementary resource, it holds significant promise for helping university students, particularly in the Indonesian context, overcome vocabulary deficits and build a stronger foundation for their overall English proficiency, with potential avenues for future investigation centered on longitudinal impacts and academic vocabulary integration.

Keywords: Vocabulary Acquisition; Busuu Application; Mobile Learning; Autonomous Learning; Spaced Repetition; Contextualization; Active Recall; Higher Education; Indonesian Context.

INTRODUCTION

A strong vocabulary is the cornerstone of language proficiency, which is the foundation for effective communication, comprehension, and overall academic success in a second or foreign language (L2). The ability to understand and use a wide variety of lexical items enables students to articulate thoughts accurately, interact with complex texts, and participate meaningfully in academic discourse. Alsagoff and Renandya (2012) emphasize that an adequate vocabulary is essential for building mutual understanding in communicative exchanges. However, learners, especially English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in contexts such as Indonesia, often face significant obstacles in acquiring an extensive vocabulary. These challenges are often compounded by limited exposure to the target language outside of formal instruction and lack of opportunities for authentic practice. Daar (2020) notes that a lack of vocabulary can cause learners to be reluctant to engage in reading and listening tasks, hindering overall language development. The existence of this problem-the gap between the need for extensive vocabulary and the

common difficulties faced by learners-is a key motivation for exploring innovative and accessible solutions.

In response to these challenges, modern language teaching has witnessed a marked shift towards learner-centered approaches, with an increasing emphasis on developing autonomous learning. Autonomous learning is characterized by the learner's ability to take control and responsibility for his or her own learning process. This paradigm emphasizes the development of essential skills in self-management, self-monitoring, and self-assessment, and empowers learners to become active agents in their educational activities. Research consistently shows that learner autonomy is positively correlated with increased motivation and more active participation in learning activities. Therefore, autonomous learning strategies are increasingly recognized as important, especially in situations where formal learning time is restricted or access to rich language environments is limited. Scholars such as Dickinson (1987) and Rubin (1987) have emphasized the important role of effective learning strategies in developing learner independence, enabling learners to work independently and continue their learning outside the classroom. This pedagogical evolution towards learner autonomy creates a demand for tools and environments that support these self-direction efforts.

The convergence of these pedagogical developments with rapid technological advances has given rise to Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) as an important catalyst for independent vocabulary acquisition. MALL capitalizes on the ubiquity of portable devices, such as smart phones and tablets, to provide flexible, accessible and often engaging learning opportunities for learners. The inherent portability and convenience of mobile devices means that learning can take place anytime, anywhere, breaking down traditional time and space constraints. A number of studies have highlighted the overall benefits of MALLs for vocabulary learning, including increased motivation, greater engagement and positive learning outcomes. For example, studies by Suwantarathip and Orawiwatnakul (2015) and Shi & Tsai (2024) show the positive impact of mobile devices on vocabulary and language skill development. While MALLs offer many benefits, it is also important to recognize potential issues, such as the risk of distraction, that require careful integration and guidance. The need for a strong vocabulary, the educational imperative of learner autonomy, and the ubiquitous availability of mobile technology create fertile ground for apps like Busuu. These platforms are well positioned to address the demand for autonomous vocabulary development by leveraging technological capabilities. However, their ultimate success depends on their effective alignment with sound pedagogical principles and their responsiveness to users' self-learning needs.

Busuu is a leading language learning app that offers courses in several languages, including English, to millions of users worldwide. The purpose of this report is to critically analyze Busuu's app features, pedagogical underpinnings and user experience to assess its effectiveness in self-learning English vocabulary acquisition among university students. This objective is in line with the conceptual exploration of Busuu's potential as a self-learning tool to improve English vocabulary, especially to overcome deficiencies in contexts such as Indonesia. A secondary aim is to derive practical recommendations for learners, teachers and app developers based on this analysis. While apps like Busuu are designed to encourage independence by providing tools for self-learning, their inherently structured nature can also guide the learning path. This presents an interesting dynamic

between directed learning and true learner autonomy. How an app balances prescribed learning paths with actual learner choice is critical. If the structure is too rigid, it can inhibit the autonomy it seeks to promote; if it is too loose, learners can feel lost or overwhelmed. This suggests that app design must carefully balance scaffolding with opportunities for genuine learner choice and control to foster deep autonomy. Busuu's effectiveness in achieving this balance can be a valuable model of how MALLs can effectively complement formal education, especially in resource-constrained settings.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design, in the form of a concept paper and expert analysis focusing on the usability of the Busuu app for self-directed English vocabulary acquisition. The main approach consisted of a qualitative analysis of user perspectives obtained from interviews, complemented by a comprehensive synthesis of existing academic literature on Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), vocabulary acquisition theory, and research specific to the Busuu app.

The data sources for this study were twofold. First, primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with a selected sample of university students. The participants were three students from Indonesia, all of whom were English Education Department students, a demographic group whose advanced vocabulary and independent learning skills are highly relevant. This purposive sampling made it possible to get an in-depth view of students who are actively engaged in language learning and who are likely to use these apps. Secondly, the secondary data consisted of various academic articles, conference proceedings, and academic reports focusing on MALLs, autonomous learning, and empirical evaluations of language learning apps, including Busuu.

Data collection consisted of individual interviews with student participants to explore their experiences, perceptions and practices regarding the use of Busuu for vocabulary learning. Literature was collected through academic database searches and reviews of relevant journals and conferences. The technique used to analyze the interview data was qualitative content analysis, which identified recurring themes, positive and negative views of Busuu's features, and the perceived impact on vocabulary learning and independence. The literature was synthesized to build a theoretical framework for vocabulary acquisition and autonomous learning, and to compare the user interview results with broader empirical evidence on the effectiveness of Busuu and MALL. This dual approach, which integrates direct user feedback with existing research, enables a nuanced assessment of Busuu's capabilities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and interprets the results of the Busuu app, placing the user experience in the broader context of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and established pedagogical theory. The effectiveness of MALL in improving vocabulary acquisition has been highlighted in a number of studies, which also highlight the importance of learner perceptions in the successful adoption of these tools. Therefore, this discussion will comprehensively analyze the key findings by first examining the features of the Busuu app and users' perspectives on it. Next, the alignment of these features with basic learning principles such as repetition and contextualization will be

explored. Finally, the analysis will explore the role of Busuu in promoting learner autonomy and its effectiveness specifically in the Indonesian higher education context.

Busuu's Vocabulary Learning Ecosystem: Features and User Perspectives

The effectiveness of language learning apps in promoting self-directed vocabulary acquisition depends heavily on the user interface (UI), the organizational structure of the learning content, and special features designed to support learning and practice. Users' views are valuable in assessing the practical usefulness and appeal of these components.

Overall, initial interactions with Busuu have been positive, with users highlighting its user-friendly design. One user described the interface as "simple" and "not like a cluttered, confusing app", adding that the navigation was "easy to understand" and offered direct access to lessons, progress tracking and settings. Other users described the screens as "neat and simple" and the enrollment process as "quick", allowing for direct engagement with the learning materials without complicated initial steps. This ease of entry is often reinforced by the level test function, which allows users to identify an appropriate starting level. This initial assessment is an important step in tailoring a personalized learning path, as it ensures that learners are not overwhelmed by content that is too difficult or demotivated by material that is too simple.

Busuu's basic vocabulary learning functions integrate a series of functions specifically designed for vocabulary acquisition, thus creating a complete learning environment, as follows:

1. **Structured Lessons:** A key feature of the Busuu methodology is the organization of content into structured lessons. These are often categorized by proficiency level (e.g. A1-C1, as one user put it) and thematic units. Users find this systematic progression useful, as they feel that the material is "structured by level". This structured approach is in line with the principles of 'design for learning', where activities are deliberately sequenced to guide the learner effectively.
2. **Multimedia Integration:** Busuu effectively utilizes diverse multimedia elements to present and reinforce vocabulary items.
 - a. *Audio:* The inclusion of audio pronunciations, often provided by native speakers, is a consistently praised feature. Users felt this feature was essential for mastering correct pronunciation, a recognized strength of the MALL app and specifically noted in the Busuu study.
 - b. *Visual Aids (Images):* Vocabulary is often presented together with corresponding images. One user found that the combination of images and sounds was very effective in associating words with their meaning and pronunciation. The use of visual aids is a common and effective multimedia strategy in language learning applications.
 - c. *Example Sentences:* Presenting new vocabulary in illustrative sentences is one of the main strategies used by Busuu. Users state that this strategy is very useful for understanding how words are used in authentic contexts, which directly supports the principle of contextualization, which is essential for meaningful vocabulary acquisition.
3. **Interactive Exercises and Practice:** Busuu offers a range of interactive tasks to engage students and facilitate active practice. These include exercises such as choosing word meanings, sequencing words to form sentences, and sections

dedicated to speaking and listening exercises. The app also offers puzzles, quizzes and word-matching activities.

4. Flashcards and Review Systems: Users highlighted the "review" and "flashcards" sections as particularly interesting and effective for memorizing vocabulary through repetition. These features are essential in the application of spaced repetition, a powerful technique for improving long-term retention of learned material.
5. Native Speaker Feedback: The opportunity to receive corrections from native speakers on practice tasks was cited by users as an attractive feature. Busuu is known for facilitating relationships between learners and native speakers, thus adding a valuable interactive and corrective dimension to the learning process.
6. Offline Mode: At least one user appreciated the availability of an "offline mode" to improve accessibility, so that learning can continue even without an active internet connection.
7. Gamification Elements: Gamification elements seem to be integrated into the experience of using Busuu. Evidence of this is the motivation expressed by one user to "reach the final level" and the mention of "achievements and points" in other Busuu reviews, which may increase user engagement and motivation.

A synthesis of user feedback from interviews and empirical studies revealed generally positive perceptions of Busuu's vocabulary learning features, along with specific areas identified for improvement. Among the most frequently mentioned positive aspects were the ease of use of the app, the systematic and structured nature of its lessons, and the effectiveness of features such as the review system, flashcards, audio pronunciations and example sentences. These elements contribute to a learning experience that users find motivating and conducive to vocabulary acquisition.

However, users also identified areas where Busuu could be improved. A recurring theme was the potential for monotonous practice, so more variety in practice activities was suggested. In addition, there was also a desire for more example sentences or more and varied conversational contexts to encourage a deeper understanding of word usage. Practical limitations, such as limited access to materials for free users and reliance on a stable network connection for optimal use, were also noted as challenges.

Features that directly support established cognitive learning principles - such as review mechanisms and flashcards for spaced repetition, and example sentences combined with audio for contextualization and multimedia learning - were the features most praised by users. This suggests that Busuu's effectiveness in these areas is based on the application of basic evidence-based learning strategies. Conversely, aspects less directly related to these principles or perceived as inadequately applied, such as the potential for monotonous exercises, tended to draw criticism. This highlights the 'sweet spot' in feature usability: pedagogically sound and well-executed features will resonate more strongly with learners.

Furthermore, while users praise the simplicity of Busuu's interface for its ease of navigation, the same simplicity may inadvertently contribute to exercises being perceived as monotonous if not balanced with sufficient variety and depth in learning tasks. This points to an important design challenge: maintaining an intuitive user experience while providing engaging and varied interactions that can sustain long-term motivation and cater to diverse learning preferences. The request for more contextualized examples also

indicates users' desire to deepen vocabulary, going beyond initial presentation and basic recall towards a more nuanced understanding. These user comments underscore the balance that app developers must strike between simplified design and rich and varied content to avoid user fatigue and encourage deeper learning.

Table 1. Student Perceptions of Busuu's Vocabulary Learning Features

Feature	Positive Perceptions (Student Attributions)	Negative Perceptions/Suggestions (Student Attributions)	Link to Learning Principle(s)
Review System/Flashcards	Helps repeat words, making them easier to remember (Student 2, Student 3); helps remember new words quickly (Student 3).	-	Spaced Repetition, Active Recall
Audio Pronunciation	Teaches correct pronunciation (Student 2); helps to know how to pronounce (Student 1, Student 3); interactive audio-visuals from native speakers.	-	Multimedia Learning, Auditory Learning, Authentic Input
Example Sentences	Facilitates understanding and application of words in daily conversation (Student 2); helps understand the use of words (Student 3); helps connect words.	I would like more example sentences and conversational context for deeper understanding (Student 2, Student 3).	Contextualization, Comprehensible Input
Exercise Variety	Exercises such as selecting meanings, constructing sentences (Student 2); listening and speaking (Student 1); puzzles, quizzes, matching.	Exercises can become monotonous (Student 2, Student 1). Suggestions to add more variety to the exercises (Student 2, Student 1).	Active Recall, Engagement
Native Speaker Feedback	An interesting function for live corrections (Student 2, Student 3); Busuu connects users with native speakers.	-	Authentic Interaction, Feedback
Structured Levels	Materials structured by level (A1-C1) (Student 1, Student 2, Student 3); systematic and clear material.	The material is sometimes too general.	Scaffolding, Progressive Learning, Learner Autonomy Support
Offline Mode	App can be used without internet (Student 2).	-	Accessibility, Flexibility
Gamification	Motivation to reach the final level (Student 1); achievements and points make learning fun.	-	Motivation, Engagement
Interface Simplicity	Simple, not confusing, easy navigation (Student 2); neat,	This can lead to boredom if the exercise design is too	User Experience

simple and fast registration simple.
(Student 3).

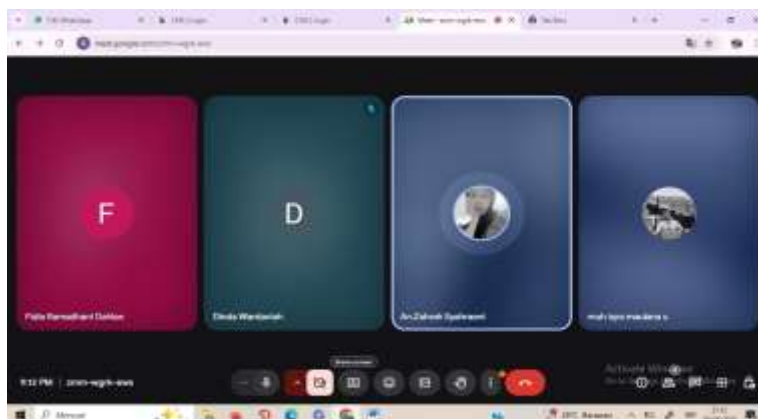


Figure 1. S Virtual Interview Session via Google Meet

Pedagogical Underpinnings: Aligning Busuu with Theories of Vocabulary Acquisition

The perceived effectiveness of Busuu, as reflected in user experiences and empirical observations, can be better understood by examining the alignment of its features with established theories on vocabulary acquisition. A strong pedagogical foundation is essential for any educational tool that aims to facilitate meaningful and lasting learning. This section critically evaluates how Busuu's vocabulary learning mechanism conforms to key principles such as spaced repetition, contextual learning, active recall and multimedia learning.

The spaced repetition principle postulates that repeating learned material at systematically increasing intervals significantly improves long-term retention. This technique counters the natural forgetting curve by stimulating recall when the memory trace is about to fade. Busuu incorporates features that align with *Spaced Repetition System* (SRS), particularly the "review" and "flashcard" functions, which are particularly praised by users for their role in aiding recall through repeated exposure. Research on language learning apps supports the effectiveness of SRS, with studies showing benefits for vocabulary learning, including the use of repetition with spaces inserted, which encourages balanced and deeper learning of different aspects of word knowledge. The Active Recall app, for example, explicitly uses SRS algorithms to determine optimal review times. Although Busuu users may not explicitly label these functions as "spaced repetition", their positive experiences with the review mechanism highlight the practical benefits of this underlying principle. Users' appreciation of functions that facilitate repeated exposure with intervals suggests an intuitive recognition of what contributes to effective memorization, even if they do not know the precise cognitive science terms.

Contextual Learning, rather than as discrete items, is widely recognized as essential for developing a deeper understanding of word meanings, nuances and appropriate usage. Context provides clues that aid comprehension and facilitate the integration of new words into existing semantic networks. Brown, cited in , states that contextualization is essential for improving vocabulary learning. Busuu attempts to provide a contextualized learning experience through the use of 'example sentences',

which users find very useful for understanding how words are used in realistic situations. The app also uses dialog and provides explanations of usage differences, such as the regional variation between "mobile" and "cellular" for "phone", which one user found very useful. Despite these features, the consistent requests from users for more and varied contextual examples suggest that, although the principle is recognized, the application could be further deepened to meet students' needs for richer contextual immersion. This desire for deeper contextual engagement may pose a design tension with the marketing of the '10 minutes a day' compact lesson implementation, highlighting the need to balance depth of processing with the practicality of small-sized learning modules. The challenge is to provide sufficient contextual richness within a framework designed for brevity and convenience, a common dilemma in the development of educational applications where pedagogical ideals meet user expectations for quick and accessible learning.

Active Recall is the process of actively retrieving information from memory, a cognitive act that strengthens neural pathways and leads to stronger learning than passive review. Language learning apps often encourage active recall through interactive exercises. Busuu uses a variety of activities, such as quizzes, fill-in-the-blank exercises, sentence construction tasks and speaking exercises, all of which require the learner to actively create or retrieve vocabulary. One user particularly appreciated the speaking function, which provides feedback on pronunciation, demonstrating the benefits of active production alongside immediate correction. Studies of similar apps, such as Quizlet, which also offer matching and fill-in-the-blank quizzes, show that these interactive tasks significantly aid vocabulary recall and application. However, Busuu users' comments about the monotony of the exercises suggest the possibility of a "monotony threshold". Even if active recall is implemented, its effectiveness may be reduced if the methods are not varied enough to maintain cognitive engagement. If exercises become too predictable, learners may reduce their mental effort, thus reducing the learning benefits. Therefore, variety in active recall stimuli is not just about avoiding boredom, but is also essential for maintaining the cognitive engagement required for effective learning. This implies that the design of active recall tasks should be dynamic and challenging enough to continuously stimulate recall effort, rather than allowing learners to get stuck in memorization and response patterns that lack engagement.

Mayer's cognitive theory of *multimedia learning* states that learning is enhanced when information is presented using both visual and verbal channels, provided the cognitive load is effectively managed. Busuu leverages multimedia resources by combining text with images and voice pronunciation, a triad often considered effective in vocabulary applications. Users explicitly stated that the combination of images and sounds helped them associate words with their meaning and pronunciation, and the audio component was universally praised for learning correct pronunciation. This research supports the use of multimedia in vocabulary learning applications, demonstrating its potential to facilitate comprehension and knowledge retention.

While Busuu's features show alignment with these key learning principles, the extent to which the pedagogical design is made explicit to users, and its adaptability, can be an important factor in maintaining engagement and fostering metacognitive awareness. Learners explain the utility of the function (e.g. "helps you remember") rather than the underlying principles. Greater transparency about why features are designed in

a certain way can help users to use the app more strategically, thereby enhancing their autonomous learning capabilities and fostering a deeper understanding of how to learn effectively.

Fostering Learner Autonomy Through Busuu

Learner autonomy, i.e. the ability of individuals to take control of their own learning, is a key goal of contemporary language teaching. In the context of MALL, autonomy manifests itself in learner decisions about what, when, where and how to learn. Apps like Busuu, through their design and features, can play an important role in supporting and fostering this self-directed learning.

MALL environments inherently offer opportunities for autonomous learning due to their flexibility and accessibility. They can provide personalized and adaptive learning experiences tailored to individual needs and pace, which is conducive to learner autonomy. Autonomous learners in a MALL context actively select resources, set goals, monitor progress and reflect on their learning strategies, using the mobile device as a facilitator rather than just an information provider.

Some Busuu features seem to support independent vocabulary acquisition:

1. **Self-Pacing:** Users can progress through lessons and levels at their own pace, adapting to individual learning rhythms and schedules. This is a fundamental aspect of autonomous learning.
2. **Goal Setting and Progress Tracking:** Structured levels (e.g. A1-C1) and the ability to see "progress" allow learners to set implicit or explicit goals (e.g. "reach the last level") and monitor their progress. This visual feedback on progress can be very motivating.
3. **Accessibility and Flexibility:** Features such as "offline mode" and the generic nature of mobile apps enable "anytime, anywhere" learning. This is in line with the core characteristics of MALLs that go beyond the boundaries of traditional learning.
4. **Placement Tests:** The inclusion of placement tests allows learners to start at a level appropriate to their knowledge, avoiding frustration with material that is too easy or too difficult and encouraging more effective independent learning.

The university students interviewed expressed a belief in Busuu's potential to aid their independent vocabulary learning. One student commented that it is "good for helping to learn vocabulary independently" ("bagus buat bantu bantu belajar kosakata bahasa asing"), while another stated it is "very suitable for independent learning" ("sangat cocok untuk belajar mandiri"). The structured nature of the app, with clear lesson levels and progression, was perceived by these learners as supportive rather than restrictive. This suggests that Busuu offers a form of 'structured autonomy', where the app provides a clear framework and the necessary tools, but the learner remains in control of the pace and intensity of their participation. This approach can be particularly beneficial for learners who are new to independent learning or who value guidance as they navigate their learning journey. This form of guided autonomy can serve as a stepping stone to building the confidence and study habits necessary for more overt autonomous learning, similar to the concept of "reactive autonomy" which can evolve into "proactive autonomy". This 'structured autonomy' can be invaluable in avoiding the

overwhelm that some learners experience in a fully open learning environment, as it provides a scaffold that encourages the gradual development of self-regulation skills.

The broader picture of research on MALLs and learner autonomy provides more context. Research shows that AI-enhanced language learning tools can significantly improve learners' autonomous learning abilities and outcomes. Although Busuu is not explicitly detailed as an AI-powered platform in the materials provided, its adaptive features, such as placement tests and potentially personalized review programs, may have features in common with AI-powered systems. In addition, research has shown that MALLs can foster positive attitudes towards autonomous learning. The ability to see tangible progress on Busuu, such as leveling up or completing lessons, is likely to strengthen motivation. This perceived progress can create a positive feedback loop: achievement drives motivation, which in turn drives continued autonomous engagement with the app. This is consistent with findings linking learner autonomy with increased motivation.

The development and application of effective language learning strategies is a key aspect of learner autonomy. While Busuu facilitates autonomous learning activities, a potential area to explore is whether the app actively teaches learners to be autonomous, for example, by encouraging the use of metacognitive strategies, explicit goal-setting beyond the level defined by the app, or self-reflection techniques. Fostering these broader strategic competencies is key to developing learners who can manage their learning effectively both inside and outside the app. The difference between providing tools for autonomous action and explicitly teaching autonomous learning skills is significant; the latter involves equipping learners with the metacognitive awareness to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning processes, a deeper form of autonomy that goes beyond the confines of individual apps.

Effectiveness in Higher Education: The Indonesian University Context

The utility of MALL apps like Busuu is particularly relevant in higher education, where students are often expected to take greater responsibility for their learning and where a strong vocabulary is essential for academic success. The Indonesian university context, with its specific ESL challenges, provides a relevant backdrop to test Busuu's potential.

Students in EFL environments such as Indonesia often face challenges such as limited authentic exposure to English outside the classroom, large class sizes that can limit individual attention, and an urgent need to develop self-directed learning strategies to meet academic demands. The conceptual framework of this report specifically highlights the promise of Busuu for university students, "especially in the Indonesian context", as a tool to help address vocabulary gaps and build a stronger foundation for general English proficiency.

The primary user feedback analyzed in this report comes from Indonesian university students who are most likely studying English Education Department. Their experiences provide direct insight into the acceptance of Busuu among this demographic. All three students interviewed expressed a positive view of the app's potential and expressed their intention to continue using it for vocabulary development. One student articulated a strong motivation, stating, "we are also English language students, so we must be able to find opportunities so that our English skills... must be 10 steps ahead"

("kita juga kan mahasiswa bahasa inggris jadi harus bisa cari peluang supaya kemampuan bahasa inggris ta ini... harus 10 langkah di depan"). The intrinsic drive of language learners at these universities is likely to encourage them to proactively use supplementary learning aids such as Busuu, thus making them an ideal target group for such an app. For these learners, who may have limited access to learning resources or frequent interactions with native speakers, Busuu can serve as an accessible and relatively affordable means (despite the limitations of its free version) to supplement formal instruction and take responsibility for their lexical development.

Empirical research supports the usefulness of Busuu in educational contexts, including higher education. A study by Cervantes González (2023) involving university students found that participants found Busuu effective in increasing vocabulary and improving pronunciation. They also stated that the app was fun and less stressful than traditional methods. Among the main features highlighted in this study were interesting exercises, visual aids, the possibility to share exercises with other Busuu users, and the use of video and sound. Another study conducted with high school students in Medan (Indonesia) concluded that Busuu is an effective (83.57% effective) and motivating medium for learning vocabulary. The study showed that features such as images, phrases, dialog, immediate feedback, audio-visuals from native speakers, achievement and point systems, and structured materials contributed to its success.

Busuu's specific results are consistent with broader research on MALLs in higher education, which generally shows that mobile learning tools are beneficial for students' vocabulary acquisition. Research has shown that MALL can improve academic scores and increase student motivation.

The suggestions from the student interviewees for more varied exercises and deeper contextualized examples are particularly relevant for the higher education group. Students need nuanced and sophisticated vocabulary understanding to make sense of academic texts and discourse. While Busuu appears to be effective for general vocabulary acquisition, its current content, based on user feedback, needs to be further improved to focus more on academic vocabulary that is important at the university level. Neither in the student interviews nor in the Busuu-specific research was there any explicit mention of a strong emphasis on academic word lists (AWLs) or discipline-specific terminology, which are significant areas in other MALL research focused on academic vocabulary. This suggests the possibility of an "academic rigor" gap, where Busuu builds a strong general vocabulary base but may not be sufficient to meet students' specific lexical needs. Development of these specialized academic modules could significantly increase the value of the app for this demographic. The issue of free access versus premium access also remains a practical consideration, as it can be prohibitive for students with limited financial resources.

CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this article leads to some conclusions about the effectiveness of the Busuu app for independent English vocabulary acquisition among university students, especially in the Indonesian EFL context. These conclusions also form the basis for suggestions for learners, teachers and app developers, as well as directions for future research.

The Busuu app shows considerable potential as a tool to facilitate independent acquisition of English vocabulary among university students. It benefits from a user-friendly interface, a systematically structured learning path and the incorporation of basic vocabulary learning functions that conform to established pedagogical principles. Features such as the interactive review system, flashcards, presentation of vocabulary through example sentences and the use of multimedia elements such as audio and visual aids are well received by users and contribute to a positive learning experience. These elements effectively support key learning mechanisms such as spaced repetition, contextualization, active recall and multimedia learning. Busuu is therefore a valuable complementary resource, especially for learners of English as a foreign language in contexts such as Indonesia, so that they can have greater control over their lexical development.

However, the analysis also revealed some areas for improvement. User comments indicated a clear desire for more variety in the types of exercises to reduce the sense of monotony and for broader and more diverse contextual examples to deepen the understanding of word usage. In addition, while effective for general vocabulary acquisition, there seems to be a potential gap in the explicit selection of academic vocabulary, which is critical for success in higher education. The restrictions associated with the free versus premium versions of the app also pose accessibility issues for some learners, which may limit its reach among financially challenged students. The overall evaluation suggests that while Busuu provides a strong foundation for self-directed vocabulary learning, its evolution can be guided by addressing user-identified needs for increased engagement and depth of learning, especially for the academic community.

From these findings, there are several suggestions that can be made. For students, it is recommended to use Busuu's pedagogical features strategically, complementing app-based learning with various resources and fostering metacognitive awareness. Teachers in higher education can consider Busuu as a complementary tool, guide students in its effective use and integrate discussions on autonomous learning strategies. For Busuu developers, increasing the variety of exercises, deepening contextualization with more examples, focusing on academic vocabulary (e.g. AWL), increasing pedagogical transparency and encouraging explicit strategy development are key areas for improvement. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies on the impact of Busuu, comparative analysis with other MALL tools, optimal models for curriculum integration, the effectiveness of Busuu for academic vocabulary acquisition specifically, and how its effectiveness varies across different learner profiles. Research in these areas will contribute to refining mobile learning technologies to enhance self-directed vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency.

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