

THE USEFULNESS OF ENGLISH BREAKING APPLICATIONS FOR EFL LEARNERS VOCABULARY

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Abstrak

Di era digital saat ini, teknologi memegang peranan penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa, khususnya bagi pembelajar EFL (English as a Foreign Language) yang sering mengalami kesulitan dengan metode pembelajaran konvensional di kelas. Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas aplikasi English Breaking dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata mahasiswa EFL. Dengan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap mahasiswa di salah satu universitas di Medan yang telah menggunakan aplikasi ini selama satu bulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa English Breaking memberikan dampak positif terhadap perkembangan kosakata, motivasi belajar, dan keterlibatan pengguna melalui fitur-fitur interaktif seperti flashcard, latihan pelafalan adaptif, dan gamifikasi pembelajaran. Namun, beberapa kendala teknis seperti kebutuhan koneksi internet yang stabil dan navigasi yang kurang jelas juga ditemukan. Meskipun demikian, kemampuan aplikasi dalam mendukung pembelajaran yang personal dan mandiri menunjukkan potensi yang menjanjikan. Studi ini menyoroti pentingnya aplikasi ini sebagai alat bantu pembelajaran bahasa yang inovatif, serta merekomendasikan peningkatan performa teknis dan penambahan fitur interaksi sosial. Temuan ini memiliki implikasi penting bagi pengembang aplikasi pendidikan, pendidik bahasa, dan pembuat kebijakan dalam mengoptimalkan lingkungan belajar digital untuk konteks EFL.

Kata Kunci: aplikasi English Breaking, akuisisi kosakata, pembelajar EFL, pembelajaran bahasa berbasis mobile

Abstract

In today's digital era, technology plays an increasingly vital role in language learning, particularly for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners who often struggle with conventional classroom methods. This study explores the effectiveness of the English Breaking application in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL students. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered from in-depth interviews with university students in Medan who used the app for one month. The findings indicate that English Breaking positively influenced learners' vocabulary development, motivation, and engagement through its interactive flashcards, adaptive pronunciation tools, and gamified learning features. However, users also reported technical challenges, such as unstable internet requirements and unclear navigation. Despite these issues, the app's capacity to support personalized and autonomous learning proves promising. The study underscores the app's potential as a supplementary language learning tool and calls for improvements in technical performance and social interactivity features. These findings hold significant implications for educational app developers, language educators, and policymakers aiming to optimize digital learning environments for EFL contexts.

Keywords: English Breaking application, vocabulary acquisition, EFL learners, mobile-assisted language learning

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed the landscape of education, particularly in the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The integration of technology into language education has not only changed how teachers deliver instruction but also provided learners with diverse opportunities for independent study. One prominent form of this integration is the use of mobile-based learning applications, which offer high flexibility for students to learn beyond the classroom environment (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018). Among the wide range of available applications, English Breaking stands out as a platform specifically designed to enhance language proficiency through artificial intelligence (AI), interactive audio features, and contextual learning methods.

Vocabulary plays a foundational role in language acquisition. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners face difficulties in reading comprehension, writing, and effective oral communication. In the context of EFL, challenges in vocabulary learning are not merely related to the number of words acquired but also involve learners' ability to use these words in meaningful and communicative contexts. Nation (2022) emphasizes that effective vocabulary learning requires repeated exposure, active usage in real-life situations, and strong intrinsic motivation. Consequently, there is a growing need for instructional media that not only present vocabulary lists but also engage learners in interactive and contextual use of language.

Previous studies have demonstrated that mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition. For instance, Lomicka (2020) found that mobile applications incorporating interactive features and instant feedback improve learners' engagement and vocabulary retention. Similarly, Hasumi & Chiu (2024) highlighted the

effectiveness of AI-powered applications in delivering adaptive vocabulary instruction, tailoring difficulty levels to learners' capabilities. Cancino & Viguera (2024) also noted that gamified mobile apps can positively influence student motivation and accelerate vocabulary development.

Despite the growing evidence on the benefits of mobile technology in vocabulary learning, there is a notable lack of research specifically evaluating the usefulness of the English Breaking application for EFL learners' vocabulary improvement. Most existing studies tend to focus on more widely known applications such as Duolingo, Memrise, or Quizlet. In contrast, English Breaking, which explicitly claims to improve vocabulary and speaking skills through a structured 90-day program, remains underexplored in academic research. This raises important questions regarding its effectiveness in enhancing vocabulary knowledge, learner engagement, and the sustainability of learning outcomes.

Furthermore, there is still no comprehensive study that analyzes English Breaking from both pedagogical and technological perspectives. Key elements such as content validity, feedback mechanisms, and alignment with EFL learners' needs have not been thoroughly examined. This gap in the literature highlights the need for systematic investigation, particularly in light of the increasing reliance on digital learning tools among students.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the usefulness of English Breaking for EFL learners in improving their vocabulary. It also seeks to identify the strengths and limitations of the application based on user perspectives, and to evaluate how its features support sustainable, contextual, and personalized vocabulary learning. The findings of this research are expected to contribute valuable insights for language educators, app developers, and EFL learners in optimizing the use of mobile applications for more effective vocabulary acquisition.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply explore students' perceptions and experiences in using the English Breaking application as a tool for learning English vocabulary. The research subjects are 10 seventh-semester students from a vocational college in Medan who have used the application for one month, with a minimum usage duration of 45–60 minutes per day.

Participants were selected purposively, based on the criterion that the students were willing to actively share their experiences using the application. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews and participant observation to obtain richer information regarding the level of engagement, motivation, and perceptions of the app's feature effectiveness (Nurdin & Sri, 2019).

The research procedure included preparing interview instruments, selecting participants, and observing the learning process (Sugiyono, 2019). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes such as vocabulary acquisition, learning motivation, ease of use, and technical challenges faced by participants (Rahman, 2022). Data validity was ensured through member checking and triangulation between interview and observation results.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study produced some important findings obtained from interviews with 10 students who have used the English Breaking app for one month. Overall, the app showed a positive impact on vocabulary acquisition, learning motivation, and user engagement levels. The innovative features offered by the app, such as interactive flashcards, AI-based pronunciation exercises, and daily challenges, significantly improved the English learning process. Most participants reported a significant increase in vocabulary during the use of the app.

Vocabulary Acquisition

Most participants reported a significant improvement in both the quantity and quality of vocabulary they mastered while using the application. Features such as flashcards, daily quizzes, and audio-based learning enabled them to learn new words in an enjoyable and memorable way.

“Every day I learn and remember more than 10 new words by using the flashcard and quiz features in the English Breaking app.” (Participant 7) (as shown in Figure 1).



Figure 1: Display of the flashcard feature in the English Breaking application.

Figure 1 illustrates that the flashcard feature presents vocabulary along with its meaning and engaging visual illustrations. This enhances users' memory retention, especially for those with a visual learning style. The flashcards are also accompanied by interactive quizzes that challenge users to test their vocabulary comprehension in real time.

The application integrates a multimodal learning approach, combining text, audio, and visual elements. This approach reinforces vocabulary through repetition in various contexts, which significantly aids in the internalization process and memory retention.

“The learning method in this app makes it easier for me to understand new vocabulary because I hear and use it directly.”(Participant 3)

Interactivity and Personalized Learning

The English Breaking app provides learning features that are not only interactive but also adaptive to each user’s ability. This was highlighted by many participants as a key advantage compared to conventional learning methods.

“I think the main advantage of the English Breaking app is that its features are very interactive and easy to understand. I can learn through audio, text, and exercises that keep me from getting bored. Also, the material is adjusted to my level.” (Participant 9)



Figure 2: Display of the AI-based pronunciation feature providing automatic feedback

This feature is supported by an adaptive pronunciation practice interface (see Figure 2). The AI-based pronunciation tool not only allows users to listen to correct pronunciation models but also gives real-time feedback on their pronunciation accuracy. Figure 2 shows how the system displays automated responses in the form of pronunciation scores or visual corrections,

which is crucial for speaking improvement, as it allows learners to reflect on and correct mistakes immediately.

“I feel like this app really understands my needs. The exercises are suited to my level, so it doesn't feel too difficult or boring.”(Participant 1)

Participants also emphasized the flexibility of learning as another strength. They were able to access materials at any time without time pressure, which aligns with the learning style of today’s digital generation.

Learning Motivation and Technical Challenges

One element highly appreciated by participants was the gamification aspect of the app. By incorporating daily challenges, point systems, and virtual rewards, the application successfully maintained consistent learning motivation.

“I feel challenged to complete the daily targets in this app because there are always small rewards that make learning fun.”(Participant 6)



Figure 3: Points and daily challenge system that promotes user motivation

Its implementation can be seen in the point system and challenges displayed in Figure 3. This figure shows a reward system that includes daily

scores, achievement badges, and learning progress indicators. These visual features help build a sense of achievement and increase long-term user engagement. Features like leaderboards or progress graphs also provide additional motivational boosts.

However, not all user experiences were positive. Several participants encountered technical obstacles that disrupted their learning process, especially when accessing features that required a stable internet connection.

"Sometimes the app runs slowly when I try to access pronunciation exercises, and the accent used by the AI is hard to understand." (Participant 10)

"I was also confused the first time I used this app because there were no clear instructions for some features, so it took time to understand how it works." (Participant 4)

These issues were mostly reported by users with lower-spec devices or unstable internet connections. Additionally, some participants suggested the app include social features, such as discussion forums or group practice sessions, to enhance peer-to-peer interaction.

DISCUSSION

Learning Motivation through Gamification

Although the English Breaking application faces several technical challenges, such as connection disruptions and inaccurate pronunciation feedback, one of its main strengths lies in its ability to sustain users' learning motivation. The gamification features implemented consisting of daily challenges, a point system, badge rewards, and progress graphs are highly appreciated by the majority of research participants. Eight out of ten participants stated that the presence of these features made them feel more motivated to study consistently every day, even without external pressure from teachers or formal assignments.

Gamification, in the learning context, functions not only as an entertainment element but also as a pedagogical strategy capable of stimulating learners' intrinsic motivation. This aligns with the Self-Determination Theory framework (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which states that intrinsic motivation grows when three basic human needs are fulfilled: competence, autonomy, and social relatedness. In the context of the English Breaking app, the point system and challenges allow users to feel increased competence, while the flexibility in learning time gives them autonomy in managing their study activities. Although social interaction features are not yet fully available, other aspects such as achievement badges and leaderboards (if further developed) have the potential to fulfill the social relatedness element with other users.

Furthermore, the research results align with (Rui Yuan, 2021) findings that motivation plays a crucial role in maintaining long-term engagement in technology-based learning, especially in AI-mediated environments. Yuan notes that when technology is designed with consideration for users' affective factors, engagement can be sustained longer than in purely cognitive instructional approaches. Thus, English Breaking shows that emotional approaches like feelings of achievement, challenges, and recognition have significant power in balancing existing technical shortcomings.

In the long term, a well-designed gamification system not only increases learning frequency but also builds sustainable learning habits, creating conditions where learning becomes part of users' daily routines. This is especially important in vocabulary learning, where repetition and continuous exposure are key to building long-term retention and active use.

Technology Acceptance and Technical Barriers

Technical performance issues such as delays during pronunciation exercises, frequent app crashes, and inaccurate AI feedback represent real obstacles in using the English Breaking application. This phenomenon can be deeply analyzed through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) introduced by (Davis, 1989). This model emphasizes that two main components determine technology acceptance: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. If users feel the technology is difficult to operate or does not provide real benefits, they tend to reject or abandon the technology.

In this study, interviews with several participants showed that slow app responses especially when accessing pronunciation features and unclear AI feedback caused frustration and decreased learning motivation. As one participant stated, such technical problems disrupted the smooth and intuitive learning flow. When the learning flow is interrupted, learners' focus shifts from content to technical effort to adapt to the app, which lowers overall learning effectiveness.

These findings align with (AlDakhil & AlFadda, 2021) study evaluating the Busuu language learning app. They found that although interactive features like quizzes and conversation exercises were welcomed, technical problems and complex interfaces became major barriers to maintaining user satisfaction. When users repeatedly encounter technical difficulties, their perception of the app's usefulness declines, reducing the intensity and duration of app use. In English Breaking's context, this proves that innovative features alone are insufficient; stable, lightweight, and responsive technical performance is crucial to creating a sustainable and satisfying learning experience.

Therefore, technical aspects are not merely system design matters but part of pedagogical strategies affecting motivation, perceived learning value, and ongoing user engagement.

Failure to create a seamless digital environment can lead users to reject the technology, even if they initially showed enthusiasm.

Lack of Social Interaction and the Role of Collaboration

One of the most noticeable shortcomings of the English Breaking app is the absence of social and collaborative interaction features that allow users to learn together, discuss, or give and receive feedback from fellow learners. The lack of discussion forums, group exercises, or online community spaces creates a gap in the social dimension of learning, which is particularly important in language acquisition.

This gap can be analyzed using (Vygotsky, 1978) Social Constructivism Theory. According to Vygotsky, learning is a social process where knowledge is constructed and deepened through interaction with others and guidance within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) the distance between what one can do independently and what one can achieve with help from a more competent person. Therefore, the presence of collaborative features not only increases engagement but also expands users' learning capacity through peer-to-peer learning mechanisms.

Several participants explicitly suggested adding discussion and group practice features as part of improving the app's quality. This shows that although users do not get social experience in the app, they intuitively realize that language learning would be more effective with real interaction, both synchronous (live) and asynchronous (delayed).

These findings support (Zakian et al., 2022) research, which found that collaborative digital learning environments significantly improve vocabulary acquisition and encourage long-term engagement. When users share experiences, learning strategies, or correct each other, a negotiation of meaning occurs that enriches

linguistic understanding and sharpens social and communication skills.

Thus, although English Breaking has succeeded in creating an adaptive and structured individual learning experience, strengthening the social-collaborative aspect is a priority for future development. Without interactive features enabling community learning, the app's full potential as a technology-based language learning medium has not been fully realized.

4. CONCLUSION

This research provides compelling evidence for the effectiveness of the English Breaking app as an innovative tool in enhancing EFL learning experiences. Through comprehensive qualitative analysis of user experiences and systematic observations, several significant conclusions can be drawn about the application's impact on language learning processes and outcomes. First, this app demonstrates remarkable success in transforming student engagement patterns in EFL learning. The consistent finding of 45-60 minutes of daily voluntary engagement outside formal class hours represents a significant improvement over traditional learning methods. This increased engagement is particularly noteworthy as it stems from intrinsic motivation, driven by the app's interactive features and reward systems, rather than external academic requirements.

Second, our findings substantiate the importance of personalized learning experiences in language acquisition. The app's ability to adapt to individual learning paces and provide immediate feedback has proven crucial in maintaining student interest and progress. This aligns with previous research by (Rui Yuan, 2021) on the significance of affective factors in language learning, while extending understanding of how technological integration can support personalized learning paths.

However, despite these promising outcomes, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study's reliance on qualitative data from a limited

user group may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, long-term impacts on language proficiency were not fully assessed due to the study's time constraints. Future research should incorporate larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs to comprehensively evaluate sustained learning outcomes and potential challenges in app implementation.

Nevertheless, this study contributes valuable insights into the role of mobile-assisted language learning applications in fostering engagement and personalized instruction. By highlighting the intrinsic motivational factors and adaptive features of the English Breaking app, it offers practical implications for educators and developers aiming to enhance EFL learning experiences through innovative technology.

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