

**EXPLORING ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES
OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES IN USING THE
U-DICTIONARY APPLICATION**

A THESIS

Submitted to Fulfill one of the Requirements for *Sarjana Pendidikan*
Degree in English Education



By :

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**ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND TEACHER TRAINING
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI
K.H. ABDURRAHMAN WAHID PEKALONGAN
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

All praise and gratitude are addressed to Allah SWT, the Most Gracious and The Most Merciful. With His blessings and guidance, I am finally able to complete this thesis. This work would not have been possible without the support, prayer, and kindness of many wonderful people, and I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to all of them.

1. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my beloved parents, **Mrs. Rahmawati** and **Mr. Taroni**, for their unconditional love, endless prayers, sacrifices, encouragement, and unwavering support throughout every stage of my academic journey. Their patience, guidance, and belief in me have been my greatest source of strength and motivation in completing this thesis.
2. I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my beloved older sister, **Inggih Prabawati**, and my brother-in-law, **Husni Ahmad**, for their constant support, kindness, encouragement, and prayers. Their care and motivation have always inspired me to keep moving forward, especially during the most challenging moments of this journey.
3. My sincere gratitude also goes to my beloved younger brother, **Rizky Elang Suryanata**, for his support, understanding, and encouragement throughout this process. In addition, I am deeply grateful to my beloved nephews, **Muhammad Fadhil** and **Muhammad Fattan**, as well as my beloved niece, **Jennaira Nuswantoro**, whose presence, laughter, and happiness have brought joy, comfort, and renewed motivation whenever I felt exhausted during the completion of this thesis.
4. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to all lecturers of the English Education Department for their dedication, valuable knowledge, guidance, inspiration, and meaningful learning experiences throughout my years of study.
5. My heartfelt thanks are extended to all of my classmates and friends in the English Education Department. Thank you for the friendship, support,

motivation, collaboration, laughter, and unforgettable memories that have made my university life meaningful and enjoyable.

6. My special appreciation is dedicated to my beloved friends, Khoerunnisa (Ica comel), Fitri Nur Aini Hidayah, Aisyah Putri Agustin, Nurul Hidayah, Diah Ayu Puspa Ningrum, Nova Purwandini, Khovivah, and Zalfa Nur Maulidina. Thank you for your kindness, encouragement, prayers, understanding, and unwavering support during both the joyful and challenging moments of this journey. Your friendship has been one of the greatest blessings throughout my academic life.



Motto

“True greatness comes from having the courage to keep moving forward, even when the path is uncertain.”



Rahmaari, Indhi. 2026. *Mengeksplorasi Pengalaman Mahasiswa Jurusan Bahasa Inggris terkait Strategi Pembelajaran Kosakata dalam Menggunakan Aplikasi U-Dictionary*. Skripsi. Program Studi Tadris Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan, UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. Pembimbing: Hafizah Ghany Hayudinna, M. Pd

Kata kunci: pengalaman mahasiswa, strategi pembelajaran kosakata, U-Dictionary, pembelajaran kosakata, *Mobile-Assisted Language Learning* (MALL), Teori Sosiokultural Vygotsky.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris dalam menggunakan aplikasi U-Dictionary untuk pembelajaran kosakata serta mengidentifikasi strategi pembelajaran kosakata yang mereka gunakan selama memanfaatkan aplikasi tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain *narrative inquiry* untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang mendalam mengenai pengalaman belajar mahasiswa. Partisipan penelitian terdiri atas tiga mahasiswa semester enam Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris yang dipilih menggunakan teknik *purposive sampling*. Data dikumpulkan melalui *daily reflection sheets* selama tujuh hari berturut-turut dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Data dianalisis menggunakan *thematic analysis* berdasarkan enam tahapan Braun dan Clarke (2006), sedangkan interpretasi temuan didukung oleh Teori Sosiokultural Vygotsky dan teori *Language Learning Strategies* dari Oxford (1990). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa U-Dictionary tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai kamus digital, tetapi juga sebagai mediational tool yang mendukung pembelajaran kosakata mahasiswa dalam berbagai aktivitas akademik, seperti membaca artikel ilmiah, menulis tugas, mempersiapkan presentasi, dan berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris. Melalui fitur-fitur seperti terjemahan, pelafalan, contoh kalimat, sinonim, dan informasi tata bahasa, aplikasi ini menyediakan scaffolding yang membantu mahasiswa memahami dan menggunakan kosakata baru hingga secara bertahap mereka mampu belajar lebih mandiri. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa proses pembelajaran kosakata dipengaruhi oleh interaksi sosial dengan teman sebaya serta diwarnai oleh berbagai tantangan, seperti keterbatasan fitur premium, gangguan iklan, kosakata akademik yang kompleks, dan kesulitan mempertahankan kosakata baru dalam ingatan. Selain itu, seluruh partisipan menerapkan berbagai strategi pembelajaran kosakata yang meliputi strategi kognitif, strategi memori, strategi metakognitif, dan strategi sosial. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan U-Dictionary mendorong mahasiswa untuk belajar secara aktif, reflektif, dan mandiri dalam mengembangkan penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengembangan pembelajaran kosakata berbasis *Mobile-Assisted Language Learning* (MALL) dengan menunjukkan bahwa aplikasi kamus digital dapat berperan sebagai alat mediasi yang mendukung perkembangan kosakata sekaligus memfasilitasi kemandirian belajar mahasiswa.

Rahmaari, Indhi. 2026. Exploring English Department Students' Experiences with Vocabulary Learning Strategies Using the U-Dictionary App. Undergraduate Thesis. English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. Supervisor: Hafizah Ghany Hayudinna, M. Pd

Keywords: students' experiences, vocabulary learning strategies, U-Dictionary, vocabulary learning, *Mobile-Assisted Language Learning* (MALL), Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the experiences of English Language Education students in using U-Dictionary for vocabulary learning and to identify the learning strategies they employ. The study adopted a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry design involving three sixth-semester students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through daily reflection sheets over seven consecutive days and semi-structured interviews, and were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006), with the findings interpreted through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Oxford's (1990) Language Learning Strategies framework. The findings indicate that U-Dictionary serves as a mediational tool that supports vocabulary learning through features such as translation, pronunciation, example sentences, synonyms, and grammar, enabling students to learn more independently across various academic activities. The learning process was also influenced by social interaction and challenged by limitations such as restricted premium features, advertisements, complex academic vocabulary, and difficulties in retaining newly learned words. In addition, the students employed cognitive, memory, metacognitive, and social strategies in their vocabulary learning. These findings suggest that the use of U-Dictionary promotes active, reflective, and autonomous learning while contributing to the development of vocabulary learning through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL).

PREFACE

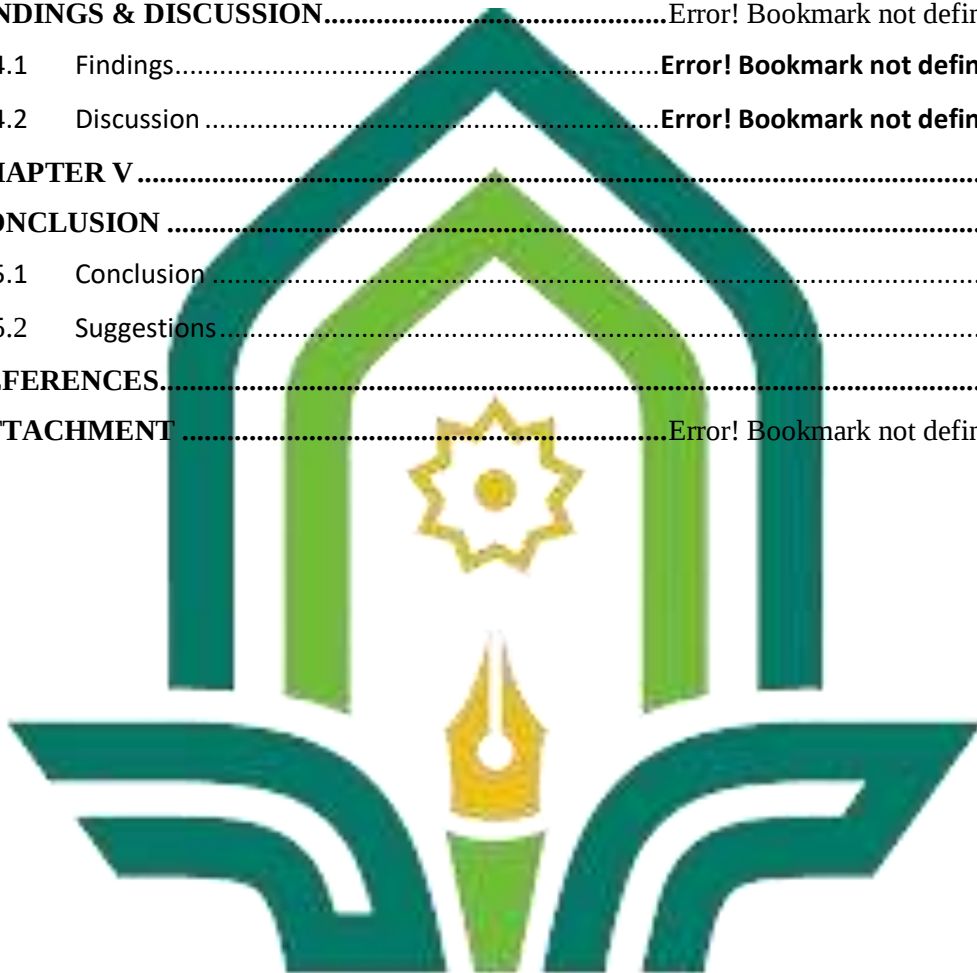
Praise and gratitude be to Allah SWT, the Most Gracious and The Most Merciful. With His endless blessings, guidance, and strength, the researcher is finally able to complete this undergraduate thesis entitled **“Exploring English Major Students’ Experiences And Vocabulary Learning Strategies In Using The U-Dictionary Application”** as one of the requirements for obtaining a bachelor’s degree in the English Education Department. The completion of this thesis is not solely the result of the writer’s efforts, but also the support, guidance, and prayers from many individuals. Therefore, the researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who have contributed to this work, either directly or indirectly.

1. Prof. Dr. H. Zaenal Mustakim, M.Ag. Rector of UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan.
2. Prof. Dr. H. Muhlisin, M.Ag. Dean of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan.
3. Mr. Ahmad Burhanuddin, M.A. Head of the English Language Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan.
4. Hafizah Ghany Hayudinna, M. Pd. My advisor, who provided support, guidance, and valuable time throughout the writing process of this thesis.
5. All lecturers and staff of the English Language Education Department, UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, who generously provided knowledge and information throughout my academic journey.
6. My beloved family, with their endless prayers, support, and patience, have given me strength from the beginning of writing this thesis until its completion.
7. To my beloved friends, “Bjir Hijrah,” thank you for filling this journey with unforgettable memories, endless laughter, meaningful conversations, and unwavering support. Your presence has given me strength during difficult times and made every success even more memorable.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Vocabulary is an essential component of language proficiency, serving as the foundation for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Schmitt (2010), vocabulary knowledge plays a central role in language development because it enables learners to understand and produce meaningful communication. In higher education, vocabulary becomes even more important because it directly influences students' academic success. English major students, in particular, are required to read complex academic texts, write well-structured papers, participate in discussions, and understand discipline-specific terminology. Supporting this view, Alahmadi and Foltz (2020) found that vocabulary knowledge significantly affects students' academic reading performance. Therefore, sufficient vocabulary knowledge is essential for English major students to comprehend scholarly materials, express ideas effectively, and participate actively in academic discourse.

Despite its importance, vocabulary learning remains challenging for many learners. Traditional vocabulary learning methods, such as memorizing word lists, translating words repeatedly, and relying on printed dictionaries, are often passive and repetitive. Schmitt (2010) argues that effective vocabulary learning requires repeated exposure and meaningful engagement with words rather than simple memorization. Although traditional methods may help learners recognize

words temporarily, they often fail to promote deeper understanding and long-term retention. Furthermore, these methods frequently lack meaningful contexts that enable learners to apply newly acquired vocabulary in authentic communication. Such challenges are particularly evident among sixth-semester English major students, who are expected to engage with increasingly complex academic texts and specialized vocabulary. Shintani (2019) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is strongly associated with successful reading comprehension in EFL contexts. Consequently, limited vocabulary knowledge may hinder students' comprehension, reduce fluency, and negatively affect their academic performance.

To address these challenges, digital technology has transformed language learning practices. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has emerged as an innovative approach that integrates mobile devices into language learning activities. Mahdi (2018) reported that mobile technologies positively influence vocabulary learning by providing learners with flexible access to learning resources anytime and anywhere. Unlike traditional methods, MALL applications enable learners to engage with vocabulary through multiple modes, including reading, listening, and interactive activities. Lin and Lin (2019), through a meta-analysis, found that mobile-assisted vocabulary learning significantly improves vocabulary acquisition and retention. In addition, these applications often provide immediate feedback, monitor learners' progress, and facilitate repeated exposure to target vocabulary, all of which contribute to more effective learning.

Among various MALL applications, U-Dictionary has become one of the most widely used tools for vocabulary learning. The application provides multiple features, including instant translation, pronunciation guides, example sentences, vocabulary exercises, and word-saving functions. Oxford (1990) explains that language learning strategies involve conscious actions that learners use to understand, remember, and apply new information. The features available in U-Dictionary can support cognitive, memory, and metacognitive strategies by helping learners understand meanings, review vocabulary, and monitor their learning progress. Previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of U-Dictionary in language learning. Yuliyanti and Siahaan (2022) found that U-Dictionary positively contributed to students' vocabulary mastery by helping them understand unfamiliar words more efficiently. Similarly, Sudhirahayu et al. (2024) reported that students perceived U-Dictionary as beneficial for improving pronunciation and increasing confidence in using English vocabulary. These findings indicate that U-Dictionary has the potential to support vocabulary learning through various interactive features.

However, despite the growing body of research on U-Dictionary, several limitations remain. Rasyidah et al. (2023) investigated the use of U-Dictionary among senior high school students and found that the application supported vocabulary learning and reading comprehension. Likewise, Suhardi et al. (2024) reported positive impacts of U-Dictionary on students' independent learning in secondary education. Although these studies provide valuable insights, they focused primarily on high school students or learners who were not English

majors. Their learning contexts and vocabulary needs differ considerably from those of English major students at the university level. Sixth-semester English major students are expected to engage with academic journals, scholarly articles, research reports, and discipline-specific texts that require a higher level of vocabulary knowledge. At this stage, students are no longer learning only general English vocabulary but are also required to use academic vocabulary accurately in reading, writing, speaking, and research-related activities. Therefore, the challenges they face and the strategies they develop may differ from those reported in previous studies.

Another limitation of previous studies is their emphasis on measurable learning outcomes, such as vocabulary achievement, reading comprehension, or pronunciation improvement. While studies conducted by Yuliyanti and Siahaan (2022) and Sudhirahayu et al. (2024) provide evidence of the usefulness of U-Dictionary, they offer limited insight into students' personal experiences, perceptions, challenges, and vocabulary learning strategies while using the application. Consequently, learners' voices and lived experiences remain underexplored. Understanding these experiences is important because learning is not solely a cognitive process but also a social and contextual experience. Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning occurs through interaction with cultural tools and social environments. From this perspective, U-Dictionary can be viewed as a mediational tool that supports students in constructing meaning, understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, and developing independent learning strategies. Through features such as translation, pronunciation guides, and

example sentences, the application provides scaffolding that helps learners move from initial understanding toward more independent vocabulary use.

Among the many digital dictionary applications available today, U-Dictionary was selected for this study because it integrates multiple learning features within a single platform. These features allow learners to access vocabulary information quickly, review unfamiliar words, listen to pronunciations, and learn vocabulary in context. Such affordances make U-Dictionary a practical tool for supporting independent and self-regulated vocabulary learning. Li and Hafner (2021) argue that digital learning environments influence learners' engagement with language learning and shape their learning behaviors. Likewise, Boroughani et al. (2023) emphasize that technology-assisted vocabulary learning can foster learner autonomy and self-regulation, both of which are important for successful language learning in higher education.

Since learning experiences are personal, contextual, and shaped by individual interactions with technology, a narrative inquiry approach is considered appropriate for this study. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences and how those experiences influence their learning behaviors. Through this approach, students can share their stories, perceptions, challenges, and strategies while using U-Dictionary as part of their vocabulary learning process.

In addition, a preliminary survey was conducted among sixth-semester English major students to identify their use of U-Dictionary in vocabulary

learning. The survey results indicated that students frequently used U-Dictionary while engaging with English-language content outside the classroom, such as watching movies, listening to music, reading online articles, and accessing social media content. Students reported that the application helped them understand unfamiliar words and expand their vocabulary independently. These findings suggest that U-Dictionary has become part of students' everyday learning practices. However, little is known about how students experience the use of the application, what challenges they encounter, and what vocabulary learning strategies they develop through these activities. Therefore, further exploration of students' lived experiences is needed.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how sixth-semester English major students experience the use of U-Dictionary in their academic vocabulary learning and how those experiences shape the vocabulary learning strategies they develop. By investigating students' perceptions, challenges, and learning behaviors, this study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of mobile-assisted language learning tools in supporting vocabulary development among English major students in higher education. The findings may also provide practical insights for educators, students, and curriculum developers regarding the effective integration of digital tools into vocabulary learning practices.

1.2 Formulation of the Problems

Based on the background described above, the research questions of this study are formulated as follows:

1. What experiences do sixth-semester English major students have when using U-Dictionary for vocabulary learning?
2. What vocabulary learning strategies do students develop through their use of U-Dictionary?

1.3 Aim(s) of the Study

Based on the study background, this research formulates questions to explore students' experiences and vocabulary learning strategies in using the U-Dictionary application.

1. To explore the experiences of sixth-semester English major students in using U-Dictionary for vocabulary learning.
2. To identify the vocabulary learning strategies that emerge from students' experiences using U-Dictionary.

1.4 Operational Definitions

1. U-Dictionary

U-Dictionary is defined as a mobile-based English learning application that provides translation, pronunciation, and vocabulary support. Based on Vygotsky (1978), it is viewed as a mediational tool that supports students' vocabulary learning.

2. Students' Experiences

Students' experiences refer to English major students' experiences in using U-Dictionary for vocabulary learning, including its use, benefits, and challenges (Vygotsky, 1978).

3. Learning Strategies

Vocabulary learning strategies refer to the conscious actions used by English major students to learn, understand, remember, and use English vocabulary while using U-Dictionary (Oxford, 1990).

1.5 Significance of the Research

1. Theoretical

This study contributes to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory by examining the role of U-Dictionary as a mediational tool in vocabulary learning. It also supports Oxford's Language Learning Strategies theory by exploring the vocabulary learning strategies developed by students while using the application.

2. Empirical

This study will provide empirical insights into students' experiences and vocabulary learning strategies while using U-Dictionary.

3. Practical

This study presents valuable information for readers, especially teachers, students, and application developers, about using U-Dictionary as an interactive tool to improve English vocabulary learning.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of sixth-semester English major students in using the U-Dictionary application for vocabulary learning and identified the vocabulary learning strategies that emerged through its use. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry design, data were collected through daily reflection sheets and semi-structured interviews with three participants and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The findings revealed that U-Dictionary functioned as more than a digital dictionary. It served as a mediational tool that helped participants understand unfamiliar vocabulary encountered during various academic activities, such as reading journal articles, writing assignments, preparing presentations, translating texts, and participating in classroom discussions. In addition, features such as translation, pronunciation audio, example sentences, grammatical classifications, and synonym suggestions provided digital scaffolding that gradually supported participants in becoming more independent vocabulary learners. These findings are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, particularly the concepts of mediation, scaffolding, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and social interaction.

The study also found that participants developed four categories of vocabulary learning strategies based on Oxford's (1990) Language Learning Strategies framework: cognitive, metacognitive, memory, and social strategies. These strategies emerged naturally as participants completed authentic academic tasks and interacted with both digital tools and their peers. Overall, this study concludes that U-Dictionary contributed positively to vocabulary learning by supporting vocabulary comprehension, promoting learner autonomy, and encouraging the development of effective vocabulary learning strategies among English major students.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed for students, lecturers, and future researchers.

1. Suggestions for Students

Students are encouraged to use U-Dictionary not only for translating unfamiliar words but also for exploring its features, such as pronunciation audio, example sentences, grammatical information, and synonyms, to develop a deeper understanding of vocabulary. They are also encouraged to combine independent learning with peer discussions, as meaningful interaction can strengthen vocabulary acquisition

2. Suggestions for Lecturers

Lecturers are encouraged to integrate digital vocabulary learning tools into classroom activities and guide students in using them strategically. Combining technology with collaborative learning can promote learner autonomy while supporting vocabulary development through meaningful social interaction

3. Suggestions for Future Researchers

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies with a larger number of participants or in different educational contexts. Comparative studies involving other vocabulary learning applications or AI-assisted language learning tools may provide broader insights into technology-enhanced vocabulary learning and the development of learners' vocabulary learning strategies.



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