

Enhancing Legal English Vocabulary Acquisition through Memrise: The Role of Gamified Association in Islamic Higher Education

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Abstrak

Studi ini menyelidiki efektivitas aplikasi Memrise dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata Bahasa Inggris Hukum mahasiswa dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi Islam di Indonesia. Menggunakan desain pra-eksperimental satu kelompok, yaitu pra-tes-pasca-tes, 24 mahasiswa S1 dari program Hukum Keluarga Islam berpartisipasi selama empat minggu. Data dikumpulkan melalui pra-tes dan pasca-tes serta kuesioner persepsi. Hasil uji-t sampel berpasangan menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan dalam performa kosakata mahasiswa setelah menggunakan Memrise ($t(23) = 12,37$, $p < 0,001$) dengan ukuran efek yang besar (Cohen's $d = 1,85$). Mahasiswa juga menyatakan persepsi yang sangat positif mengenai motivasi, kegunaan, dan kepuasan belajar ($M = 4,31$, $SD = 0,48$). Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa fitur-fitur gamifikasi multimoda Memrise—menggabungkan pengulangan, visual, dan audio—memfasilitasi pemerolehan kosakata dan keterlibatan pembelajar yang efektif. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa mengintegrasikan Memrise ke dalam mata kuliah Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Tertentu (ESP), seperti Bahasa Inggris Hukum, dapat meningkatkan penguasaan leksikal, mendorong pembelajaran mandiri, dan mendukung integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dalam pendidikan bahasa digital.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggris Hukum, Memrise, Pembelajaran Kosakata, Gamifikasi, Pendidikan Tinggi Islam

Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the Memrise application in enhancing students' mastery of Legal English vocabulary within the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia. Employing a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design, 24 undergraduate students from the Islamic Family Law program participated over four weeks. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests and a perception questionnaire. The results of a paired-sample t-test revealed a significant improvement in students' vocabulary performance after using Memrise ($t(23) = 12.37, p < .001$) with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.85$). Students also expressed highly positive perceptions regarding motivation, usability, and learning satisfaction ($M = 4.31, SD = 0.48$). The findings confirm that Memrise's gamified, multimodal features—combining repetition, visuals, and audio—facilitate effective vocabulary acquisition and learner engagement. The study concludes that integrating Memrise into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, such as Legal English, can improve lexical mastery, foster autonomous learning, and support the integration of Islamic values in digital language education.

Keywords: Legal English, Memrise, Vocabulary Learning, Gamification, Islamic Higher Education

A. Introduction

The advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed the methods of English language acquisition in higher education, notably in Indonesia. In the realm of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a notable focus has emerged on the acquisition of domain-specific vocabulary, particularly within the legal environment, often referred to as Legal English. It is essential to know a wide range of Legal English vocabulary, as it encompasses technical phrases, domain-specific collocations, and conceptual contexts that can be challenging for non-native speakers to understand (Novi Indriyani & Wakerkwa, 2024).

However, traditional teaching approaches that focus solely on "rote learning" and translation often fail to help students retain what they have learned, even in Indonesian Islamic higher education. Hartini & Suri Ardini (2024) found that while students acknowledged the importance of studying English vocabulary, their vocabulary mastery scores remained below the target level, suggesting a correlation with inadequate English language proficiency.

Mobile apps and gamified/mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) methods are becoming increasingly effective for vocabulary acquisition. The Memrise app, for instance, utilizes spaced repetition, mnemonic association, multimedia flashcards, and game elements such as points, a scoreboard, and a progress indicator. Studies in general learning environments have demonstrated that utilizing Memrise can markedly improve motivation and language memory (Pardamean & Santoso, 2025).

In addition, thorough evaluations of gamification in vocabulary training in higher education have demonstrated that incorporating game elements into vocabulary acquisition not only makes it more engaging but also helps students become more independent and has lasting impacts on memory (Haque et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, the utilization of tools such as Memrise, particularly within the realm of Legal English—especially in Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions—continues to be significantly constrained. This signifies a significant research gap to address, considering the learning features at Islamic institutions (the integration of intellectual, moral, and religious dimensions) that may necessitate adaptation or an alternative strategy.

In the realm of Islamic higher education in Indonesia, students are required not only to attain proficiency in English for academic or professional objectives but also to uphold Islamic values, including honesty, academic excellence, and moral character. So, a practical, fun, and helpful way to learn new words is quite important (Rahmah, 2022). This study employs a quasi-experimental methodology (Pretest and Posttest) to assess the efficacy of Memrise in the acquisition of Legal English vocabulary among students in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.

This study aims to investigate the efficacy of Memrise in enhancing knowledge of Legal English vocabulary and how students perceive its use as a vocabulary acquisition tool within the framework of Islamic higher education.

Literature Review

Legal English Vocabulary Learning in ESP Contexts

Legal English is a specialized area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that enables students to learn how to correctly use and understand legal terminology (Haigh, 2012).

In Indonesia, law students, especially those at Islamic universities, face an additional challenge: they must integrate the technical terminology of law with Islamic legal conceptions (Syariah), which significantly diverge from secular legal traditions. Conventional vocabulary instruction techniques, including rote memorization and teacher-centered translation, often fail to facilitate long-term retention and learner autonomy (I. S. P. Nation, 2013; P. Nation & Richards, 2017). ESP study emphasizes that acquiring vocabulary effectively should involve being exposed to it in context, seeing it repeatedly, and recalling it actively. Using digital tools like Memrise can help address these problems by providing students with learner-driven, multimodal experiences.

Technology-Enhanced Vocabulary Learning

Over the last decade, the integration of technology in vocabulary learning has transformed language pedagogy. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) platforms offer flexible, interactive, and personalized environments that increase learner motivation and efficiency (Burston, 2015; Ward, 2018).

Research conducted by Kohnke et al. (2019) and Abdulaziz Al Fadda (2020) suggests that mobile applications can enhance self-paced learning and retention by utilizing spaced repetition and gamified practice. These results are consistent with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize self-regulation and active participation (Phil, 2011).

Moreover, technology enables students to work with real materials and receive immediate feedback, which helps them think more critically and effectively. Digital tools can help EFL students in higher education, especially those studying abstract subjects like legal discourse, connect what they learn in class with how they apply it in the real world (CHAPELLE, 2009).

Memrise as a Vocabulary Learning Platform

Memrise is a popular digital platform that helps people learn new words by using spaced repetition, visual association, and games (Deputri et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2019). Its unique method uses mnemonic techniques and interactive multimedia to help students make connections between new words (Ward, 2018).

According to Deputri et al. (2023), students who used Memrise scored significantly higher on posttests than those who used traditional paper-based approaches. The app's rewards and leaderboards also help keep people motivated and interested (Eppard et al., 2016).

Memrise also offers contextual learning, which means that vocabulary is used in honest conversations and situations. This element is beneficial for ESP learners who need to know how terminology works in academic discourse (I. S. P. Nation, 2013). According to Quyen (2021), Memrise encourages independence and self-directed learning, particularly in university settings where students must juggle multiple academic responsibilities. Even with these benefits, few studies have examined how it affects teaching Legal English or higher education in Islamic environments. Consequently, this study enhances the expanding corpus of research on digital-assisted English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning by examining the incorporation of Memrise into Legal English vocabulary training in Indonesia.

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009) and Spaced Repetition Theory (Ebbinghaus, 1885). Mayer says that learners understand material better when it is given in several ways, such on multimedia platforms like Memrise. Spaced Repetition Theory posits that revisiting taught material at progressively longer intervals enhances long-term memory retention.

The combination of these theories supports the hypothesis that Memrise, by integrating multimedia presentation and spaced review, can improve learners' mastery of complex vocabulary, such as Legal English terminology. This theoretical foundation corresponds with prior research indicating that digital tools enhance cognitive engagement and facilitate long-term vocabulary retention (Abdulaziz Al Fadda, 2020; P. Nation & Richards, 2017).

B. Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest–Posttest design to evaluate the effectiveness of Memrise in improving students’ mastery of Legal English vocabulary. The design was selected because it facilitates the assessment of a treatment’s effect on a single group by comparing performance metrics before and after the intervention (Creswell J. W. & D., 2023).

The study was conducted over four weeks, during which participants used Memrise as a supplementary tool for vocabulary learning. The independent variable was the use of Memrise, while the dependent variable was students’ Legal English vocabulary performance, measured through pre- and post-tests. The design can be illustrated as follows:

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
G	O ₁	X	O ₂

where:

O₁ = Pretest score

X = Treatment using the Memrise application

O₂ = Posttest score

2. Participants

The research was conducted at IAIN Kendari, specifically in the Islamic Family Law Study Program (Hukum Keluarga Islam). A total of 24 undergraduate students participated in the study. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, as they were enrolled in a *Legal English* course in the ongoing semester.

Most participants had low English proficiency, particularly in vocabulary and legal terminology. They had previously learned English for General Purposes but had limited exposure to Legal English. This condition made them ideal subjects for examining the effectiveness of a vocabulary-based learning tool such as Memrise.

Prior to the study, participants were briefed about the objectives, schedule, and procedures. Participation was voluntary, and students were assured that their academic evaluation would not be affected by the research outcomes.

3. Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect the data:

1. Pretest and Post-test

A 40-item vocabulary test was developed to measure students’ mastery of Legal English terms. The items were derived from authentic legal sources such as Legal English by Haigh (2012), Black’s Law Dictionary by Garner (2004), and Muslim Family Law (Muhammad Ekramul Haque, 2015), focusing on common legal terminology relevant to Indonesian legal studies (e.g., “verdict,” “plaintiff,” “jurisdiction”). The reliability of the test was verified through Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.87$), indicating high internal consistency.

2. Treatment Material via Memrise

A customized Memrise course titled “*Legal English Vocabulary for Indonesian Law Students*” was designed by the researcher. The course contained 150 key terms divided into five thematic sets (criminal law, contract law, Islamic law, courtroom procedures, and legal professions). Each term was accompanied by its English definition, Bahasa Indonesia translation, example sentence, images, and audio as well to facilitate multimodal learning.

3. Perception Questionnaire

A five-point Likert scale questionnaire (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was adapted from (Deputri et al., 2023; Quyen, 2021; Topala & Tomozii, 2014) to explore students’ perceptions of using Memrise for vocabulary learning. The questionnaire covered three dimensions: motivation, usability, and learning satisfaction. It consisted of 15 items across three dimensions: Motivation (5 items), Usability (5 items), and Learning Satisfaction (5 items). The internal reliability for this questionnaire was also acceptable ($\alpha = 0.84$).

4. Procedure

The study consisted of four main phases:

1. **Pretest Phase:**
Before the treatment, participants took a pretest to determine their initial mastery of Legal English vocabulary. The results confirmed that most students had low baseline vocabulary scores, indicating limited familiarity with standard legal terms.
2. **Treatment Phase (4 weeks):**
Students were guided to use Memrise as a supportive learning tool to help them build vocabulary gradually through repetition and gamified learning. The researcher provided weekly instructions and checked progress through the Memrise dashboard to ensure consistent participation. Students were instructed to use Memrise for 20–30 minutes daily. They were encouraged to complete at least one learning set per week. The instructor monitored students' learning progress through the Memrise dashboard.
3. **Posttest Phase:**
After four weeks, participants took the same vocabulary test (reordered items) as the Posttest to measure improvement.
4. **Questionnaire Administration:**
Following the Posttest, participants completed the perception questionnaire via Google Form to reflect on their experiences, motivation, and satisfaction with using the app. All activities were conducted in an online blended learning environment, integrating Google Classroom for coordination and Memrise as the leading learning platform.

5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data from pretest and posttest results were analyzed using a paired sample t-test through SPSS version 23 to determine whether there was a statistically significant improvement in students' vocabulary scores after the treatment. The effect size was also calculated using Cohen's d, interpreted as small (0.2), medium (0.5), or large (0.8) effects (Daly & Cohen, 1978).

The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to identify students' perceptions toward Memrise in terms of motivation, usability, and satisfaction.

6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institution's research ethics committee. All participants gave informed consent, and their identities were kept confidential. Participation was voluntary, and students could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

C. Results and Discussion

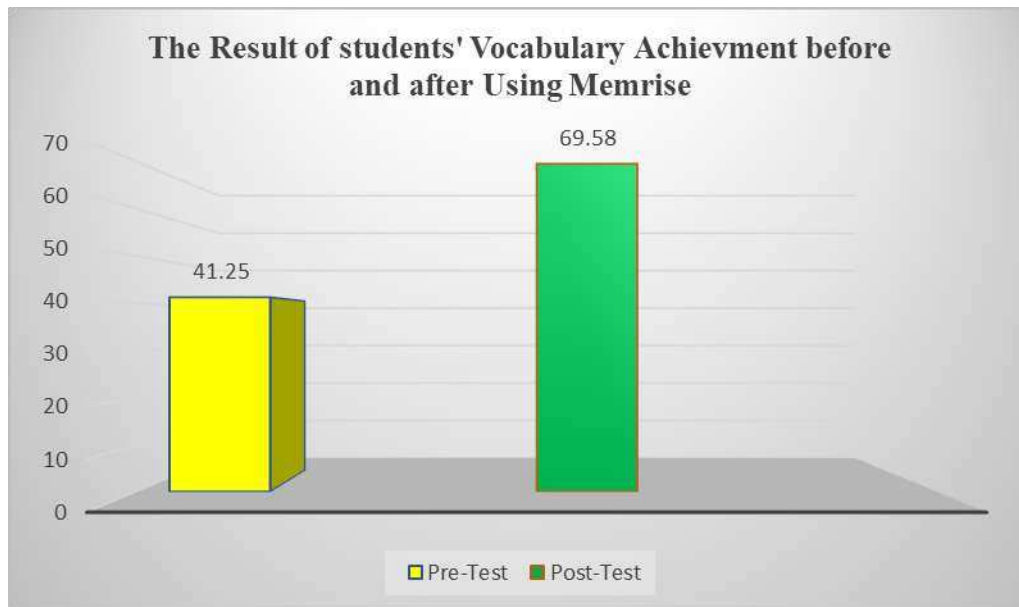
Quantitative Findings

1. Improvement in Legal English Vocabulary

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare students' pretest and posttest scores after four weeks of using *Memrise*. Table 1 presents the summary of the results.

Test	Mean	SD	N	t(23)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Pre-test	41.25	8.74	24			
Post-test	69.58	9.16	24	12.37	0.000	1.85 (large)

Table 1. Results of paired sample t-test between pretest and post-test.



Graphic 1. Pre-Post Test Result on Students' Vocabulary Scores

The results indicate a significant improvement in students' Legal English vocabulary scores after using Memrise ($t(23) = 12.37, p < .001$). The mean difference of 28.33 points suggests that the Memrise-based learning intervention had a strong positive impact on vocabulary acquisition. The effect size was large (Cohen's $d = 1.85$), indicating a substantial practical improvement in vocabulary mastery.

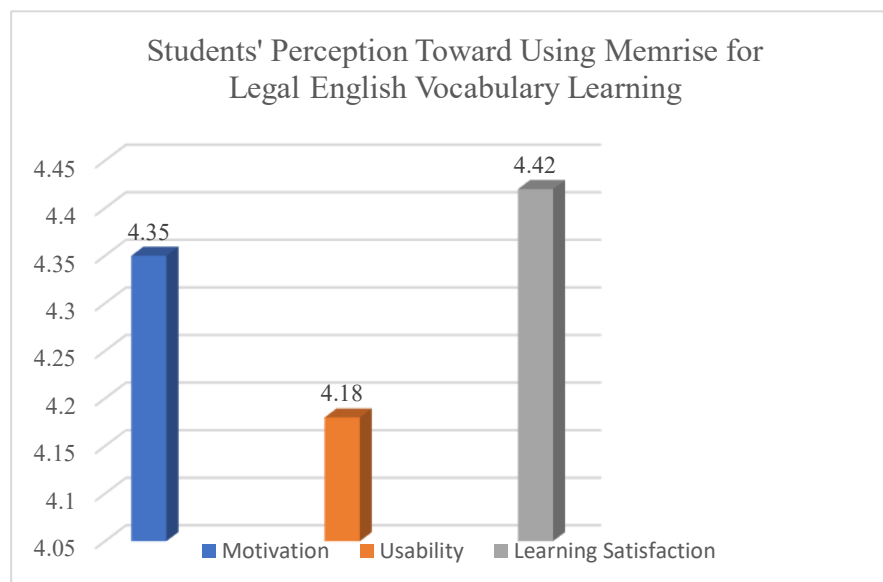
These findings are consistent with previous studies that highlighted the role of digital vocabulary platforms in enhancing lexical retention and learner engagement (Burston, 2014; Klimova & Poulouva, 2016; Pradana et al., 2023). Specifically, Memrise's use of spaced repetition, audio-visual input, and gamified learning appeared effective for students with low English proficiency levels, aligning with (Lei et al., 2022) findings on motivation and long-term retention in EFL learners.

2. Students' Perceptions toward Memrise

To explore students' attitudes toward using Memrise, a descriptive analysis was conducted on the perception questionnaire. Table 2 summarizes the results for each dimension.

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Motivation	4.35	0.47	Very Positive
Usability	4.18	0.52	Positive
Learning Satisfaction	4.42	0.44	Very Positive
Overall	4.31	0.48	Very Positive

Table 2. Students' perceptions of Memrise in Legal English learning



Graphic 2. Students' Perception after Using Memrise

Overall, students expressed very positive perceptions toward the use of Memrise in learning Legal English vocabulary ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.48$). The highest-rated dimension was *learning satisfaction* ($M = 4.42$), indicating that students enjoyed the multimodal features (videos, audio, and images) and appreciated the autonomy offered by the platform.

These results are similar to those of Quyen (2021) and Triyoga et al. (2023), who found that mobile learning apps are more motivating, convenient, and fun than traditional vocabulary drills. The dynamic and gamified design of Memrise was particularly beneficial for law students with limited proficiency in the English language. It helped them deal with their anxieties and get more interested in learning legal terms.

3. Discussion

The current study validates that Memrise serves as an efficient digital platform for instructing Legal English vocabulary within the framework of Islamic higher education, especially for learners with constrained English ability.

The significant enhancement observed between pretest and posttest scores indicates that technology-mediated vocabulary training facilitates deeper student engagement and more effective retention of terminology.

The results are also align with the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer, 2009), suggests that incorporating both verbal and visual information facilitates longer-term information retention. Memrise's use of sounds, visuals, and examples in context helps learners make deeper connections between words, especially when it comes to abstract or technical legal ideas.

Moreover, the high motivation and satisfaction levels support Dornyei's (2010) *motivational framework*, suggests that incorporating both verbal and visual information facilitates longer-term information retention. Memrise's use of sounds, visuals, and examples in context helps learners make deeper connections between words, especially when it comes to abstract or technical legal ideas. (Saumi et al., 2025).

This research provides empirical evidence within the Indonesian Islamic higher education context that incorporating Memrise-based modules into English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, such as Legal English, can significantly improve learning outcomes and students' attitudes towards language acquisition. This substantiates the advocacy for contextualized and technology-enhanced ESP education (Fithriani, 2021; Klimova & Poulova, 2016).

4. Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in several aspects:

1. It only included 24 students from one study program; thus, the results might not apply to other schools or levels of skill.
2. The four-week treatment period may not have been sufficient to assess long-term retention of vocabulary.
3. The study did not include a control group, so improvement cannot be entirely attributed to Memrise alone.

Furthermore, the study does not compare Memrise with other learning applications or instructional methods. Future research is encouraged to conduct longitudinal or comparative studies involving larger and more diverse samples, multiple cohorts, more extended intervention periods, and comparative analyses with other platforms such as Quizlet or Quizizz.

D. Conclusion

1. Conclusion

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of *Memrise* in developing students' Legal English vocabulary and to explore their perceptions of using this digital platform within the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

The results from the Pretest and Posttest indicated a statistically significant enhancement in students' vocabulary proficiency following a four-week *Memrise*-based educational intervention. The enormous effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.85$) indicates that the software has a significant impact on learners' understanding and retention of specialized legal phrases.

Students also reported having very positive feelings about using *Memrise*, particularly in terms of motivation, ease of use, and overall satisfaction with the learning experience. The interactive and gamified learning design, combined with multimedia content, helped them acquire complex legal jargon that would have otherwise sounded abstract or intimidating.

In summary, *Memrise* helped students in Islamic higher education settings who did not speak English very well learn Legal English vocabulary. The use of mobile-assisted vocabulary learning (MAVL) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses enhanced lexical knowledge and promoted student autonomy and confidence in language acquisition.

2. Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study have several pedagogical implications for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers in Islamic higher education institutions:

1. Integrating Digital Vocabulary Tools in ESP Courses
Incorporating mobile applications such as *Memrise* into Legal English or other ESP courses can create a more engaging and student-centered learning experience. Teachers can develop customized courses aligned with specific disciplinary vocabulary needs.
2. Supporting Low-Proficiency Learners through Multimodal Input
Students with limited English backgrounds benefit from multimodal exposure (text, image, and sound), which enhances comprehension and long-term retention. This approach should be prioritized in early-semester ESP instruction.
3. Encouraging Autonomous Learning
Memrise encourages independent learning and allows students to practice vocabulary at their own pace. Educators can use *Memrise*'s tracking features to monitor students' progress and provide individualized feedback.
4. Contextualizing Vocabulary to Local Legal Discourses
Given that Legal English includes both Western and Islamic legal concepts, instructors are encouraged to contextualize vocabulary materials with examples from Indonesian Islamic law, court procedures, and family law cases to enhance relevance.
5. Future Research Directions
Future studies should consider extending the treatment period, incorporating a control group, and comparing multiple platforms (e.g., *Memrise* vs. Quizlet vs. Quizizz) to determine differential impacts on vocabulary retention and learner motivation. A mixed-method approach could also provide deeper insights into learners' strategies and challenges.

3. Final Remark

In conclusion, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and Legal English instruction within Islamic higher education. The use of *Memrise* not only facilitates vocabulary learning but also bridges the gap between technology integration and discipline-specific language education, supporting Indonesia's broader efforts to modernize and internationalize higher education.

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