

# The Efficacy of Memrise as a Supplementary Study Material in Understanding French as a Foreign Language

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## ABSTRACT

Different obstacles in learning may cause setbacks. In order to help learners achieve a better understanding, some studies have found that with the aid of current technology, learners will gain knowledge easier, faster, and more efficiently. Thus, mobile learning has been found to be effective in improving educational outcomes. Previous studies have shown that integrating technology with foreign language learning is beneficial to learners; such as improving certain competences like Italian pronunciation by using the application Duolingo, refining English vocabulary mastery using the platform Memrise, or learning Spanish solely by using Rosetta Stone, without any formal, additional help. This research aims to study the efficacy of using the language learning application Memrise as a supplementary study material outside of a French language learning class at university level for oral comprehension. The participants of this research were A2 level French university students who had never learned French as a foreign language before. A pre-test, post-test, survey, and observation were processed qualitatively and analysed according to A2 competencies and Desmons' *FLE*. It is found that by using Memrise as a supplementary study material gives a lot of benefit to learners in gaining more knowledge to capture and understand French audio documents. This is due to generating interest and making user experience easier that motivates learners to learn outside of class and encourages them to improve their level. This supports previous studies using mobile-assisted language learning or gamification of foreign languages.

**Keywords:** *Efficacy, FLE, Language Learning Application, Memrise, Oral Comprehension.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Several methods of teaching foreign languages that integrate with the latest technologies have emerged in modern times. Departing from Burston's [1] opinion regarding the increased use of smartphones among the public, Connolly et al. [2] proposed the idea of integrating smartphones as an aid in foreign language learning by using a feature called gamification. Giannetto et al. [3] argue that the gamification feature in a smartphone makes use of elements that are characteristic of a game into a non-game (non-game) concept that increase user or learner engagement and experience. In addition, there is also a term Mobile Assisted Language Learning/MALL which is often used by teachers using technological to advantage. Kukulska-Hulme [4] defines MALL as the use of mobile technology in language learning, especially because device portability is an advantage. According to Kétyi

[5], to take advantage of the full potential of a smartphone, it is advisable to integrate learning with games or elements of a game, with more specific mobile games. With the shift of many fields to computer-based usage, often relying on the internet, the field of education can be no less advanced, especially with foreign language learning. However, Gay et al. [6] state that smartphones and similar tools, are not a substitute for existing learning, but rather serve as an addition to learning in new environments with new capabilities, although not all content and learning methods are suitable for a smartphone.

Therefore, the use of language learning applications only accessed by mobile phone or internet is one method by which one can learn a foreign language. Memrise (<https://www.memrise.com/>) is one of many well-known language learning applications that is fun and effective having several user-friendly and unique

features, and like others, it encourages students to register for free to get them started, which then records their learning journey. Users can choose from a variety of languages, from French to Latin, dividing the courses into various levels that are adjusted by the Memrise team. Users can also tailor classes to suit their needs; e.g., a French course that teaches 450 commonly used words in French or a French conjugation course. There are also courses such as French geography or history introductory courses. With these choices, students are given opportunity to start learning with the language or culture. In addition, Memrise users can take courses according to their abilities, record their progress, and obtain an attractive award after finishing a course. This feature is an example of gamification. Users can also learn through short videos made by native speakers of the language. Another unique feature of this application is translating automatically an item using the camera from a smartphone. Memrise is not only available in the form of an application for smartphones but is also available from a website, namely [www.memrise.com](http://www.memrise.com).

There are several previous studies that also discuss language learning application as the main topic using various approaches. Martinelli [7] and Aulia et al. [8] examine the effectiveness of the Duolingo application on a specific ability in foreign language learning; while Gerova [9] examines its advantages and disadvantages, Ratzlaff [10] studies the effect of using Duolingo in a university-level foreign language learning class. Darmawangsa et al. [11] discuss the integration of multimedia technology and CD-ROM MAP in learning French pronunciation. Additionally, the studies mentioned above examine the use of other applications, the behaviour of foreign language learners using applications, various application usage comparison, and the influence of social class in learning using applications [12] – [17]. To fill in the gap, this article measures and identifies Memrise's effect on French oral comprehension in a university-level class.

## 2. METHOD

This qualitative study uses pre- and post-test strategies by studying the answers to oral comprehension questions based on audio documents taken from Alter Ego+2 [18] already discussed in the classroom. The test was given to two groups: those who did not use the application (control group) and those using the application (experimental group). These groups consist of second-semester French Studies students in the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia, who are in the French Proficiency II class and have never studied the language before the courses.

After the pre-test, the experimental group was given a task for 5 days to complete one level each day as an additional task and a different variable from group one

(the control group). A survey was also given after the post-test regarding the experience of using the Memrise application as additional material. Overall, the data taken are details of pre- and post-test scores, duration of time used by the experimental group working on one level each day, as well as survey results. Meanwhile, the analysis was carried out based on competency A2 according to CECRL [19] and FLE theory according to Desmons [20].

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The pre-test in the form of audio document comprehension questions was evaluated as a measuring tool of the initial abilities before the case study and observation period began. It was found that there was only a difference of 0.5 points in the mean scores for the two groups. Overall, the research subjects found it difficult to listen to names that had similar pronunciations, for example, "Sophia" and "Sophie". This problem may not be too significant, but the similarity of pronunciation between «*faire de l'équitation*» and «*faire de la natation*» and a misunderstanding of the context heard in the audio document can be fatal in communication. Meanwhile, according to CECRL, A2 level students should have achieved the ability to understand sentences and general expressions related to several topics such as personal or family information, shopping, the surrounding environment, and work, and communication and exchange of basic and direct information on a topic that is already understood. It can be said that the pre-test taken from the material that has been given and discussed shows that the students' understanding has not been fully achieved.

Referring to Desmons [20], seeing that the test material comes from audio documents that have been used and discussed, it can be said that the teacher has not fully implemented the FLE method. Desmons [20] state that departing from a communicative approach, the FLE method prioritizes better integration of students into foreign societies. Thus, the objectives of using the method are described, namely (1) knowing several ways to teach a multicultural, multilingual or monolingual class; (2) teaching using a communicative approach such as through games; (3) knowing when the time is right to justify; (4) understanding the mistakes made in teaching and to look for other, better, alternatives; (5) knowing the best way to evaluate students; (6) balancing learning among four main competencies: *la compréhension orale*, *la production orale*, *la compréhension écrite* and *la production écrite*; (7) respecting students by providing various "path" options for the future. The peculiarities of the French name Sophie are still not absorbed by students but the writing of the sound [f] with "ph" has been absorbed. The difference between *l'équitation* 'riding a horse' and *la*

*natation* 'swimming' has also not been fully absorbed. However, the book *Alter Ego+ A2* already covers the scope of CECRL A2, namely general expressions.

After the pre-test, the experimental group was given an assignment using the Memrise application as an addition outside the classroom. The group that was given this task used the Memrise application for 5 (five) days and was required to pass one level in the application to get maximum results. Then the two groups again conducted a prepared post-test. The post-test material includes *écouter* skills and understanding based on material that already accords with level A2 and is adapted to what has been given in the French Language Proficiency II class so far, namely the DELF practice level A2.

From the results obtained, it was found that there was an increase in both groups but a significant increase occurred in the experimental group after using the Memrise application as an additional learning tool compared to the control group. The post-test results of the experimental group increased by 3.5 while the control group increased by only 1 point. Additionally, there are significant differences between these two groups. The difference of 0.5 in the pre-test to 2.5 points in the mean value of the post-test between the two groups in favour of the experimental group. It can be said then that the use of the Memrise application can promote the understanding of French learners. Their level of understanding increase was seen in their ability to answer all questions.

During the study, we also observed study subjects for an additional 5 days of assignment. Researchers paid attention to the duration used to complete one level or more levels in the Memrise application. With the time used by the second group, the duration needed by the second group to complete one level or more in the French class using the Memrise application is approximately 27 minutes on average.

The second group was then given a survey to look at the use of the Memrise language learning application as an adjunct beyond French Proficiency II class in more detail and in terms of user impressions. According to the experimental group, the Memrise application is something new for them, compared to other applications such as Duolingo, Rosetta Stone, Busuu, and others. The Memrise application is also an application that they think is easy to use and that they will use in the future. They also used the application platform instead of using the Memrise website page. Application usage on Android makes it easy to access anywhere and at any time.

Thus, the results of this study support the opinion of Desmons [20] that by providing an additional "way" option, the learning process provides more satisfactory results. This study also supports the findings of Zhang

and Zou [16], and Andujar et al. [17] that interesting and integrated technology in teaching can improve learning outcomes because Memrise has user-friendly and unique features and allows users to record their learning journey. In addition, as Saputri [14] found, there are various methods nowadays to assist in mastering foreign languages more easily.

It should also be noted that the main language used by the experimental group in this application is an important factor. They use English as their main language when learning French as a foreign language. This makes it easier for this group to understand French, especially when understanding audio documents.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study showed that Memrise application tends to be more helpful in *compréhension orale*. Thus, digital applications are in line with FLE teaching goals and can assist learners in oral comprehension. In addition, the interesting features of the Memrise application support the success of the foreign language learning process. Self-study motivation by spending free-time while using the application arises not only because of its attractive features, but also because of the interesting features. Additionally, the gamification feature factor and also the application design can make students more involved with the application. Therefore, the use of the Memrise application as an addition to French learning classes can help improve French language skills while providing more motivation for students.

Given that the teaching of French as a foreign language according to CECRL (Conseil de la coopération culturelle, n.d.) includes not only oral comprehension but also written comprehension as well as oral and written production, this study needs to be continued to see the impact of using Memrise for the other three understandings. In addition, in communicating activities, it is also necessary to study the influence of this application in learning grammar and vocabulary.

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