From zero to language hero in just 5 minutes a day! :)

Overview

Project made during my UX Design course at CareerFoundry.

Process

Design Thinking
User-centred Design

Duration

May-June 2021

Role

UX Researcher and UX Designer

Tools

Marvel
Pen & paper

Methods applied

User Research
Competitor Research
Information Architecture
Wireframing
Prototyping
User Testing

Project Overview

Learning a new language can be a challenging process even for the most avid language learner. Endless vocabulary lists...pronunciation...if only we could make learning new words simpler, faster and more fun.

Lingi is a vocabulary learning app that makes learning new words and expressions easy and fun through engaging memory games, pronunciation and spelling practice and by providing situational context for new vocabulary, making the learning experience meaningful and communicative.

As a former language teacher, I know how and when learning happens, but as a UX designer, I had many questions at this point and wanted to explore the problem space further by conducting a competitive analysis and user research.

Competitive Analysis

I started by researching what vocabulary learning apps are currently on the market and how they meet the needs of language learners, so I could develop an understanding of them.
I conducted a competitive analysis on 3 vocabulary learning apps: Lexilize, Duocards and Drops. To check how effectively I can acquire new language items, I became a Spanish language student for a week :)

All apps proved to be effective when it comes to new vocabulary practice and retention. However, most of the learning occured out of language context, wasn't structured enough and didn't follow a communicative approach. To read more about my findings, follow this link.

User Research

I also wanted to look into attitudes, behaviour, habits and difficulties language learners may have when using vocabulary learning apps and compare them to what the competitors were offering. To uncover insights, I interviewed 3 people who regularly use language learning/vocabulary apps and organized their comments into "Doing", "Thinking" and "Feeling" statements.

Andor, 32   Engineer   Learning German

DOING

- I used Duolingo, attended courses, listened to audiobooks to improve my skills.
- I usually spend 30 minutes studying, sometimes more
- I repeated and reviewed the words again and again, listened to them, memorized them, played with them

THINKING

- I need loads of exercices, to listen to new words a good few times before I can recall or memorize them.
- If there was also a feature within an app to save new words so I could practise them later, I think that would help me greatly

FEELING

- I also enjoy reading articles and audiobooks, especially when they have an integrated dictionary
- I feel great after learning something new, earning a badge for keeping up my streak, knowing how bad I used to be at languages

User Research | Key Findings

Most learners turn to vocabulary learning apps to increase language fluency, expand their vocabulary and improve communicative competence.

However, they felt that very few language apps have a holistic approach to learning new vocabulary. While words are usually divided by topics, they are often not graded by difficulty and/or taught in context. Students often felt they can't use the word in a sentence, and require further audio and video material to practise.

Interviewees agreed that listening, repeating and typing in new words helps memorization. They also expressed that they find language games motivating, and notifications help them stay consistent about their learning.

They prefer a language app that allows them to create and practise their own study decks, is ad free and doesn't limit study time.

Defining the Problem

The insights from the competitive analysis and user research helped me define the problems language learners were experiencing:

To improve their communicative competence, language learners need an app with a holistic approach that teaches language and vocabulary in a structured, graded, easy-to-follow manner. Current language apps meet learners' needs only partially, lacking both features and structure to contribute to effective and meaningful learning. To reach their goals, learners need an app with the following features: customizable vocabulary study decks, progress checks, study reminders, notifications, streak goals and visuals, graded article and audio/video selection, speaking, listening and writing exercices that encourage communicative vocabulary-building in context.

Creating a User Persona

After defining the problem, I created a user persona based on the interview insights. This ensured that my design solution stayed focused on the user throughout the design process. Please meet Robi, my user representative.

Meet Robi

> I need languages for my job.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Age: 30
From: Budapest, Hungary
Location: Sankt Marienkirchen, Austria
Occupation: Electrical Engineer
Interests: Diving, Motorbikes, Learning Languages

NEEDS

a step-by-step approach
loads of exercices, listening and pronunciation practice
regular repetition and review of words learnt
articles and audiobook material with an integrated dictionary
a feature to save new words into study decks
study reminders/streak goals/visual learning progress
communicative/situational approach

BEHAVIOURS

9-5 job in electrical engineering
works on his German language skills after work
spends 30 minutes studying, sometimes more
reads articles and audiobooks on his phone and looks up unknown words
likes to practice a lot-especially listening and pronunciation

GOALS

to make learning and retention more effective
to enhance listening skills and pronunciation
to help long-term memorization of words learnt
to further expand vocabulary by reading articles and listening to audiobooks
to see his progress and boost his motivation
to be able to speak with fellow colleagues

User Stories

I want a step-by-step and communicative approach to learning so I don't feel overwhelmed by new vocabulary and can use it in work and other situations.

I want to see my language learning progress, be able to set up study reminders and feel motivated so I could keep up my streak goals and continue learning.

I want loads of exercices, listening and pronunciation practice, regular repetition and review of words learnt, so that I can memorize them easily and effectively.

I want to read articles and listen to audiobook material with an integrated dictionary, so I could look up and save new words into study decks and practise them in a meaningful manner.

Task Analyses and User Flows

User stories helped me understand better what tasks Robi would like to perform using the app, also what features he would find useful in a vocabulary learning app. Next, I wrote task analyses and drew user flows based on Robi's needs and goals.
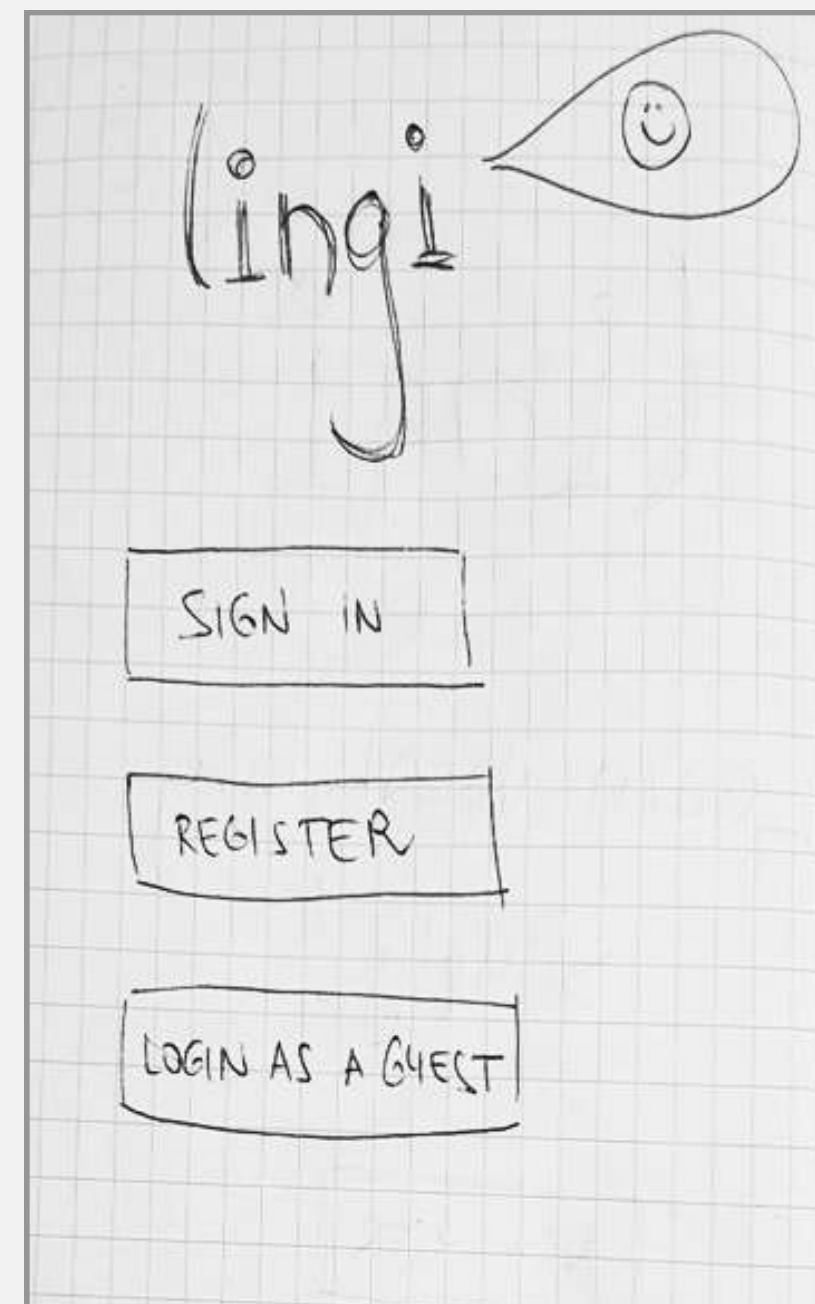

TASK
Complete a lesson

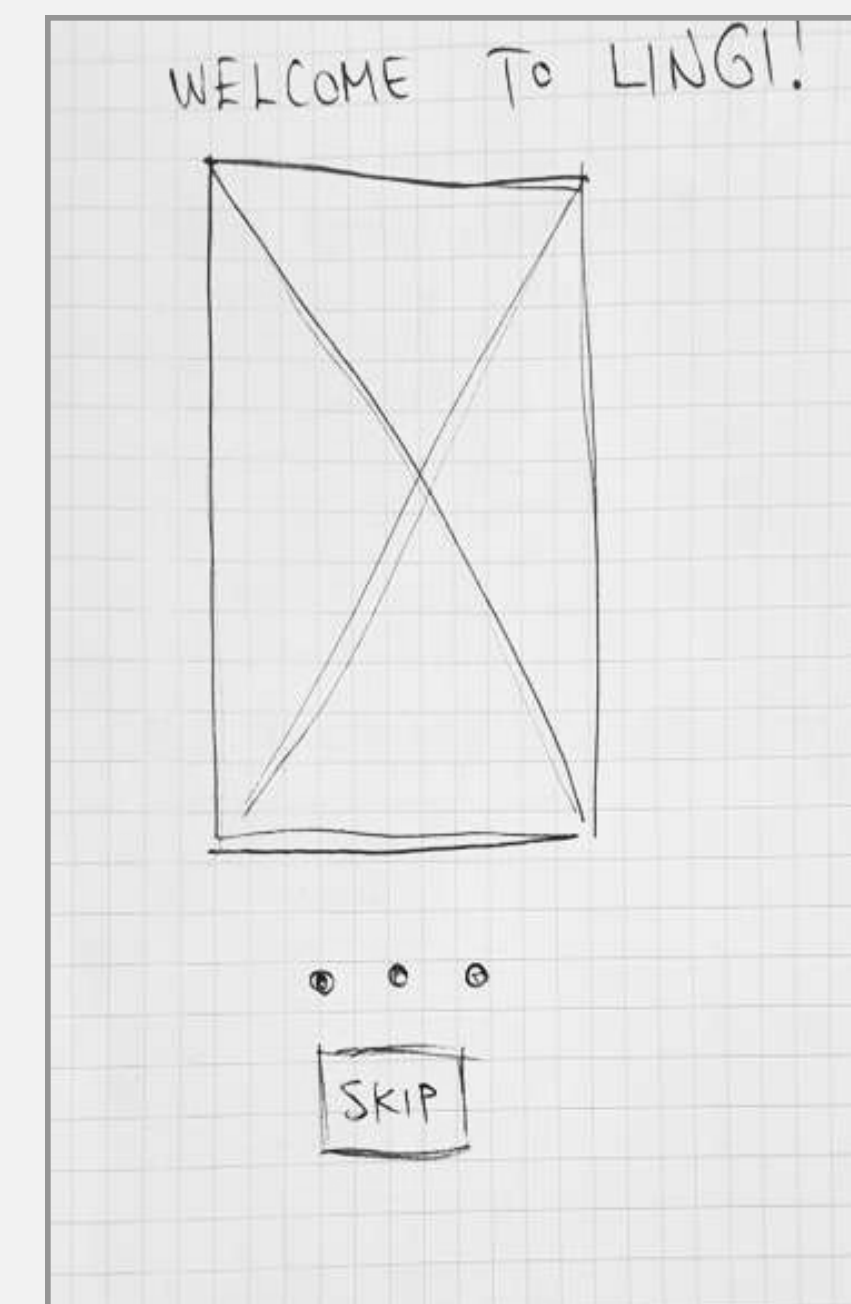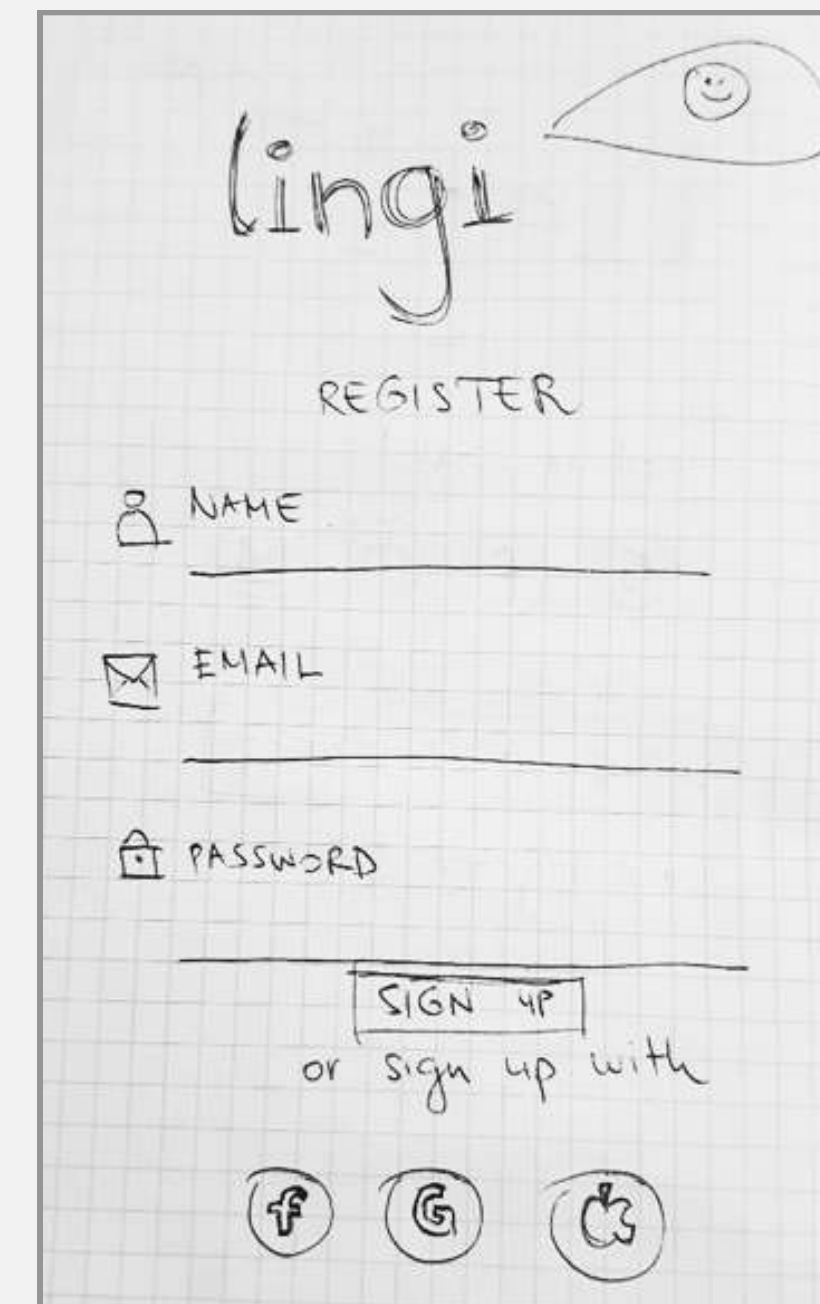ENTRY POINT
Open app

SUCCESS CRITERIA
Lesson completed
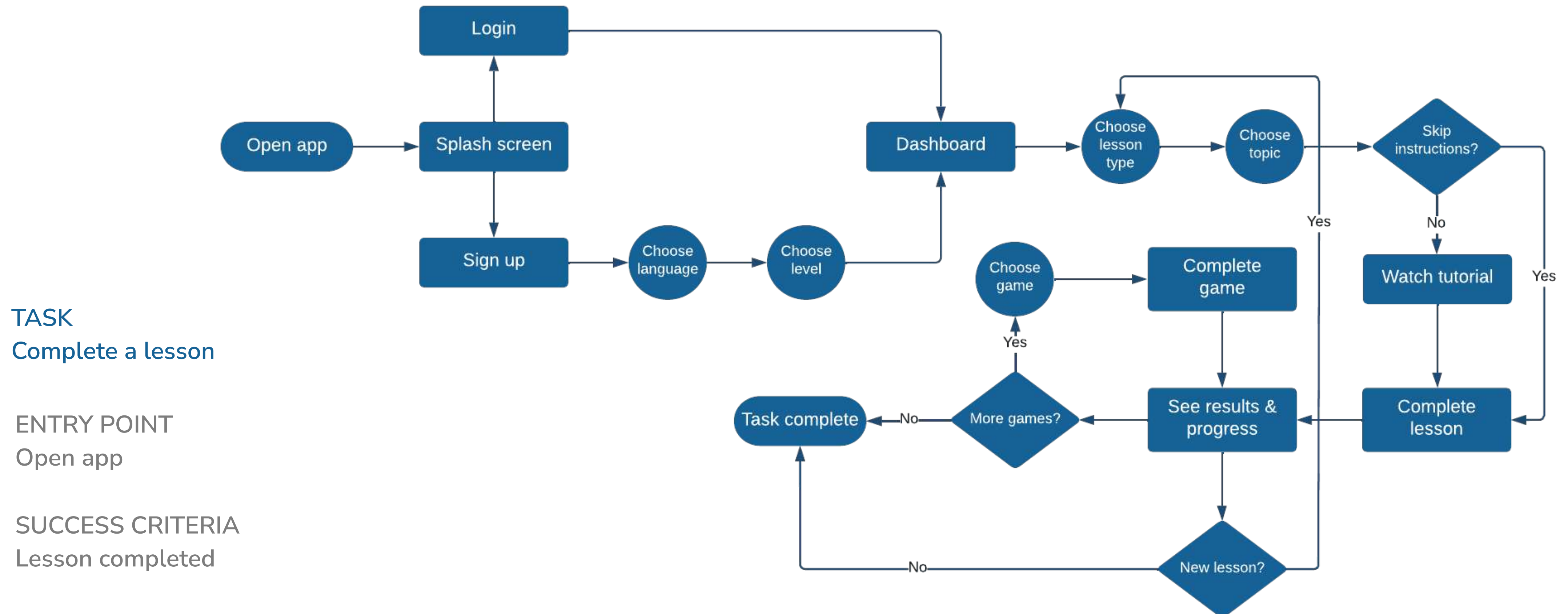
Wireframing & Prototyping

Once the flows were ready, I drew simple sketches of Lingi focusing on layout and navigation. These low-fidelity pen and paper wireframes were then made into a clickable prototype using Marvel.
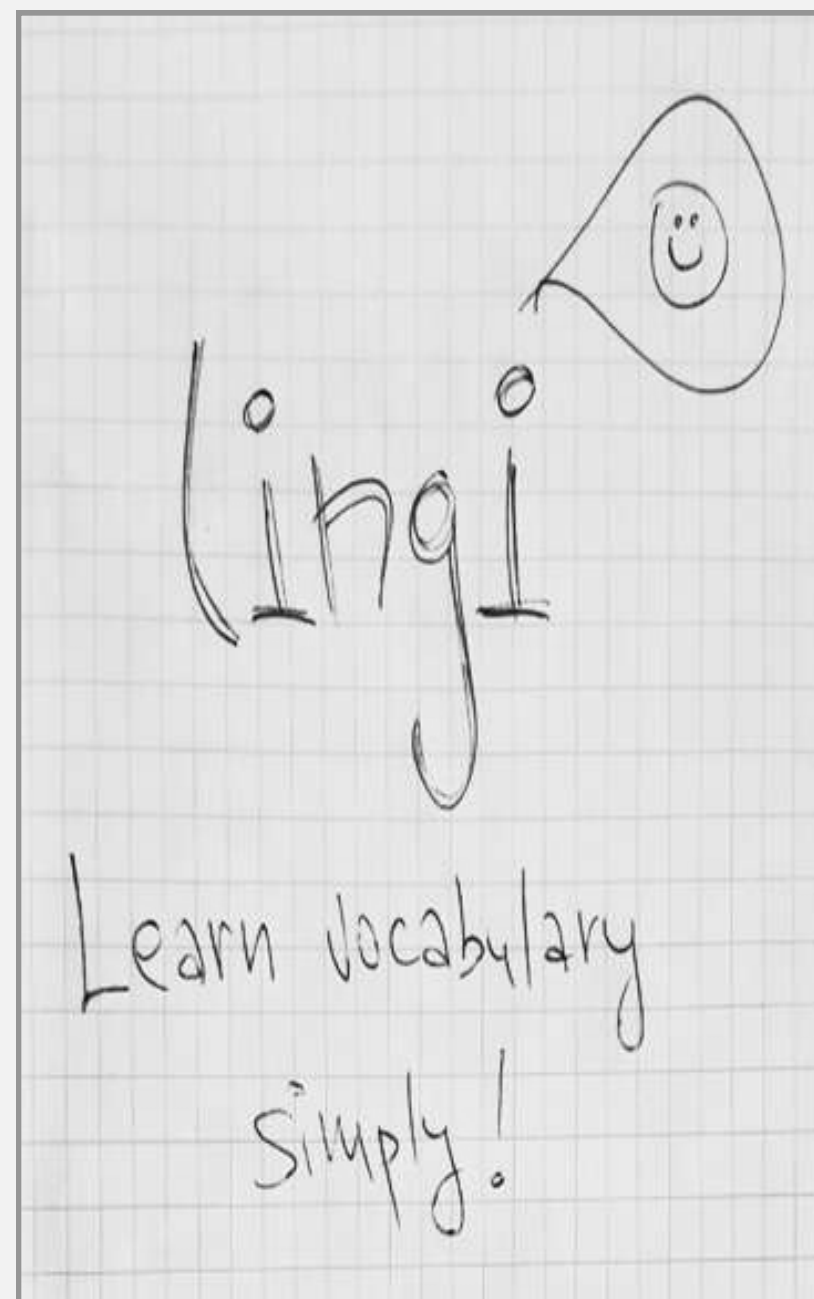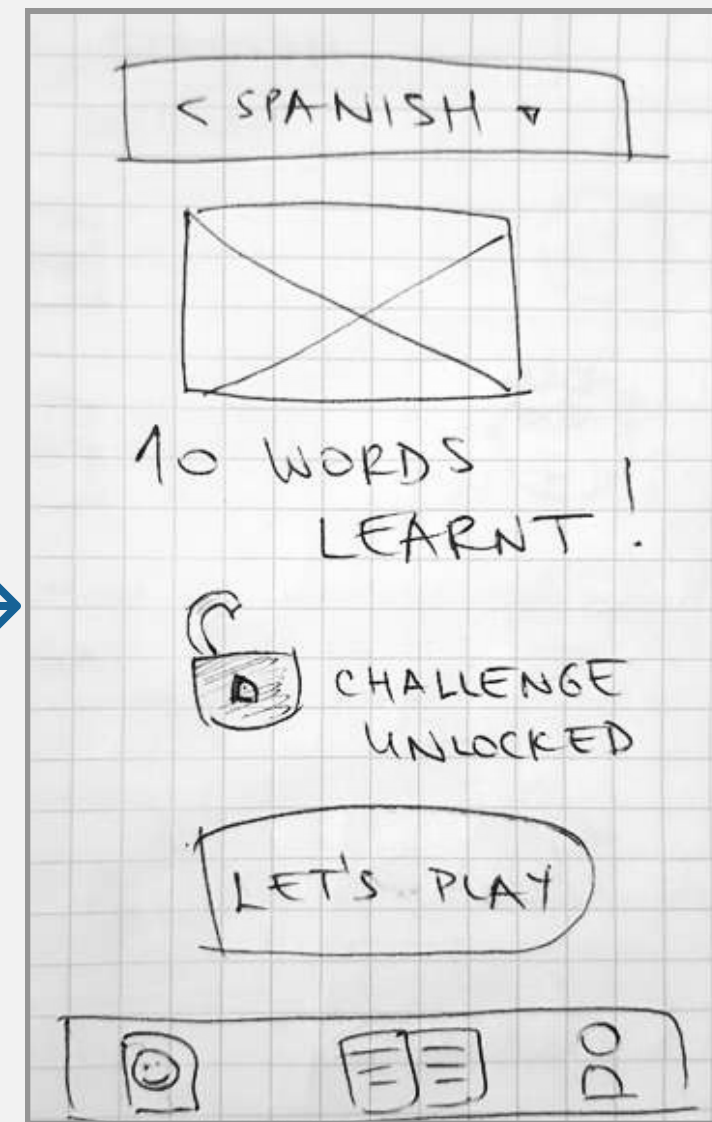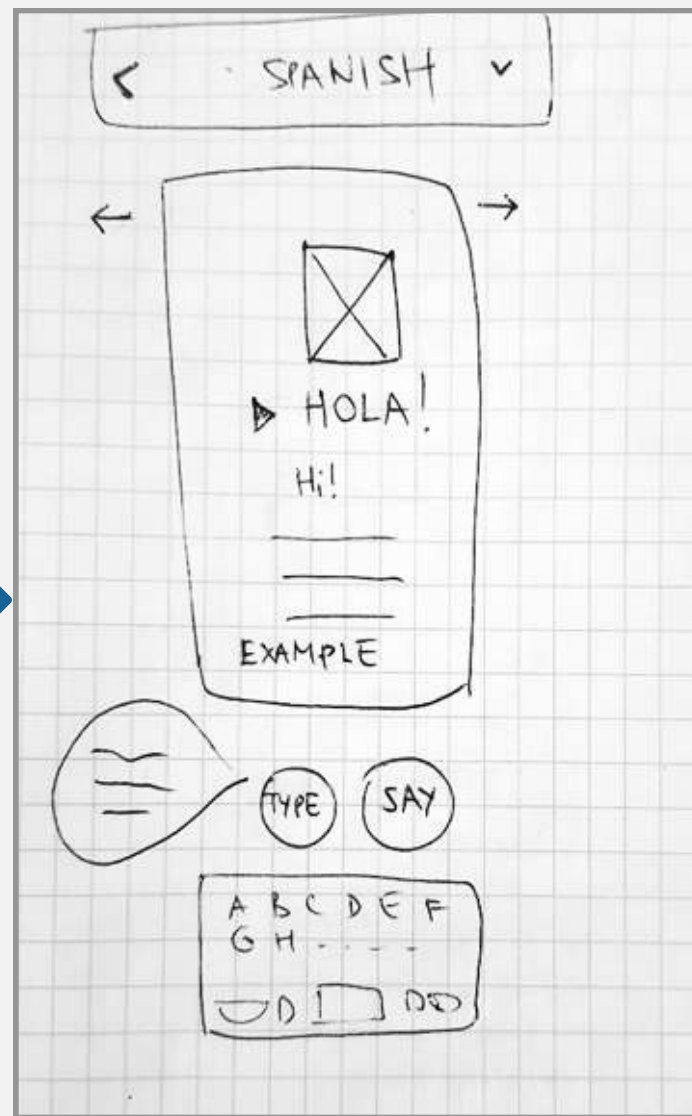
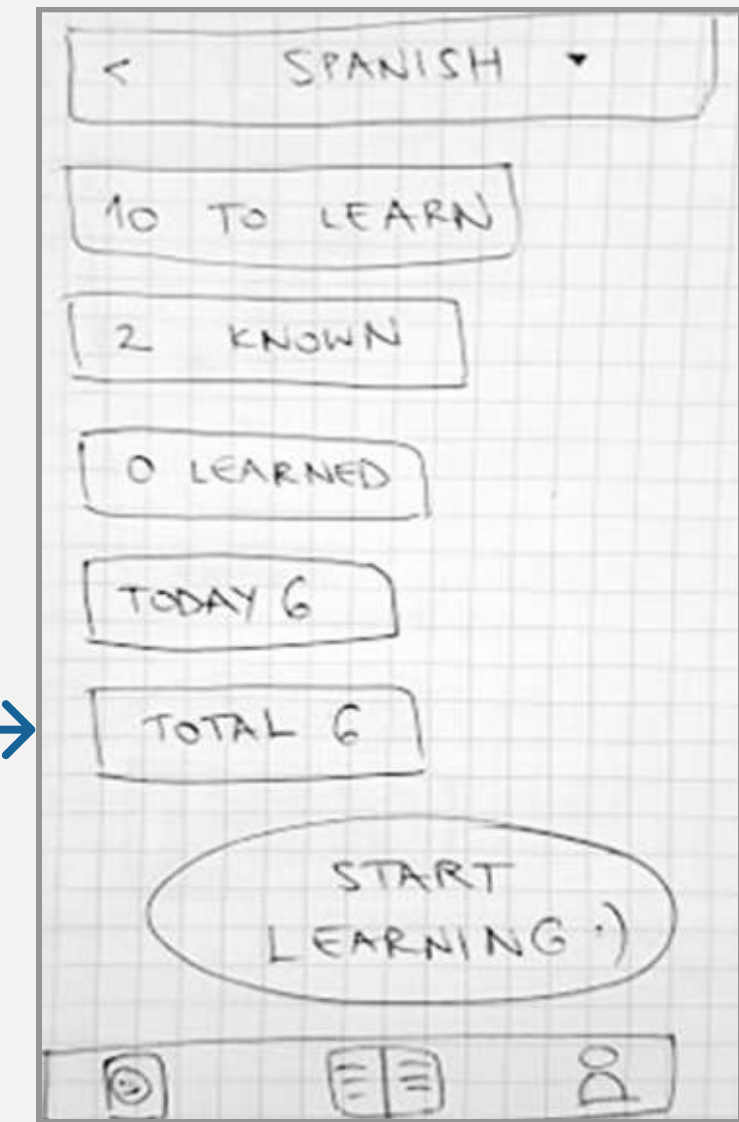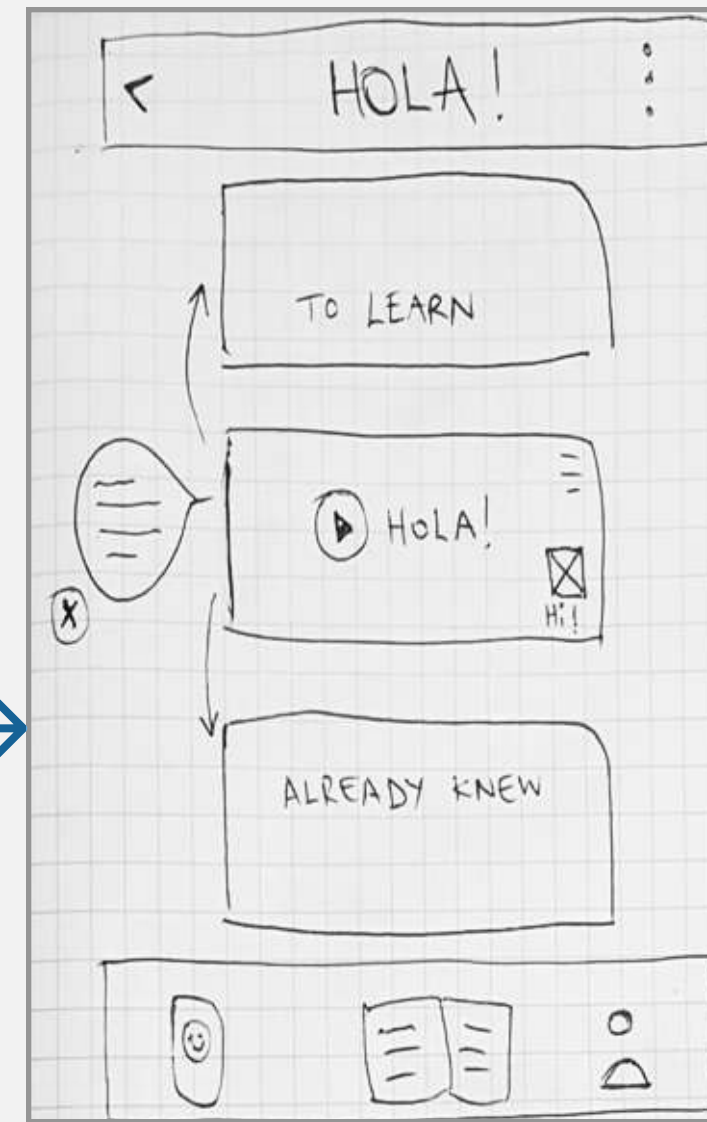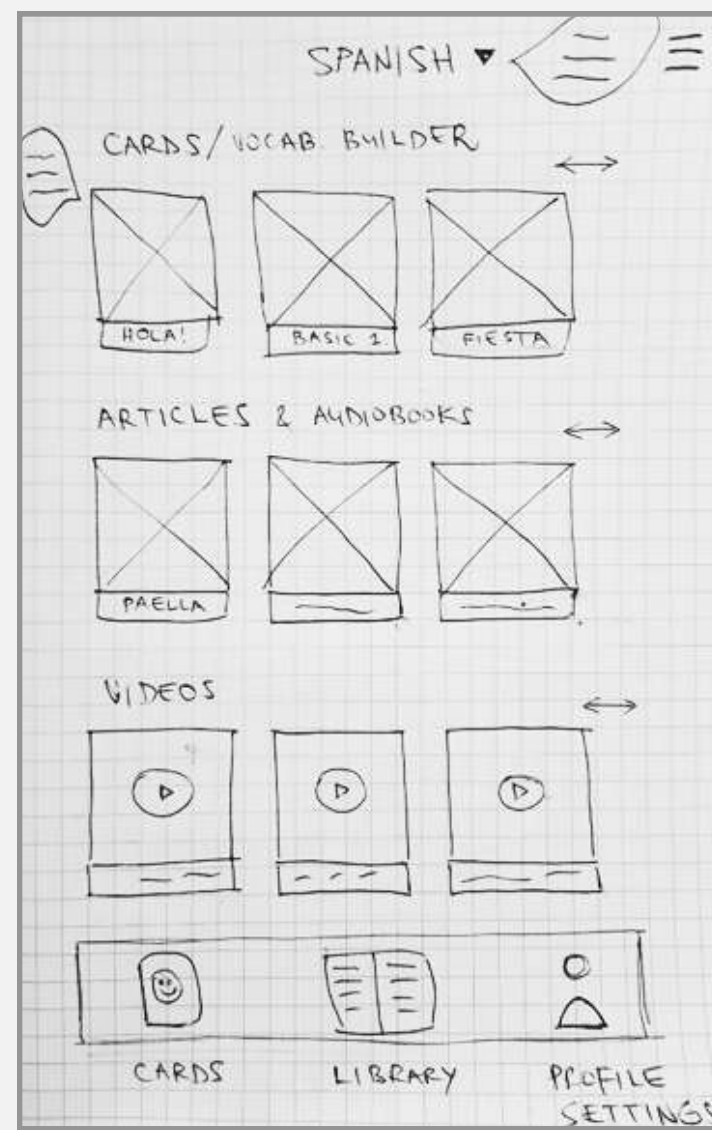SPLASH SCREEN   REGISTRATION SCREENS   INTRO

COMPLETE A LESSON

Usability Testing

I wanted to test the low-fidelity prototype, see if it works for users and iterate according to their feedback. I conducted a usability test with the following objectives:

1 Determine if general layout and navigation are intuitive and user-friendly

2 Determine if users can login/register on the app with ease.

3 Determine users' vocabulary learning experience in the app

4 Determine if users can use the "add new word" feature

Participant Feedback

"Just 5 minutes for a vocabulary lesson? Think I will like this app."

Zoli

"Swipe left...swipe right...so easy!"

Lidija

"Looks like I've just achieved my streak goal. That was quick and easy!"

Lidija

"Clever little app, really versatile."

Andor

"Where's the 'add new word' button?!"

Everyone

Test Report

I summarized participants' comments and observations in a test report and also gave them a severity rating using Nielsen's usability severity rating scale.

NIELSEN'S USABILITY SEVERITY RATING SCALE

0 = I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all

**1** = Cosmetic problem only: need not be fixed unless extra time is available on project

2 = Minor usability problem: fixing this should be given low priority

3 = Major usability problem: important to fix, so should be given high priority

4 = Usability catastrophe: imperative to fix this before product can be released

| TASK	OBSERVATION	SEVERITY	RECOMMENDATION
1	Participants could easily sign up for Lingi, although 1 participant missed the back button in case he wants to choose a different option.	0	This is not a usability problem, the app will prompt users to choose the options that are available to them.
2	Participants found it easy to sort and learn words using swipe style flashcards.	-	-
3	1 participant preferred the house icon for the homepage.	1	The overall UI design of the app is to be discussed at a later stage, cosmetic issue only.
4	Participants found it hard to find the "add new word" feature.	3	Design a quick access "add new word" feature, so users can easily find it and can look up words quicker.
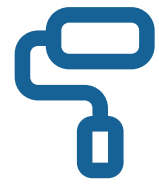
Iterations

It was then time to find solutions to the usability problems that I had discovered. I focused on resolving major usability issues, with a severity rating 3 or higher.
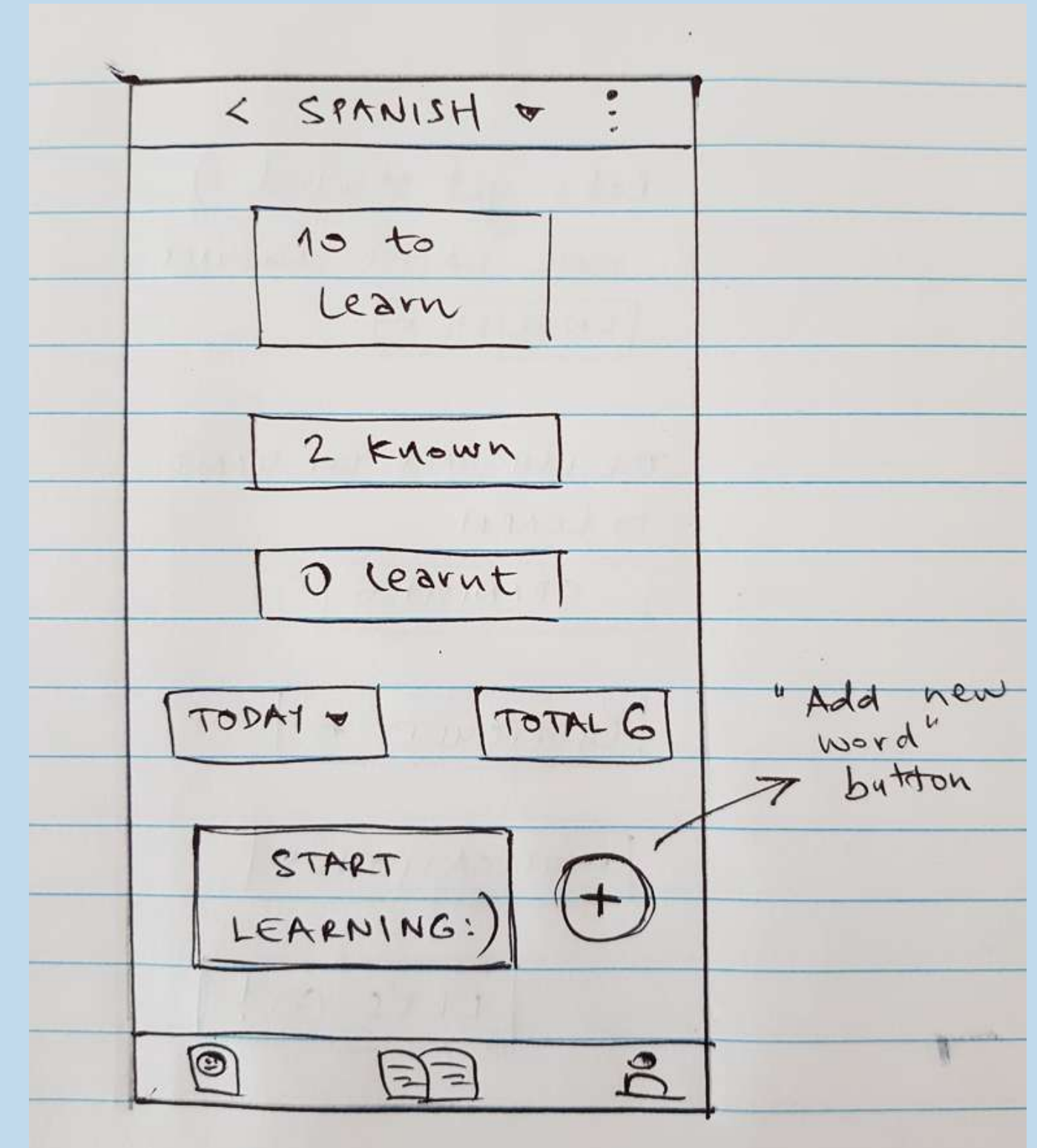
"Where's the 'add new word' button?!"

Everyone

An "add new word" button was added to the dashboard to provide ease of access to the feature.
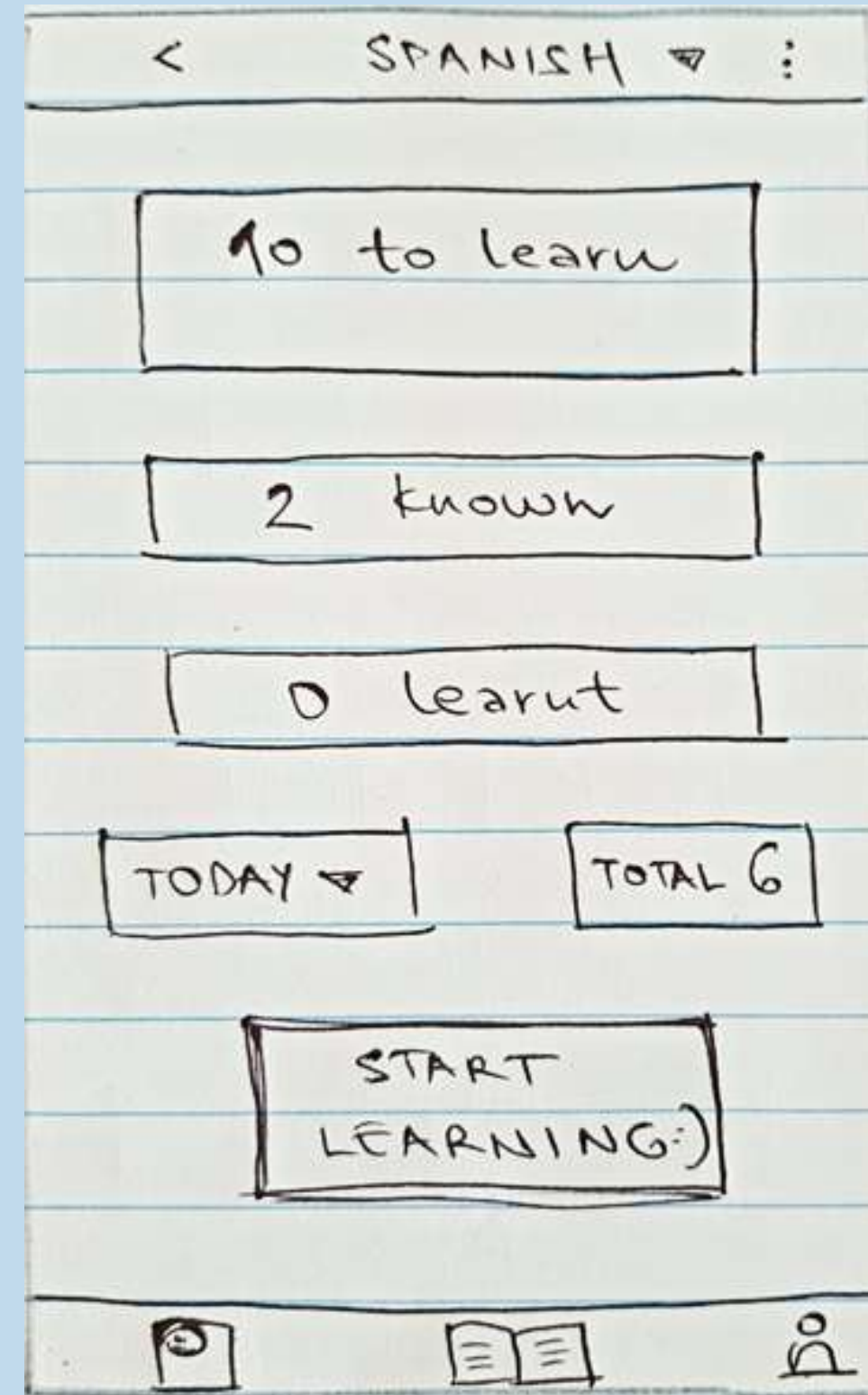
ORIGINAL

ITERATION

Next Steps

When working on Lingi, I focused my attention on basic user flows my persona Robi would take in the app. In the future, I would like to add more user flows and features for vocabulary, audio and video lessons and create more detailed mid and high-fidelity prototypes in Figma. These new flows would then undergo usability testing and further iterations to improve user experience.

Takeaways

People have different learning styles and use different tools to learn a new language. It's important that the app acknowledges these differences and caters for different needs, goals and learning styles. I really enjoyed working on this project-putting my language teaching experience toward designing a better user experience that ensures better language acquisition and retention.

THANK YOU :)