

# Literature Review of Improving Vocabulary Learning Methods in Indonesian Secondary School

Farah Ramadhani

{fram0005@student.monash.edu}

Monash University, Australia

**Abstract.** This paper reviews the theory of vocabulary learning in second/foreign language acquisition and five empirical research that highlights different approaches that shift over time to give secondary school teachers in Indonesia a view of the most effective techniques to teach vocabulary in the classroom. Implementation of the Cross-Cultural Curriculum (CCC) and Peer Review Technique (PRT), the use of the direct-translation method, code-mixing and active class participation are proven to contribute the success of vocabulary learning in Indonesian secondary schools. More recent journal articles have found that technology involvement can benefit Indonesian secondary schools' vocabulary development, such as the use of Role-Play Games and using Indonesian-made Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) websites. To conclude, providing interactive and relatable materials for secondary students is necessary to make the learning environment more comprehensive. Recent papers suggest that technology such as games or interactive websites will motivate students to learn. It is also recommended to implement cultural aspects to make the material 'closer' to the learners' everyday life.

**Keywords:** vocabulary learning, secondary school Indonesia, second language acquisition.

## 1 Introduction

In Indonesia, the journey of vocabulary learning in secondary school is determined by curriculum change. [1] described the starting point of the curriculum in 1984 adopted the communicative English translation method. The current curriculum 2013 emphasises a competency-based curriculum with communicative goals in English. However, [2] found that curriculum 2013 lacks sequences of learning; skills learned in the early years of junior high-school were not included in the learning competencies for the later years. For example, the strong focus on vocabulary as the basic competency in the first three years of junior high-school did not continue in the higher grade. Therefore, teachers should be creative to include the vocabulary learning methods themselves.

Vocabulary is the core element of second or foreign language learning; it connects to skills needed in English competency, receptive (listening, reading) and productive skills (speaking, writing). [3] even found that a lack of suitable vocabulary skills might be the main obstacle to

foreign language learning. Hence, vocabulary learning is encouraged to be improved to enrich learners' repertoire of English words and increase mastery of the language. In order to learn vocabulary effectively, research has been done in the area of implicit and explicit with the central question of which method works best for second language learners to reach fluency in a second language. [4] [5] proposed that noticing is essential for L2 learners to start the second language acquisition process. Thus, the learners must be aware of what they are learning to actually reach the point of acquisition. [6] supported the argument by saying that explicit learning is needed in the classroom to build learners' ability to construct grammatically correct sentences.

In this literature review, the writer overviews the improvement of language teaching after the curriculum 2013 implementation through five empirical research conducted in Indonesian secondary schools to find the most effective way of teaching vocabulary to secondary schools students in Indonesia. A year after the curriculum was officially employed, [7] found that Cross-Cultural Curriculum (CCC) successfully increased vocabulary learning because the learning materials were designed closely to students' life outside the classroom. He also suggested that peer review techniques (PRT) improve students' vocabulary size significantly. Aside from the given instruction from the teachers, individual differences are found to contribute to the effectiveness of language learning. [8] conducted quantitative research and found that determination strategy using direct translation methods appeared to be used often by secondary school students across genders. The frequent code-mixing interaction between students and teachers was also found to be the characteristic of the students with higher vocabulary levels by. [9]. This finding is against the popular belief that using learners' first language interferes with second language acquisition. The use of both Indonesian and English was viewed as unfavourable by society back then as an act of not being a nationalist [9]. However, the growth of technology has made English more related to the young generation in Indonesia. Rahman [10] found that English Role-Playing Games (RPG) affect students' vocabulary growth through the tasks presented in the games. The research finding suggested that explicit vocabulary learning through video games makes the process more joyful and places the students in a situation where they are "forced" to understand the new words to complete the game. Previous research has emphasised the importance of providing an enjoyable learning environment for learners. [11] complement this by stating that anxiety and confidence impact the progress of vocabulary improvement. He found that using Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) websites in English learning has been found to improve learners' vocabulary as their speaking anxiety is minimised through using the websites.

In this literature review, the writer seeks the process of English vocabulary learning improvement in Indonesia from the implementation of the curriculum 2013 to suggest the most effective methods to teach vocabulary in Indonesian secondary schools. First, the writer analyses the problem in vocabulary learning in Indonesia. Then, the most effective method of vocabulary learning from the latest to recent research and suggestions on how future vocabulary learning should be implemented is presented at the end of this paper.

## **2 Literature Review**

The literature review section is divided into two sections: 1) the core theory of explicit learning in the classroom and 2) the shift of vocabulary learning techniques in Indonesia. The writer designed the literature review from the latest to recent research to analyse the teaching

methods or any discovery that enhanced the success of vocabulary learning in Indonesian secondary schools.

### **2.1 Explicit Instruction for Vocabulary Learning**

The core theory of the belief that an explicit instrument is more effective in the second language acquisition process is [4] [5] theory of ‘noticing’. Psychological research he has done suggests that learning a second language requires consciousness; one should be aware of the learning process in order to acquire it. However, the theory does not deny incidental learning, when learners can pick up grammatical patterns through tasks, but attended or conscious learning remains superior. [6] also believed that consciousness and explicit instruction are necessary for second language acquisition. She supported the theory by stating psychological research on “the weak interface” theory of second language instruction that discussed ‘noticing’, ‘noticing the gap’, and guided output practice. The noticing theory suggests that the neural system of perceptual integration and consciousness is unified in the prefrontal cortex [4]. Thus, instruction should be given explicitly so learners can focus on the acquisition process. Feedback in the form of recast is also known to be an effective method for learners to ‘noticing the gap’. Lastly, the pedagogical environment should support learners by providing declarative grammar rules and promoting formulas, drills, and output practice with the objective of building learners’ L2 automatised. In addition, [12] suggested that vocabulary learning should be explicit and involve students actively participating to let them associate the word learning with their own experiences. Teachers should provide opportunities for the students to practice, apply, and properly discuss their word learning. Explicit instruction in vocabulary learning must go beyond memorising the words or providing long lists of words; the teacher should facilitate and implement suggested methods across different stages of students’ vocabulary learning.

### **2.2 Shift of Vocabulary Learning Techniques in Indonesian Secondary Schools**

Indonesian education has to undergo curriculum change almost every ten years. [1] stated that curriculum shifting affects the vocabulary learning techniques in secondary schools because the objectives and approach of the curriculum also change over time. The communicative method was implemented in Indonesian education through the 1984 curriculum. The English language skills such as reading, listening, speaking, and writing is emphasised in a thematic context. The following curriculum, the 1994 curriculum, adopts the same communicative approach with explicit instruction focused on grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The approach in 2004 and 2006 curricula started to shift toward the competency-based curriculum. However, the curricula still focused on the communicative competence of learners with vocabulary learning as its first stage of learning. The most recent curriculum, the 2013 curriculum, is still competency-based. However, there are four core competencies (*Kompetensi Inti / KI*) learners should achieve, namely the spiritual, moral, knowledge, and communicative skills (Department of Education and Culture Indonesia, 2013).

In addition to the 2013 curriculum, Said & Sidin [7] implemented the CCC (Cross-Cultural Curriculum) with PRT (Peer Review Technique) for English learning in Islamic Junior High School in Makassar, Indonesia. The participants of the empirical research are divided into two groups, the experimental and control groups comprising 20 students. Both groups are tested regarding their vocabulary size before and after the experiment. The experimental group are taught English integrated with CCC, including Indonesian culture in the learning and encouraging the students to check their friends' works. [7] explained that the implementation of CCC and PRT in the classroom started with the task of translating cultural manuscripts, exchanging students' works with each other, giving appropriate feedback, discussing the feedback in small groups, and teachers observing the discussion and being involved when the students were struggling to keep the discussion going. The findings indicate that controlled groups show no significant improvement while the experimental class students' scores are primarily high. [7] concluded that the implementation of CCC and PRT successfully improves students' vocabulary size because of the English material that is close to students' everyday life.

Not only the pedagogical aspects, [8] found that individual differences, such as learning strategies across gender and school levels also crucial in determining students' English vocabulary learning. She included 706 students (61% female, 39% male) from eight secondary schools in Salatiga, Indonesia, for the research and used questionnaires to collect data about their learning strategies preferences. There are 20 questions on the questionnaire that include four learning categories strategies proposed by [5]: memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and determination strategy. The results showed determination strategy has the highest score of always being carried out by students in learning vocabulary. The determination strategy attempts to translate the new words using a dictionary or other tools to learners' first language [8]. The findings also suggested that both genders and all participants from different school levels consistently used the determination strategy. However, the female population have a higher grade than the males.

[9] studied students' communication patterns of using the code-mixing outside and in the classroom to benefit their vocabulary learning. Mix methods are used in this study with 70 participants from Indonesian high schools and divided into experimental and control classes. They also are separated based on their grades from low, intermediate, and high grades. Vocabulary tests, pre-test, and post-test using questionnaires were conducted to compare participants' proficiency. Students in the experimental class are encouraged to use code-mixing during the lesson, and the control group is taught strictly using English only. Teachers are also interviewed at the end of this study regarding their view towards code-mixing in students' vocabulary mastery. The findings show experimental class had a higher score than the control group, and their interest in learning new vocabulary increased. In class, the student actively engaged with teachers and classmates and comprehended the material optimally. In addition, students confessed that they continue vocabulary learning through exposure to foreign social media as they acquire new words. The findings also suggest combining Indonesian and English in one sentence excites students to bring the knowledge home and into their friends' circles. It creates repetition, which [9] claimed as an effective way to improve their learning memory. However, interviews with teachers advised educating students about the context in which code-mixing is allowed; teachers should pay attention to also teach politeness and registers to the students in the mixed language learning method.

Previous research discussed using social media to enhance vocabulary learning, which has become evidence of the benefit of using technology in English learning [10] takes it further by using Role-Playing Game for English class activity. They believe Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) promotes natural native languages and allows students to use the newly learned words in a meaningful context. Besides, most young generations are interested in playing games that let them role-play as characters and engage in meaningful conversation with other players. In order to conduct this quantitative research, Rahman & Anggraeni [10] involved three classes in one Indonesian secondary school and divided them into two groups: try-out and controlled. Both groups were given vocabulary tests before and after the experiment. The game being used is an English-only RPG with tasks the player must achieve in specific periods. The researchers believe that students' comprehension is being tested through their ability to finish the tasks. The findings showed that learners in try-out group vocabulary test results improved after implementing RPG as the classroom activity. Feedback from the students indicated they have fun and feel motivated to learn English. Teachers also believe using RPG in the classroom can escalate students' attention span, and they become more independent in learning new vocabulary. Almost 55% of the students decided to look for new words' definitions instead of asking their teachers. The researchers suggest that the self-learning method can improve long-term memory, assisting students in their language-learning journey. However, the game only provides multiple answers to the task and limits the players to produce their own sentences. Thus, additional syntax, grammatical functions, meaning, and form must be implemented as supplementary lessons.

CALL implementation in vocabulary learning for Indonesian secondary school students was carried out further by [11] through Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR)-based websites as an additional classroom activity. The quasi-experimental study includes 232 first-year vocational high school students in Indonesia divided into experimental and controlled groups. A standardised EFL proficiency test (Anglia Examination Online Placement Test) was administered to check students' English proficiency and indicated that all of them were below the A1 level. Websites that are used for experimental group classroom activities are *I Love Indonesia* (ILI) and *Novo-Learning* (NOVO). Both websites provide audio-version of Indonesian stories and ask students to pronounce targeted words that later give feedback regarding their pronunciations. The findings show that students in the experimental group had the English score in the post-test increased significantly. Furthermore, interviews with students indicate they felt more confident with their English pronunciation and were not nervous, as the websites will not judge their wrong pronunciation. However, several errors are found in the websites, such as the failure to recognise students who pronounce the words correctly. This issue was cleared by teachers who observed all the time.

### **3 Conclusions**

After reviewing the literature above, there is strong evidence that explicit vocabulary learning methods involving students using the words they learned in real-world use is effective. Recent research suggested that implementing technology into the classroom and providing materials that are close to students' everyday life can successfully increase their performance in vocabulary learning. In addition, including Indonesian culture in the curriculum can enhance students' comprehension of English as they might already know the materials in their first language, for example, using folklore to introduce new words. The students might already know the story, so when reading it in English, they can easily guess the meaning of the new

vocabulary based on the context. The research also suggests that classroom activities should be fun and engaging for students to practice their second language, especially for learners in Indonesia who have restricted use of English since its status in Indonesia is a foreign language. However, the young generation nowadays is mainly exposed to social media and the contents are primarily in English. Using code-mixing is encouraged to minimise students' nervousness and motivation to learn new vocabulary outside the classroom or on the internet. In addition, utilising technology for classroom activities (CALL) was also beneficial in improving willingness to self-learn, leading to better vocabulary learning.

Further research in this area can explore combining the aforementioned techniques for vocabulary learning in Indonesia. In addition, the study can also be done for another education level and determine whether younger or older students engage better than secondary school learners in using the techniques for vocabulary learning. CALL-related topics regarding how fast the internet trends are changing can also be analysed on its influence on students' exposure to English.

**Acknowledgments.** I would like to thank my former supervisor, Sahiruddin, PhD, for his expert advice on the topic and encouragement to be included in this International conference. I also want to thank Kusumarasyati, PhD for the meaningful discussion about the topic chosen for this article.

## References

- [1] Cahyono, Bambang Yudi. "The Teaching of Efl Vocabulary in the Indonesian Context: The State of the Art." *Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia (TEFLIN) Journal* 19, no. 1 (2008): 17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v19i1/1-17>.
- [2] Paris, Scott G. "Suggestions to Improve the Indonesian Literacy Curriculum." *The 2nd International Conference and Linguistics on Language Teaching (I-COLLATE) 1* (2016).
- [3] Ahmadi, Mohammad Reza. "Improving Vocabulary Learning in Foreign Language Learning through Reciprocal Teaching Strategy." *International Journal of Learning & Development* 2, no. 6 (2012): 186-201. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v2i6.2882>.
- [4] Schmidt, R. "Attention." In *Cognition and Second Language Instruction*, Cambridge Applied Linguistics, edited by P. Robinson, 3-32: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- [5] Schmidt, Richard. "Psychological Mechanism Underlying Second Language Fluency." *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 14, no. 4 (1992): 29. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100011189>.
- [6] Ellis, Nick C. "Implicit and Explicit Sla and Their Interface." Chap. 4 In *Implicit and Explicit Language Learning: Conditions, Processes, and Knowledge in Sla and Bilingualism*, edited by Ronald P. Leow Cristina Sanz, 35-47: Georgetown University Press, 2011.
- [7] Said, Hasbullah. "Integrating Cross-Cultural Curriculum into School Based Curriculum: Using Peer Review Technique to Enhance Learners' English Vocabulary ". *Sains Humanika* 2, no. 4 (2014): 5. <https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v2n4.471>.
- [8] Astika, I. Gusti. "Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Secondary School Students." *Indonesian Journals of Language Teaching and Linguistics (IJOLTL)* 1, no. 1 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.30957/ijoltl.v1i1.1>.
- [9] Sabri, Muh. Mahrup Zainuddin. "How Daily Code Mixing Becomes a New Strategy for Teaching Vocabulary Mastery." *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 13, no. 4 (2019): 9. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v13i4.13372>
- [10] Rahman, Aam Ali. "Empowering Learners with Role-Playing Game for Vocabulary Mastery." *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 19, no. 1 (2020): 13. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.1.4>.
- [11] Bashori, Muzakki. "Effects of Asr-Based Websites on Efl Learners' Vocabulary, Speaking Anxiety, and Language Enjoyment." *System* 99 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102496>.
- [12] Bruce Taylor, D., Maryann Mraz, William D. Nichols, Robert J. Rickelman, and Karen D. Wood. "Using Explicit Instruction to Promote Vocabulary Learning for Struggling Readers." *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 25, no. 2-3 (March 25, 2009): 205-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10573560802683663>.