

Shortcomings Faced by Senior High School Students during English Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract. Despite ample studies on EFL learners' perception in vocabulary learning, little research has shown the information from vocabulary test to examine students' challenges in learning vocabulary. This study investigated the shortcomings faced by EFL students in a reputable private high school during English vocabulary learning. This study made use of a preliminary study where the researchers collected the data from the vocabulary test as an instrument to measure students' competence in identifying, understanding, and using vocabulary. The findings show that the students had difficulty in choosing correct-meaning words rather than identifying synonyms and antonyms. This study asserts the problems students face in learning vocabulary, increases students' awareness of the importance of learning English vocabulary, and further researchers can explore more effective vocabulary learning strategies and promote teachers to make learning activities that can improve students' vocabulary mastery.

Keywords: vocabulary mastery, vocabulary learning problems, preliminary study.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the shortcomings faced by senior high school students in English vocabulary learning at one of the reputable private high schools in Malang. In fact, vocabulary plays a fundamental stage in learning a language. Moreover, English is a foreign language or in other words, it is not the mother tongue in Indonesia. Students that have a limited vocabulary would have more challenges with their English skills [1]. This quantitative study asserts the problems students face in learning vocabulary, increases students' awareness of the importance of learning English vocabulary, and further researchers can explore more effective vocabulary learning strategies and promote teachers to make learning activities that can improve vocabulary learning skills.

In introductory communication, language takes on the role of an interactional medium. With a common language that many people can understand, interaction and communication may be developed. The term "lingua franca" refers to English since it unifies all international communication. This encourages everyone, especially students, to study and master English. English is playing an increasingly significant part in daily life in this age of globalization.

English is always utilized as a global language in a variety of contexts, not only in the commercial world but also educational world [2]. English is also used in the educational setting of nations that do not use English [3]. The language idea in English is split into two pieces, namely macro-skills and micro-skills. A language's fundamental idea known as macro-skills is made up of four skills, including speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Micro-skills, in contrast, go into more depth about the language components such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and spelling.

All individuals, including students, should study and be fluent in English because it is a universal language. English is indeed the foreign language in Indonesia. This presents complex problems for both teachers and students. Students in Indonesia who want to study and master English will undoubtedly need a lengthy learning procedure. Learning English is more challenging in countries where it is spoken as a second or foreign language [3]. Learners of English as a Foreign Language should acquire both macro- and micro-skills in the language. The four abilities that EFL students should master are speaking, reading, writing, and listening. If they master various things in micro-skills, including vocabulary, these four skills will be simpler to grasp.

The acquisition of new vocabulary is inextricably linked to learning a new language and cannot be separated. Vocabulary is the most important skill in language learning either for the mother tongue or any foreign language [4]. Vocabulary is a crucial component of learning that students should grasp because it is used in language communication [5]. Additionally, vocabulary is said to be the most crucial component of language for students of foreign languages because effective communication depends on having a wide range of vocabulary mastered [6]. In terms of production and comprehension, vocabulary and language are tightly intertwined.

The first component of language learning is vocabulary. Vocabulary is a collection of meaningful words and phrases that people use to communicate. A vocabulary is a group of words with varied meanings that compose the majority of English [6]. The ability to comprehend a word or collection of words is known as vocabulary mastery. This is an essential component of understanding, producing, and developing language. Students should have adequate vocabulary mastery to learn English [7]. Each student undoubtedly possesses a distinct amount of vocabulary knowledge and proficiency. The amount of vocabulary that each student masters depends on their education level [8].

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental part of learning a language. One of the English micro-skills that students need to master is vocabulary. Students who regularly study vocabulary have the chance to become fluent in all four English language abilities. The capacity to read, write, listen, and speak is among these abilities. Students who are more proficient in English have a higher level of vocabulary knowledge [8].

Students' level of vocabulary mastery measures how well they comprehend a word. The knowledge of vocabulary is one of the keys to learning English as a foreign language. For this reason, it is important for students to comprehend and effectively apply vocabulary. The level of vocabulary mastery has a relationship with students' performance in learning. Students that have a limited vocabulary would have difficulty with their English skills [1].

Students should enrich their word-repository by increasing their vocabulary [4]. However, vocabulary learning has its challenges for EFL learners related to identifying, understanding, and using vocabulary, especially choosing the correct meaning and identifying synonyms and antonyms. Various reasons influence the difficulties faced by students in learning vocabulary. For instance, this private high school underlines that this is the impact of distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic and less attractive English teaching and learning techniques.

In this present research, the vocabulary test was used to examine students' challenges in learning vocabulary, particularly to measure students' competence in identifying, understanding, and using vocabulary. Although there are several aspects of vocabulary learning, this study focuses on word meaning, synonyms, and antonyms. These three aspects are things that are widely discussed by researchers conducting teaching in schools.

Vocabulary mastery can be interpreted as a collection of words that contains information about the meaning of the word, its form, and its use according to the context. This is a basic thing that students should understand in learning a new vocabulary in language learning. In automatic vocabulary learning, students are required to know the meaning of the word so that they can use it according to the context in communication. Vocabulary science refers to understanding the meaning of words so that the word should be equivalent to the target language and know its synonyms [9].

Language learning students should be able to understand a meaning based on the available context. One word in English can have more than one meaning, so understanding the context is important. Students' ability to comprehend words is improved by expanding their vocabulary [9]. The greater vocabulary they master, the better students will understand the meaning of a word according to the available context. When individuals do not comprehend the meaning of a term, several implications or impacts may occur. For instance, students may misinterpret the message [10].

In learning vocabulary, knowing the synonym and antonym of the word is also important. It can also help students understand the context of the source language well. Synonyms and antonyms can be a source of new means of communication. The use of dictionaries during learning really helps students to find out synonyms and antonyms of the new vocabulary they encounter.

Despite a wealth of study on how EFL students perceive learning vocabulary, little research has used data from vocabulary tests to look at how students have difficulty with the subject and focus on the words' meaning, synonyms, and antonyms. Previous research used questionnaires and interviews as research instruments to find out the challenges of students in learning vocabulary. Learning new vocabulary poses a number of challenges for students, including recalling and spelling new words as well as understanding their meanings and pronunciation [4]. Students have troubles in pronouncing words, learning how to write and spell, selecting the right word meanings, and are still uncertain about how to use certain terms in specific contexts [11].

2 RESEARCH METHOD

The research design is a set of methods used to coherently assemble all the elements of the study. The researchers take this action to get around research challenges. For the research to provide results, the research design is essential. The research design entails a number of steps completed during the research process, including data collection and analysis as well as the creation of written reports [12].

This study was conducted using a quantitative method. Furthermore, this study made use of a preliminary study to help the researchers gain a better understanding of the difficulties high school students had in learning vocabulary. The researchers collected the data from the vocabulary test as an instrument to measure students' competence in identifying, understanding, and using vocabulary in the sentence. The subjects were 36 tenth-grade students at one of the reputable private senior high schools in Malang.

Data analysis is one method for answering the research problem. The data collected from students should be analyzed by the researchers before they may respond to research questions. In this research, the researchers followed a variety of steps to analyze the data. First, student answers on the vocabulary test were assessed. In this step, the researchers made a blueprint consisting of twenty questions for a vocabulary test related to literal and contextual meanings, synonyms, and antonyms to determine the extent to which students master the vocabulary things about meaning, synonyms, and antonyms. In this case, there is a limitation where the twenty questions on the vocabulary test were only discussed with the English teacher and the researchers did not conduct the validity and reliability tests. Second, the average scores of all students on the vocabulary test were calculated. The mean value reflects the value in a data set [13]. Third, the percentage of student success in achieving the standard of minimum completeness was calculated. This percentage can be obtained from the number of students who have a score of more than equal to 70 divided by the total number of students in the class. The last, the items in the vocabulary test in which many students answered incorrectly were analyzed and determined and then the percentage was calculated. This aims to find out whether the students had difficulty in understanding meaning, synonym, or antonym.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researchers conducted a vocabulary test on the students to find out how far their ability in mastering English vocabulary was. This study was used as preliminary study. The researchers collected the data from the vocabulary test as an instrument to measure students' competence in identifying, understanding, and using vocabulary about meaning, synonyms, and antonyms. The main focus of this research was to examine the shortcomings faced by senior high school students in English vocabulary learning.

The researchers decided to give a vocabulary test based on the material the students were studying at that time. The vocabulary test was related to report text about Indonesian endemic animals. Based on the observations in class, during the test process, the students felt confused and asked the teacher several times about the meaning of the tested vocabulary. The vocabulary test consisted of twenty questions that focused on determining the literal and contextual meanings and identifying synonyms and antonyms. After that, the researchers conducted an assessment of the students' vocabulary test results according to the formula for the data analysis method, the number of right answers was multiplied by 5.

Based on the score calculation carried out by the researchers using the formula, the results show that there were seven students who scored 70-100, and twenty nine students who scored 0-69. The scores of vocabulary test results were then processed by the researchers to get the students' average score. By using the average formula that has been presented in the data analysis method section, it is found that the average score of students on the vocabulary test was 50.97. In fact, the standard of minimum completeness or KKM (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimum*) for English subject is 70.00. This indicates that students had a low level of vocabulary mastery.

The success of student learning has indicators that should be achieved. The learning process is deemed successful if 75% of the students achieve the minimal, ideal, and even maximal degree of accomplishment [14]. The researchers accomplished calculations based on the formula of the data analysis method. The results show that only 19.4% of students were successful. This indicates that students had low vocabulary skills because the results obtained were below 75%.

The low level of students' vocabulary mastery was further analyzed. The researchers analyzed and determined the vocabulary test questions that many students answered incorrectly and then calculated the percentage. It tried to determine whether students had troubles with meaning, synonym, or antonym questions. The results show that many students answered incorrectly on questions number 20, 4, and 11. These three numbers were questions in the form of meaning where the students were asked to choose correct-meaning words. Based on the formula mentioned in the data analysis method, it was found that at question number 20, there were 83% of students who answered incorrectly. At question number 4, there were 80% of students who answered incorrectly. At question number 11, there were 75% of students who answered incorrectly. The three questions had the largest percentage where the students answered the questions incorrectly. In fact, the three questions were present in the form of meaning. These results indicate that students had difficulty in choosing the correct-meaning words rather than identifying synonyms and antonyms.

Students had problems with identifying, understanding, and using the correct meaning of words because they found it difficult to separate the literal meaning from the contextual meaning. The literal meaning refers to all of its definitions found in dictionaries, whereas contextual meaning refers to an actual phrase or one that is in line with the context and is impacted by the composition of words or phrases and their constituent parts [15]. Most students were unable to understand the text as a whole because they could not interpret words contextually or were too fixated on the meaning of words according to the dictionary. It is in line with the finding of the research conducted by [11] that students had difficulty in determining the correct meaning of words and were still confused about how to understand and apply the words based on the context.

Based on the finding, what can be done as a solution so that students can improve their vocabulary mastery is to encourage teachers to make learning activities that can improve students' vocabulary mastery. Gamification is one of the learning methods that can be used to provide student activities with the aim of improving vocabulary mastery in this technological era. In another word, gamification can be a suitable method to use in this era for vocabulary learning. Gamification is a specific approach used to promote activity and boost academic

progress and is linked to game tools that use technology [16]. Practically, teachers can take advantage of the use of any applications or websites such as Quizlet as a medium for learning vocabulary in the classroom. Various vocabulary study tools are offered through the website and mobile application of Quizlet, which has a game-like user interface. Quizlet has various features for learning and improving vocabulary skills such as flashcards, learn, test, and match which can be accessed easily and are free of charge. Quizlet is a program that aids students in learning the language [6].

4 CONCLUSION

This study, utilizing the vocabulary test, has investigated the difficulties faced by the tenth-grade senior high school students in learning English vocabulary. The findings of this study confirmed that students had difficulty in learning English vocabulary. Furthermore, they had difficulty in choosing correct-meaning words rather than identifying synonyms and antonyms. This problem should be faced and given a solution so that they can improve their vocabulary mastery. The higher the students' level of vocabulary mastery is, the better their English proficiency will be. The success of the students' vocabulary learning process will certainly have a positive impact on their language or communication skills. Due to its limitations, this study concentrated on highlighting the difficulties that students faced in learning English vocabulary. It is suggested that further researchers can explore more effective vocabulary learning strategies and promote teachers to make learning activities that can improve vocabulary mastery. Moreover, further researchers are also suggested to conduct validity and reliability tests on the vocabulary test to ensure the credibility of the research findings and address students' difficulties in acquiring English vocabulary by utilizing Classroom Action Research (CAR). Hopefully, this study will make students more conscious of the value of acquiring English vocabulary.

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