

TEACHER STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY IN GRADE V AT SDN 72 KAUR

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the teachers' strategies to improve students' vocabulary mastery, describe their implementation, and explore the challenges faced by teachers in Grade V at SDN 72 Kaur. The study employed a descriptive qualitative design involving three teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, questionnaires, and documentation. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data credibility was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings revealed that the teachers implemented five main strategies: explicit vocabulary instruction, contextual learning, the use of visual and digital media, game-based and creative activities, and regular review and evaluation. These strategies encouraged students' participation, improved vocabulary retention, and supported meaningful learning. However, the teachers also faced several challenges, including students' limited vocabulary knowledge, difficulty remembering new words, different learning abilities, limited instructional time, and limited learning media. Overall, the combination of interactive, contextual, and repetitive strategies contributed positively to improving students' vocabulary mastery in Grade V at SDN 72 Kaur.

Keywords: *teacher strategies, vocabulary mastery, young learners, qualitative research.*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi strategi guru dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata siswa, mendeskripsikan implementasinya, serta mengungkap tantangan yang dihadapi guru di kelas V SDN 72 Kaur. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif. Partisipan penelitian terdiri atas tiga guru yang dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, kuesioner, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Keabsahan data diuji melalui triangulasi sumber dan triangulasi teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menerapkan lima strategi utama, yaitu pembelajaran kosakata secara eksplisit, pembelajaran kontekstual, penggunaan media visual dan digital, aktivitas berbasis permainan, serta peninjauan dan evaluasi secara berkala. Strategi tersebut meningkatkan partisipasi siswa dan membantu penguasaan kosakata.

Namun, guru masih menghadapi kendala berupa keterbatasan penguasaan kosakata siswa, siswa mudah lupa, perbedaan kemampuan belajar, keterbatasan waktu pembelajaran, dan media pembelajaran yang terbatas. Secara keseluruhan, penerapan strategi yang bervariasi memberikan kontribusi positif terhadap peningkatan penguasaan kosakata siswa.

Kata Kunci: *strategi guru, penguasaan kosakata, siswa sekolah dasar, penelitian kualitatif.*

A. Introduction

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of English language learning because it provides the basis for developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Students with adequate vocabulary knowledge are better able to understand texts, express ideas, and communicate effectively in different contexts. Conversely, limited vocabulary often prevents learners from comprehending learning materials and participating confidently in classroom activities. Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary is the foundation of language proficiency since meaningful communication cannot occur without sufficient lexical knowledge. Therefore, developing students' vocabulary should become one of the primary objectives of English language teaching, particularly at the elementary school level where learners begin acquiring basic language skills.

Teaching vocabulary to young learners requires instructional strategies that are appropriate to their cognitive development and learning characteristics. Elementary school students learn more effectively through meaningful, enjoyable, and interactive activities than through rote memorization. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children at this stage understand concepts more easily through concrete experiences, visual representations, and hands-on activities. Likewise, Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning is facilitated through social interaction and scaffolding, in which teachers guide learners to construct new knowledge. These perspectives indicate that teachers should create engaging learning environments that actively involve students in vocabulary learning.

Despite the importance of vocabulary mastery, many Indonesian elementary

school students continue to experience difficulties in learning English vocabulary. Since English is taught as a foreign language, students have limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom. As a result, many learners easily forget newly learned words, have difficulty understanding word meanings, and lack confidence in using English during classroom interaction. These challenges are more evident in rural schools where access to learning resources, technology, and authentic English exposure remains limited. According to the OECD (2023), Indonesian students continue to perform below the OECD average in reading literacy, while the EF English Proficiency Index (2023) also indicates that Indonesia's English proficiency still requires improvement. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening vocabulary instruction from the elementary school level.

Teachers therefore play a crucial role in improving students' vocabulary mastery by selecting effective instructional strategies. Nation (2001) explains that vocabulary learning should include three interconnected aspects: word form,

meaning, and use. Accordingly, teachers are encouraged to employ strategies that integrate explicit instruction, contextual learning, visual media, games, and repeated practice to help students understand and retain new vocabulary. Previous studies have shown that these strategies positively influence vocabulary learning. Pratiwi et al. (2021) found that contextual teaching and Total Physical Response (TPR) effectively enhanced elementary students' vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, Fauziningrum et al. (2023) and Asipi et al. (2023) reported that pictures, games, and interactive learning activities improved students' motivation, participation, and vocabulary retention.

Although previous studies have identified various vocabulary teaching strategies, limited research has explored how these strategies are implemented in rural primary schools and the challenges teachers encounter during classroom instruction. Therefore, this study investigates teachers' strategies for improving students' vocabulary mastery in Grade V at SDN 72 Kaur, a rural public primary school in Bengkulu Province, Indonesia.

Specifically, the study aims to identify the strategies employed by teachers, describe their implementation in classroom practice, and examine the challenges faced during the teaching process. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing literature on vocabulary instruction and provide practical recommendations for English teachers in designing more effective and engaging vocabulary learning for young EFL learners, particularly in rural educational contexts.

B. Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the strategies used by teachers to improve students' vocabulary mastery in Grade V at SDN 72 Kaur. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences, instructional practices, and challenges in teaching vocabulary within a natural classroom setting. Rather than examining causal relationships through numerical data, this approach focused on describing and interpreting teachers' strategies and classroom implementation comprehensively. According to

Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research enables researchers to explore participants' perspectives and understand social phenomena within their real-life contexts.

The research was conducted at SDN 72 Kaur, located in Air Palawan Village, Nasal District, Kaur Regency, Bengkulu Province, Indonesia. The school was selected purposively because it represents a rural primary school where English learning is characterized by limited instructional resources and students' minimal exposure to English outside the classroom. Preliminary observations also indicated that many fifth-grade students experienced difficulties in vocabulary mastery, making the school an appropriate setting for investigating teachers' instructional strategies.

The participants of this study consisted of three teachers who were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was applied because the selected participants possessed direct experience in teaching English vocabulary to fifth-grade students and were considered capable of providing rich and relevant information regarding classroom instruction. Their teaching

experiences enabled them to explain the strategies they employed, the implementation of those strategies, and the challenges encountered during vocabulary instruction.

To obtain comprehensive and credible data, this study employed four data collection techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, questionnaires, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' perceptions, instructional strategies, and experiences in teaching vocabulary. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to provide detailed explanations while enabling the researcher to ask follow-up questions for clarification.

Classroom observations were carried out to examine the actual implementation of vocabulary teaching strategies during English lessons. An observation checklist was used to record teachers' instructional activities, classroom interaction, students' participation, learning media, and vocabulary teaching techniques. Observation data were essential to verify whether the strategies described during interviews

were consistently implemented in classroom practice.

Questionnaires were distributed as supporting instruments to strengthen the research findings. The questionnaire consisted of indicators related to teachers' vocabulary teaching strategies and classroom implementation. The responses complemented the interview and observation data by providing additional evidence regarding the frequency and consistency of instructional practices.

Furthermore, documentation was collected to support the credibility of the findings. The documentation included lesson plans, teaching materials, students' learning worksheets, classroom photographs, and other relevant school documents. These documents provided additional information regarding lesson preparation and instructional implementation while serving as evidence to support the interview and observation findings.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, organized, and categorized information relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, the organized data were presented in descriptive narratives and thematic categories to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were continuously developed and verified by comparing evidence obtained from multiple data sources to ensure consistency and accuracy throughout the analysis process.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the three participating teachers, while technique triangulation was achieved by comparing findings from interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documentation. These triangulation procedures enhanced the credibility and dependability of the findings by ensuring that the reported results were consistently supported by different sources of evidence. In addition, the researcher maintained detailed field notes and carefully documented each stage of the research process to strengthen the confirmability of the study.

Overall, the qualitative design and the use of multiple data collection techniques enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' strategies for improving students' vocabulary mastery, the implementation of these strategies in classroom practice, and the challenges encountered during the instructional process at SDN 72 Kaur.

C. Results and Discussion

The findings revealed that the teachers employed five major strategies to improve students' vocabulary mastery in Grade V at SDN 72 Kaur, namely explicit vocabulary instruction, contextual vocabulary learning, the use of visual and digital media, game-based learning, and continuous review and evaluation. These strategies were implemented systematically during the teaching and learning process to help students understand, remember, and use new vocabulary more effectively. The first strategy, explicit vocabulary instruction, was implemented by introducing new words directly through pronunciation practice, explanation of meanings, translation, and repetition. Teachers also asked students to write the vocabulary in their notebooks and

practice using the words in simple sentences. This strategy enabled students to recognize the form, meaning, and pronunciation of new vocabulary before applying it in communication. This finding supports Nation (2001), who argues that effective vocabulary instruction should emphasize three essential aspects of lexical knowledge: word form, meaning, and use.

The second strategy was contextual vocabulary learning. Instead of teaching isolated word lists, teachers introduced vocabulary through dialogues, short reading texts, classroom conversations, and situations familiar to students' daily lives. This approach helped students understand vocabulary within meaningful contexts, making it easier for them to remember and apply new words appropriately. The finding is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs through social interaction and contextual experiences. Students demonstrated greater confidence when vocabulary was connected to their real-life situations.

Teachers also utilized visual and digital media, such as pictures,

flashcards, real objects, and instructional videos, to support vocabulary learning. Classroom observations indicated that students became more enthusiastic and actively participated in learning activities when visual media were incorporated into lessons. The use of concrete learning materials was particularly beneficial because elementary school students learn more effectively through visual and experiential activities. This finding is in line with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which states that children in the concrete operational stage understand concepts more easily through tangible experiences and visual representations.

Another important finding was the implementation of game-based learning activities. Teachers integrated guessing games, matching activities, spelling competitions, vocabulary quizzes, and group discussions to create an enjoyable learning environment. These activities increased students' motivation and encouraged active classroom participation. Rather than memorizing vocabulary passively, students learned through interaction and collaboration with their peers. This

finding supports previous studies by Pratiwi et al. (2021) and Asipi et al. (2023), which reported that interactive learning activities improve vocabulary retention and reduce students' anxiety in learning English.

Despite implementing various instructional strategies, teachers encountered several challenges during vocabulary instruction. The most common difficulties included students' limited vocabulary knowledge, their tendency to forget newly learned words, differences in learning abilities, limited instructional time, and insufficient learning media. Teachers explained that many students required repeated exposure before they could remember and use new vocabulary confidently. Consequently, continuous review and repetition became essential components of the instructional process.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that no single instructional strategy is sufficient to improve students' vocabulary mastery. Instead, combining explicit instruction, contextual learning, visual support, interactive activities, and regular review creates a more effective learning environment for young EFL

learners. These findings not only reinforce existing theories of vocabulary instruction but also provide practical evidence that effective vocabulary learning depends on teachers' ability to adapt instructional strategies to students' needs and the classroom context, particularly in rural primary schools with limited educational resources.

D. Conclusion

This study investigated the strategies employed by teachers to improve students' vocabulary mastery in Grade V at SDN 72 Kaur, examined how these strategies were implemented in classroom instruction, and identified the challenges encountered during the teaching process. The findings indicate that teachers applied five major instructional strategies: explicit vocabulary instruction, contextual vocabulary learning, the use of visual and digital media, game-based learning activities, and continuous review and evaluation. These strategies were implemented systematically through pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching activities, creating meaningful learning experiences that encouraged

students' participation, increased their motivation, and strengthened vocabulary retention.

Despite the positive outcomes, teachers encountered several challenges, including students' limited vocabulary knowledge, difficulties in retaining newly learned words, differences in learning abilities, limited instructional time, and inadequate learning media. These findings suggest that improving vocabulary mastery requires not only appropriate teaching strategies but also continuous practice, supportive learning environments, and adequate instructional resources. The combination of explicit instruction, contextual learning, interactive activities, and regular vocabulary review proved to be effective in supporting young EFL learners' vocabulary development, particularly in a rural primary school context.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that English teachers continue to employ varied and student-centered instructional strategies that actively engage learners in meaningful vocabulary learning. Schools should also support teachers by providing adequate teaching media and opportunities for

professional development in vocabulary instruction. Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to conduct similar studies in different educational contexts or employ mixed-methods and experimental research designs to examine the effectiveness of specific vocabulary teaching strategies on students' learning outcomes. Such studies are expected to enrich the existing literature and contribute to the development of more effective vocabulary instruction for young EFL learners.

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