TEACHER'S STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING ENGLISH VOCABULARY MASTERY OF GRADE VIII STUDENTS OF SMPN 1 SAMBALIUNG

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the strategies used by teachers in improving the English vocabulary acquisition of grade VIII students at SMPN 1 Sambaliung. Vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of language learning, and limited vocabulary can hinder students' speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills. Therefore, this study seeks to identify effective teaching strategies to improve students' vocabulary acquisition and understand teachers' challenges in implementing these strategies. The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a descriptive design and an interpretivism paradigm. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with English teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis, including student evaluation results and assignment scores. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of this study indicate that the use of varied and interesting strategies can increase students' learning motivation and improve their vocabulary mastery. The three teachers interviewed applied various interactive and contextual methods, such as visual media, language games, songs, and conversation exercises.

Keywords: English Language Learning, Interactive Methods, Teaching Strategies, Vocabulary Acquisition, Technology In Learning

A. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of learning English. Students who lack basic vocabulary will struggle with other language abilities, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. (Ridwan, 2025). Therefore, the role of teachers in improving students' vocabulary is significant, especially for middle-level students, such as grade VIII junior high school students, who are transitioning from basic understanding to more complex language use.

Research shows that word mapping and interactive media strategies can significantly improve students' vocabulary comprehension and retention (Tu, 2025). Therefore, it is important to explore which strategies are most effective in the context of learning at SMPN 1 Sambaliung.

One of the main challenges in vocabulary mastery is students' limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Many students only use English in academic settings, while outside the classroom, they rarely get the opportunity to develop their skills (Wu, Cheng, & Zhao, 2025). In such situations, teachers must adopt interesting and relevant strategies to enhance students' daily lives. According to Thornbury (2002), a person should possess a functional vocabulary comprising more than 5,000 word families, with at least 3,000 word families being a baseline vocabulary. For example, students hoping to pass the Cambridge First Certificate Examination could have to try to grasp more than 5,000 words, even if they only use half of the words in their productive vocabulary.

Flipped learning and cooperative learning techniques are also becoming increasingly popular for improving English vocabulary. Research conducted by Tu (2025) revealed that students who used the flipped learning approach, where they studied the material at home and discussed it in class, had better vocabulary comprehension than traditional methods.

According to Asyiah (2017), it is recommended that EFL teachers allocate a larger portion to vocabulary when teaching English as a foreign language and use a combination of entirely contextual and decontextual strategies. Additionally, students are advised to be introduced to various vocabulary learning strategies.

In the context of SMPN 1 Sambaliung, it is necessary to analyze the most suitable strategies to implement based on students' characteristics and their learning environment. Factors such as socioeconomic background, access to learning resources, and support from parents and the surrounding environment can also influence the strategies' effectiveness.

This study is expected to clarify the most effective vocabulary teaching method for grade VIII students of SMPN 1 Sambaliung. Thus, the results can be a reference for educators in developing more innovative learning strategies that meet students' needs.

B. METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

The type of research used is qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena that occur in depth based on the participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2016). In this context, the study will explore the strategies used by teachers in improving the English vocabulary mastery of class VIII students of SMPN 1 Sambaliung.

The qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena within a specific context using an interpretive and descriptive approach. This study investigates the experiences, perceptions, and processes underlying a phenomenon, particularly in the context of problem-based education. The qualitative research, with a descriptive approach, aims to understand and articulate the strategies employed by teachers to enhance students' English vocabulary mastery. This approach will provide a complete description of the phenomenon based on facts gathered through observation, interviews, and documentation.

2. Technique Collecting Data

Descriptive qualitative research uses document analysis and in-depth interviews as data collection methods. In-depth Interview: Semi-structured interviews with English teachers of grade VIII at SMPN 1 Sambaliung. The purpose was to explore information about the strategies used by teachers, the reasons for choosing the strategies, and their experiences in implementing them.

Document: Analyze related documents, such as student assessments. These documents will provide information about teachers' strategies and their integration

into learning. Observation: Classroom observations were carried out to directly witness how English teachers implemented their teaching strategies in real-time. This method allowed the researcher to gather contextual data on teachers' instructional behaviors, student-teacher interactions, and the classroom environment, thereby validating and enriching the data obtained from interviews and documents. Here is a questionnaire checklist :

a. Using opening questions in English

b. Providing a list of new vocabulary in every meeting

c. Using English songs

d. Using short stories/reading texts

e. Using visual media (pictures/flashcards/videos)

f. Using language games

g. Giving exercises to make sentences/paragraphs with vocabulary

h. Encouraging students to speak using new vocabulary

i. Giving vocabulary quizzes/assignments periodically

j. Giving direct Feedback on vocabulary use

3. Data Analysis Techniques

The interactive paradigm of Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three primary stages—data reduction, data presentation, and concluding/verification—is typically used in qualitative data analysis. Inductive data analysis was used in this study, classifying information gathered from observations and interviews into specific themes and patterns.

The collected data will be analyzed qualitatively through several stages:

a. Transcription: Record and transcribe the interview results verbatim.

b. Data Reduction: Reading interview transcripts and observation notes repeatedly to identify themes and patterns relevant to the research focus.

c. Coding: Assign codes to relevant data to group and categorize information.

d. Interpretation: Interpret the coded data to understand teachers' strategies, how they are implemented, and their impact on students' vocabulary mastery.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the teaching strategies used by three English teachers at SMPN 1 Sambaliung to enhance the vocabulary mastery of grade VIII students. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The teachers interviewed were Mrs. Milda Vera, Mrs. Maemunah, and Mrs. Juliaty Riahma Saragih, each of whom showed a unique approach in their vocabulary teaching. The interviews were guided by ten main questions that explored the various dimensions of vocabulary teaching strategies in the classroom.

In response to the first question, "Do you use interesting learning methods to improve students' vocabulary?", all three teachers agreed on the importance of engaging students in fun and motivating ways. Mrs. Vera and Mrs. Maemunah emphasized the use of interactive games, group discussions, and quizzes to maintain students' interest and foster active learning. In contrast, Mrs. Juliaty focused more on structure and repetition, stating that while her methods may not always be classified as 'interesting,' they are effective for reinforcing vocabulary

retention through consistency. This reflects a balance between entertainment and academic structure, depending on each teacher's perspective.

When asked, "Do you often use visual media (pictures, flashcards, videos) in teaching vocabulary?", all teachers confirmed the usefulness of visual tools. Mrs. Maemunah uses visual media very frequently, incorporating videos, flashcards, and images that align with lesson themes to help students contextualize new vocabulary. Mrs. Vera also uses pictures regularly, highlighting their impact on student attention and understanding. Meanwhile, Mrs. Juliaty prefers flashcards and images but rarely uses videos due to limited school resources. This indicates that while all teachers recognize the value of visual aids, the level of integration depends on accessibility and personal teaching styles.

The third question, "Do you provide a new vocabulary list at every meeting?", revealed that vocabulary lists are not always presented at every lesson. Mrs. Vera consistently introduces new vocabulary in each session and encourages students to look up definitions and memorize the words. Mrs. Maemunah provides vocabulary periodically, often embedded in readings or exercises. Mrs. Juliaty usually introduces new vocabulary at the beginning of each chapter or after reading texts, allowing students to understand the words in context. These approaches show variation in frequency and format but demonstrate a shared goal of vocabulary enrichment.

In regard to the fourth question, "Do you apply language game techniques (word games, crossword puzzles, etc.) in vocabulary learning?", Mrs. Vera and Mrs. Maemunah strongly support the use of games. They believe that activities

like crosswords, word search, and guessing games enhance participation and reduce the monotony of traditional instruction. Conversely, Mrs. Juliaty rarely uses games, citing time limitations and a greater focus on grammar and structure. Nevertheless, she occasionally includes light games such as letter arrangement tasks. These differing responses underline how instructional time and classroom priorities influence the inclusion of playful learning.

For the fifth question, "Do you use songs and stories to improve students' vocabulary acquisition?", all three teachers acknowledged the effectiveness of songs. Mrs. Vera regularly incorporates English songs into her lessons and even assigns students to memorize them, believing they assist with pronunciation and writing. Mrs. Maemunah combines songs and short stories, especially in lower grades, to provide vocabulary in context. Mrs. Juliaty favors songs over stories, as she finds that music better captures students' attention and engagement. Together, these methods showcase how auditory media can enrich vocabulary learning in enjoyable ways.

Addressing the sixth question, "Do you give exercises or assignments that focus on the use of vocabulary in sentences?", all teachers affirmed the practice of contextual vocabulary exercises. Mrs. Vera encourages students to use English in daily classroom interactions, fostering natural vocabulary use. Mrs. Maemunah assigns sentence or paragraph construction tasks to reinforce meaning and application. Mrs. Juliaty often asks students to create their own sentences using new words to assess their grasp of vocabulary usage. These practices demonstrate a shared understanding of the importance of context in mastering vocabulary.

In response to the seventh question, "Do you provide opportunities for students to apply new vocabulary in conversation?", all teachers reported doing so, though in varying degrees. Mrs. Vera implements an "English Area" policy, urging students to use English phrases daily, even if mixed with Indonesian. Mrs. Maemunah incorporates simple dialogues and group discussions, allowing students to practice vocabulary in real-life contexts. Mrs. Juliaty encourages vocabulary use during presentations and speaking tasks but does not schedule specific conversational activities. These responses show that opportunities for active language use are present, though shaped by each teacher's classroom setup.

The eighth question, "Do you give regular quizzes or vocabulary tests to measure students' understanding?", was answered affirmatively by all teachers. Mrs. Vera uses sparking questions at the start of each class as informal assessments. Mrs. Maemunah provides structured quizzes and written tasks to evaluate understanding and usage. Mrs. Juliaty conducts vocabulary quizzes at the end of each chapter as a formal assessment method. This indicates that all teachers consider ongoing evaluation essential to track vocabulary development.

To the ninth question, "Do you provide feedback to students on correct vocabulary usage?", each teacher emphasized the importance of feedback. Mrs. Vera motivates students by giving positive reinforcement and praising vocabulary use, especially when they adhere to classroom agreements like speaking English. Mrs. Maemunah provides constructive corrections and models correct usage. Mrs. Juliaty offers written feedback on assignments and discusses common mistakes

with the whole class to support collective improvement. These approaches reflect a strong focus on formative feedback to guide learners.

The final question, "Do you provide vocabulary learning strategies that students can apply independently at home?", also revealed positive responses. Mrs. Vera advises students to speak English at home or even practice alone in front of a mirror to train their pronunciation. Mrs. Maemunah suggests various strategies such as making flashcards, writing daily journals, using language apps, and listening to English content. Mrs. Juliaty encourages students to keep personal dictionaries but admits she has not implemented independent strategies consistently due to time limitations. This suggests that while the value of autonomy is recognized, implementation varies among teachers.

The classroom observations conducted supported the validity of interview responses. The researcher observed Mrs. Vera using interactive strategies including songs and classroom conversations that encouraged students to actively use new vocabulary. In Mrs. Maemunah's class, the use of visual aids, group games, and vocabulary-matching tasks was clearly evident, reinforcing her commitment to making learning fun and interactive. Meanwhile, in Mrs. Juliaty's class, vocabulary teaching was more structured, relying on repetition, sentence drills, and written exercises. Although her methods were more conventional, they still effectively supported vocabulary mastery.

These observations were further validated by students' performance data. Mrs. Vera's students generally scored well on assignments, with several achieving scores above 90, reflecting the effectiveness of her participatory and song-based

methods. Mrs. Maemunah's students performed equally well, with many scoring close to perfect, indicating that her balanced use of media, games, and writing tasks was beneficial. Mrs. Juliaty's students also achieved high marks, showing that her structured and repetition-focused strategies had a solid impact despite being less varied.

The analysis of teacher strategies reveals alignment with several expert theories. The importance of contextual vocabulary learning, emphasized by Nation (2015), is reflected in all teachers' practices, especially in Mrs. Maemunah's and Mrs. Juliaty's text-based approaches. Reinders (2017) supports the use of games to enhance motivation, a technique used extensively by Mrs. Vera and Mrs. Maemunah. Benson (2016) advocates for learner autonomy, which Mrs. Vera and Mrs. Maemunah foster through independent practice. Webb and Nation (2017) highlight the role of structured repetition, evident in Mrs. Juliaty's method. Alqahtani (2015) underscores the use of visual media, widely used by all three teachers. Lastly, Syafrizal and Haerudin (2018) emphasize memorization strategies, which are clearly reflected in Mrs. Vera's daily vocabulary techniques.

D. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research conducted at SMPN 1 Sambaliung, the teaching strategies implemented by the teachers to enhance the English vocabulary mastery of grade VIII students showed positive results. The three interviewed teachers applied various interactive and contextual methods, such as visual media, language games, songs, and conversation exercises. Although each teacher's

approach varies, all teachers demonstrate a high commitment to creating a fun learning environment that supports student engagement.

The results of the interviews, observation, and student score data indicate that using varied and engaging strategies can increase students' motivation to learn and improve their vocabulary mastery. Students who participate in enjoyable and contextual activities achieve better results in vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, constructive feedback and encouragement for independent learning also enhance students' motivation and learning outcomes.

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