

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN VOCABULARY MASTERY AT ELEVENTH GRADE IN ONE OF MADRASAH ALIYAH NEGERI IN BATANG HARI

Harlina Harja ^{*1}
Adang Ridwan ²
Laeli Nur Khamilah ³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Islam Batang Hari, Jambi, Indonesia

*e-mail: lina.harja@gmail.com, Adangridwan903@gmail.com, l00753834@gmail.com

Abstract

Vocabulary is an essential part in foreign language learning that must be mastered well by the students, because vocabulary is an important factor that support the students ability in speaking, listening writing and reading. Students who master in vocabulary also have ability in understanding and using the words and meanings. Students who have difficulty in vocabulary will be agitated in understanding the English lessons. This research aimed to identify students' difficulties in mastering vocabulary and the factors that caused these difficulties. The research was qualitative and to collect the data, interviews were conducted using a phenomenological approach. The subjects of this research were one English teacher and six eleventh-grade students from class XI.1 at Madrasah Aliyah Batang Hari. The results of the study showed that there were six difficulties faced by the students in mastering vocabulary, including Difficult pronouncing the words, 2) Difficult in Spelling, 3) Length and complexity, 4) Grammatcal of words, 5) Meaning of words, 6) range, connotation and idiomaticity. There were four factors that caused students' difficulties in mastering vocabulary. Students were reluctant to open the dictionaries. Students were also less interested in learning English. They did not practice speaking English regularly. Another factors were external factors such as Monotonous teaching methods make it difficult for students and Learning is less effective due to the minimal use of media.

Keywords: Students difficulty, vocabulary, MAN, Batang hari

INTRODUCTION

Learning vocabulary is time for students to understand the meaning of words and for they to get an idea about life because they can speak and write in other languages. Vocabulary mastery is very necessary in learning English. The result shows that for every student, mastering vocabulary is very important in learning English because it helps them achieve their goals in learning the language.

The researcher found that there is preliminary research related to this study. Learning is an interaction activity between teacher and students, Student-content interaction is a process of intellectual interaction with material that produces changes in students' self, knowledge, students' perspectives, or the cognitive structure of students' minds.¹

According to Nurnisa, factor is because of the lack of vocabulary.² Finally, it is found that students experience difficulties with vocabulary, including pronunciation, spelling, memorizing multisyllabic words, and understanding their meanings.

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental factor in learning a language and it is crucial for effective communication and comprehension in a foreign language. Student difficulties in

¹ Gustianto, R., Cangara, H., & Rahman, A. (2022). Analysis of Teacher and Student Interaction Patterns During Online Learning at the Covid-19 Pandemic Period at SMP Negeri 3 Anggeraja. In *International Conference on Communication, Policy and Social Science (InCCluSi 2022)* (pp. 502-510). Atlantis Press.

² Uri Salam, Nurnisa. (2021) Students' Difficulties in Learning Vocabularies *English community journal*, 5 (1), 46-53.

acquiring and remembering vocabulary was the subject of extensive research in the field of second language acquisition.³

In addition, based on preliminary interviews made by a researcher with an English teacher on July 22th, 2024, and experiences of researchers while attending school in one of the Madrasah Aliyah in Batang Hari. The researcher found several obstacles in the process of learning English in class, one of which is during Vocabulary practice learning, where students have difficulty understanding or interpreting words in English correctly, so students can not understand the meaning of the word.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative research method. According to Creswell, Qualitative research begins with the assumptions of a worldview.⁴ This means that all individuals or groups are assumed to share their opinions, as they are considered to be attempting to address the problem.

This research used phenomenology approach. Phenomenology study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenology focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon.⁵ Phenomenology focuses on describing meaning based on the lived experiences of several individuals regarding a particular phenomenon. at one of MAN in Batang Hari to identify the students' difficulties in vocabulary mastery and the causes of those problems. This research use Purposive sampling (or purposeful sampling) is a sampling method or technique. In this research, a researcher deliberately and subjectively selects a sample based on specific criteria or research objectives.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This research was explore the difficulties encountered by students in vocabulary mastery their English subject in one of madrasah aliyah in Batang Hari. Trough qualitative interviews from several key difficulties emerged, categorized to the theory with supporting quotes elaborated from participants to illustrate their experience.

FINDING

According to Thornbury (2002) theory there are six aspects of difficulty in vocabulary mastery, namely: pronunciation, spelling, length and complexity, grammar, meaning, range (connotation and idiomaticity).⁶

a. Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the way in which a particular person pronounces the word of a language.⁷ The problem with vocabulary mastery was pronunciation, because pronunciation refers to how an individual pronounces words in a language.

³ Nurul Rahmawati (2023) an analysis students difficulties in vocabulary mastery: a case study at English club of SMAN 7 Kota Serang 4(9)

⁴ Creswell, J. W. (2020). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. (Pearson Higher Ed,2020).

⁵ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design (2nd edition)*, (London:Sage Production,2007), 37

⁶ Scott Thornbury, (2002) *How to Teach Vocabulary*, (Essex: Longman, Pearson Education, 2002), 27-29.

⁷ Ibid. scout thornbury

Participant A said: "I still have difficulties memorizing and having difficulty in pronunciation, because in my daily life I do not hear much English conversation and also the pronunciation of English and Indonesian is different, so it is difficult to pronounce, sis."

Participant B said: "I often have difficulty remembering the pronunciation of a word, especially in foreign languages like English. Even though I can memorize the meaning of a word, I often forget how to pronounce it correctly. This becomes a major challenge when I want to speak or listen to conversations in that language. I often feel hesitant, afraid of mispronouncing a word that I actually understand the meaning of."

Based on the interview above, it showed that, the participant did not master vocabulary because she had difficulties with pronunciation. The contributing factors were that she did not regularly listen to native speakers and that there were differences in pronunciation. the participant experienced major difficulty in remembering the pronunciation of English words.

b. Spelling

Spelling is the act of forming words correctly from individual letter or the way that a word is spelt. Spelling is the writing of a word or words with the necessary letters, an arrangement of letters that form a word, and the process of forming words by putting letters together.

Participant C said: "I learn through pronunciation, does not from how the word is written. Because of that, it is easier for me to remember how a word is spoken than how it is spelled. The problem is, when I'm asked to write it, I often get confused because the spelling does not match the pronunciation I memorized. As a result, I can say the word fluently, but I often spell it incorrectly."

Based on the interview above, it showed that the participant relies more on pronunciation than on the written form when learning English. This creates a problem because, although they can pronounce the words correctly, they struggle to write them accurately. Participant D said:

"Another difficulty I face in mastering vocabulary is when spelling new words. I often write them based on what I hear from the teacher's pronunciation, without knowing the correct spelling. As a result, many words turn out to be misspelled because they do not match the proper written form."

Based on the interview above, it showed that the participant relies more on pronunciation than on the written form when learning English. This creates a problem because, although they can pronounce the words correctly. The student got confused when the teacher asked her to spell a word that the teacher had said before.

c. Length and Complexity

Long words seem to be no more difficult to learn than short ones. But, as a rule of thumb, high-frequency words tend to be short in English, and therefore the learner is likely to meet them more often, a factor favoring their learnability.

Participant E said: "I also have difficulty with word that contain "r" and "th" for example trust and they."

Based on the statement above, it showed that the difficulty of the word because of the students is a part of society in Rambutan Masam, they difficult to mention / make sound for particular letter. For example "r", "st" and "th".

Participant F said: "A lot, especially in my major, there are many complex technical terms. Words like "mechanization," "transmission," or "operationalization" make my head spin. It takes me a long time to understand and write those words correctly."

Based on the statement above, it showed that the difficulty of the word because of the students is a part of society in Rambutan Masam, they difficult to mention / make sound for particular letter. For example "r", "st" and "th". the participant experiences difficulty understanding and writing complex technical terms in English, especially in their field of study. Words like "mechanization," "transmission," and "operationalization" confused and required a long time to understand and write correctly.

d. Grammar

Grammar problems often arise when the grammar associated with a word differs from its equivalent in the first language (L1).

Participant G said: "My weakness in English lessons is that when I'm given vocabulary, I do not fully understand the meaning. Sometimes I know the meaning of the word, but I do not know how to use it in the correct form. This makes it difficult for me to construct sentences with those new words."

Participant H said: "Sometimes when I translate sentences, my teacher says that my translation does not follow English grammar rules. She often asks me to check my grammar again. This makes me realize that understanding grammar rules is very important in translating."

Based on the interview above, it showed that the participant had difficulties with grammar. The students explained that they sometimes understood the meaning of a word, but they did not know which tense to use. During the process of translating sentences, the teacher often reminded students that their translations did not yet follow the rules of English.

e. Meaning

When two words overlap in meaning, learners are likely to confuse them. Words with multiple meanings can also be troublesome for learners.

Participant I said: "Students are often confused in distinguishing words that look similar but have different meanings. The similarity in pronunciation or spelling makes it difficult for them to know when to use the correct word. This often causes mistakes in both writing and speaking."

Participant J said: "What I find most difficult is distinguishing the meanings of similar words. Sometimes there are two words with almost the same meaning, but they are used differently. It makes me confused about which one to use."

Based on the interview above, it showed that the participant still struggled to distinguish words that seemed similar but had different meanings. This indicated that a deeper understanding of the differences in word meanings the participant's main difficulty was distinguishing the meanings of similar words.

f. Range Connotation and Idiomaticity

Words that can be used in a wide range of contexts will generally be perceived as easier than their synonyms with a narrower range.

Participant K said: "Yes, often. For example, the words 'big' and 'large' I thought they were the same, but it turns out that in some situations, only one of them is appropriate. I don't know which one is more formal or more commonly used in certain contexts."

Participant L said: "Words in English sometimes differ depending on the context of their use. Some words are formal, while others are more commonly used in everyday conversation. I often get confused about which word is appropriate to use according to the sentence given."

Based on the statements above, it showed that the participant often experienced confusion in distinguishing words that seemed similar in English, such as 'big' and 'large'. the participant often felt confused when choosing words in English due to the differences between formal words and more common ones.

2. The Factors that Cause Students' Difficulties in Vocabulary

Four factors that cause students' difficulties in vocabulary in the eleventh grade in one of the Madrasah Aliyah in Batang Hari.

1. Students are reluctant to open dictionaries

Dictionary is a media that will important thing in learning foreign language.

Participant M said: "I still have difficulty mastering vocabulary due to a lack of independent study habits and rarely using a dictionary. Whenever I come across a word I do not understand, I rarely take the initiative to look up it is meaning in a dictionary."

Participant N said: "I often guess the meaning of a word in a sentence without looking it up in a dictionary. Sometimes my guess is correct, but other times it is wrong, which causes me to

misunderstand the overall meaning of the sentence. The reason is that, in my opinion, using a dictionary takes a long time to find the meaning of the word I'm looking for.”

Based on the statement above, it showed that the participant faced difficulties in mastering vocabulary due to poor study habits and infrequent use of dictionaries. When asked to use a dictionary, they tended to choose Google Translate on their phones as an alternative. The participant tended to use the strategy of guessing the meaning of words based on the context of the sentence rather than using a dictionary, because it was considered faster and more practical.

2. Students are less interest in learning English

According to Slameto, the factor that cause learning difficulties are from within students are lack of attention, lack of interest emotion, talent, and etc.

Participant O said: “Yes, I often have trouble, sis. Sometimes I forget the meaning or am confused how to use it, sis. Maybe because I am do not interest in learning English. So I rarely practice and I am not enthusiastic during lessons, and then no friends to invite in English speaking outside of classroom. ”

Participant P said: “Honestly, I do not really have a good grasp of English lessons. Because of that, I feel less confident every time the class takes place. As a result, I tend to focus more on other subjects like Economics or History, which I find easier to understand.”

Based on the statement above, it showed that the participant had difficulty learning English due to a lack of interest, so she rarely practiced and was not enthusiastic during lessons. the participant were not very interested in learning English because they found it difficult and believed that not everyone could master it.

3. Students do not practice speaking English regularly

According to Catur Widiasworo stated that students did not practice speaking English because of inhibition, nothing to say, anxiety, lack of self-confidence and low motivation.

Participant Q said: “Yes, I often have difficulty remembering new vocabulary. Especially if I have not used it for a long time, I usually forget those words when I want to speak in English. This makes me feel less confident when I have to speak with others in English.”

Participant R said: “The factor that causes me difficulty in mastering vocabulary is the lack of practice speaking English. I don’t know what to say. I feel nervous and afraid of making mistakes when speaking English.”

Based on the statement above, it showed that the participant's difficulty in remembering new vocabulary was caused by the infrequent use of English. the participant faced difficulties in mastering English vocabulary due to a lack of speaking practice. Nervousness and fear of making mistakes while speaking were hindering factors, making it hard for them to express what they wanted to say.

4. External Factor

There are three indicators in external factors of learning difficulties namely the teacher, the media, and classroom conditions.

Participant S said: “Monotonous teaching makes the classroom atmosphere boring. This causes us to have difficulty focusing and understanding the vocabulary given by the teacher. In addition, the lack of variety in teaching methods makes us quickly feel bored.”

Participant T said: “The lack of media used in the learning process makes it less interesting. In fact, sometimes the teacher does not use any media at all during the lessons. This makes it difficult for us to understand the material well because we only rely on verbal explanations.”

Based on the statement above, it showed that the participant's monotonous teaching methods made it difficult for students to understand the vocabulary provided by the teacher. the participant's learning was less effective due to the minimal use of media. Sometimes,

Discussion

The Difficulties Faced by the Students in Vocabulary Mastery

Thombury (2002) states that six aspects that become sources of difficulty in vocabulary mastery, students have difficulties in vocabulary, such as Difficult pronouncing the words, pronunciation difficulties if their experience of memorizing many vocabulary words for an exam, but struggled with pronunciation when asked to say them aloud. This indicated that understanding the meaning of a word did not always accompany the ability to pronounce it correctly. A mistake in pronouncing words like 'debt' served as a clear example that the student had not fully grasped the pronunciation rules in English, especially regarding silent letters. Difficulty in Spelling, The student got confused when the teacher asked her to spell a word that the teacher had said before: the word 'psychology,' which was initially written as 'saikologi.' This indicated confusion in understanding the inconsistent spelling rules in English. Difficult in Length and complexity, the length and complexity of words can make long or structurally complex words hard to remember or use. Difficulty understanding and writing complex technical terms in English, especially in their field of study. Words like "mechanization," "transmission," and "operationalization" confused and required a long time to understand and write correctly. To overcome this difficulty, the participants used a strategy of repeated repetition so that the words could be memorized better. This showed that despite the challenges in vocabulary mastery, the participants had the motivation to learn and develop their English skills. Difficulties in Grammatical of words, during the process of translating sentences, the teacher often reminded students that their translations did not yet follow the rules of English. The teacher usually asked them to check their grammar to make the translation more accurate. Difficulty in Meaning of words, main difficulty was distinguishing the meanings of similar words. Although the words had nearly the same meaning, differences in usage context were often confusing, making students unsure about which word to use. In addition, students also difficult in range, connotation and idiomaticity. often felt confused when choosing words in English due to the differences between formal words and more common ones. They struggled to determine which word was appropriate for the context of the sentence being used.

The Cause Factors of Learning Difficulties for Students

The findings of this study align with Djamhari and Zain theory of factor student difficulties, Students were reluctant to open dictionaries, This was due to the assumption that using a dictionary wasted study time, as well as a tendency to prefer asking friends or the teacher. In addition, some students felt embarrassed to using a dictionary because they were worried about being considered less intelligent.⁸ Their interest in learning English was low, the participant did not like English lessons because she felt burdened by the many assignments. This made the student lazy to memorize, lose interesting, and even tend to skip class during lessons. They rarely practiced speaking English regularly, they more often worked on exercises or writing tasks, while in class, direct conversations in English were rare. Additionally, outside of school, there were no friends or an environment do not supported speaking practice. There were external factors such as an unsupportive environment, limited learning media, and few opportunities to use English outside the classroom, monotonous teaching methods made it difficult for students to understand the vocabulary provided by the teacher. The lack of variety in delivering the material hindered student comprehension. The learning was less effective due to the minimal use of media. Sometimes, the teacher did not use any media at all, making the learning process less engaging and interactive. This suggests that Djamhari and Zain theory is relevant and is accordance with the context of the factor Students difficulties in vocabulary mastery.

Conclusion

⁸ Ibid., Rohmatillah,

It can be concluded that students have difficulties in vocabulary mastery in English. Thornbury (2002) states that six main aspects become sources of difficulty in vocabulary mastery, namely: **pronunciation, spelling, length and complexity, grammar, meaning, and range**, including **connotation and idiomaticity**. This theory has proven to be relevant to findings in the field regarding the challenges students face in learning English vocabulary. For example, many students experience difficulty in **pronunciation**, which aligns with the first point in Thornbury's theory.

While the results support the theory, students have difficulties in vocabulary, such as Difficulty pronouncing the words, difficulty in Spelling, difficulty in Length and complexity, difficulties in Grammatical words, difficulty in Meaning of words. In addition, students also have difficulty with range, connotation, and idiomaticity.

2. There are some factors that cause students difficulties in vocabulary

There are some factors that cause difficulty in students' vocabulary mastery. These factors include: Students were reluctant to open the dictionaries, Students were also less interested in learning English, They did not practice speaking English regularly, and external factors.

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