AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY AT SEVENTH-GRADE MA'HAD DARUL IKHLAS BOARDING SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive qualitative research, entitled "An Analysis of the Students' Vocabulary Mastery at the Seventh Grade of Ma'had Darul Ikhlas Boarding School," aimed to determine the level of English vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade students and to identify the specific difficulties they face. The study was conducted at Ma'had Darul Ikhlas Boarding School, involving a sample of 30 students from class VII-A selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through a vocabulary test, classroom observation, and a structured interview with the English teacher. The key finding shows that the students' overall vocabulary mastery is at the Medium level, with an average class score of 58.5. This score falls below the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC) of 70, confirming a widespread need for intervention. Specifically, 60.00% (18 students) were categorized at the Medium level, and 23.33% (7 students) were at the Low level. The research identified several significant difficulties faced by the students: Pronunciation and Reciting, Productive Mastery Gaps, Spelling and Word Form, and Motivational and Affective Factors. The study concludes that the seventh-grade students' vocabulary mastery is insufficient and requires focused intervention. The difficulties are rooted in phonological challenges, a significant gap between receptive and productive vocabulary, and affective barriers like low motivation and limited exposure to the languange. These findings serve as a crucial diagnostic tool for the school to select and implement appropriate teaching strategies.

Keywords : *Vocabulary Mastery, Pronunciation Difficulties, Lack of Motivation.*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is universally recognized as one of the three core components of language, serving as the fundamental building block for effective communication. Without an extensive range of vocabulary, communication becomes severely limited, and proficiency in the four language skillsmreading, speaking, writing, and listening is hindered. Therefore, vocabulary instruction is essential throughout all levels of schooling, from elementary to senior high school. However, the process of acquiring vocabulary, particularly in a Foreign Language (EFL) context, is challenging[17]. Students frequently struggle with word meanings, spelling, and the inconsistency between English orthography and pronunciation (e.g., *write* and *right*). Preliminary observations conducted at Ma'had Darul Ikhlas Boarding School on June 10th, 2025, revealed that many seventh-grade students experience significant difficulties, notably in pronouncing and actively mastering vocabulary. The students' performance in vocabulary mastery, as indicated by past semester exam results, was consistently below the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC) of 70. The current teaching approach at the school, which relies on reading texts, conversations, and translation methods, has not sufficiently addressed these fundamental issues.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, as its primary purpose was to systematically describe and analyze existing phenomena namely the students' level of vocabulary mastery and the specific difficulties they face. The findings are predominantly expressed and analyzed through interpretation of content and identifying the meaning of observed behaviors rather than purely mathematical methods.

The population of this study consisted of all seventh-grade students at Ma'had Darul Ikhlas Boarding School, totaling 250 students. The sample comprised 30 students from class VII-A, selected using a purposive sampling technique. The selection criteria included students who were actively enrolled in the seventh grade and shared the same English class schedule. The research was conducted at the Ma'had Darul Ikhlas Islamic Boarding School, located in Dalan Lidang, Panyabungan District, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra Province.

Data were collected using two main instruments: test and non-test instruments.

1. Vocabulary Test: A comprehension test was administered to measure students' ability to produce and understand words, both receptively and productively. The test was designed to assess indicators such as interpreting, reading, reciting, finding, and using vocabulary in sentences.
2. Observation: An observation checklist was used during classroom activities to record students' behaviors, specifically noting their level of vocabulary mastery and the difficulties encountered when reading text.
3. Interview: A structured interview was conducted with the English teacher to gather contextual and qualitative data regarding the students' learning factors, pronunciation issues, and current teaching strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Level of Vocabulary Mastery

The vocabulary test results indicated that the students' overall vocabulary mastery was categorized as Medium. The class achieved an average score of 58.5, which is significantly below the school's Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC) of 70. The distribution of student mastery levels highlights this issue:

a. Medium Level: 60.00% (18 students)
b. Low Level: 23.33% (7 students)

This finding confirms that the majority of seventh-grade students at Ma'had Darul Ikhlas Boarding School possess insufficient vocabulary mastery, necessitating targeted intervention strategies.

Identified Difficulties in Vocabulary Mastery

Qualitative data from the observation and teacher interview identified four major areas of difficulty:

1. Pronunciation and Reciting: Students showed significant challenges with phonological aspects. The teacher noted that students tend to read new words exactly as they are spelled, often applying Indonesian phonetic rules, leading to incorrect pronunciation of words with silent letters like *Wednesday* or *honest*. This issue is exacerbated by a lack of focused pronunciation practice in the classroom.
2. Productive Mastery Gaps**:** There is a notable gap between receptive vocabulary (understanding words in listening/reading) and productive vocabulary (actively using words in speaking/writing. This issue is tied to limited practice in composing or using vocabulary in original contexts.
3. Spelling and Word Form**:** Difficulties were observed in students' knowledge of how to write and spell vocabulary correctly. This includes a limited understanding of word structure and spelling patterns.
4. Motivational and Affective Factors: A crucial factor contributing to the low scores is a lack of motivation and limited exposure to English outside the classroom, which are common affective barriers in an EFL environment. Students perceive English as largely irrelevant to their daily life within the boarding school, resulting in low interest and engagement in studying vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the vocabulary mastery level of seventh-grade students at Ma'had Darul Ikhlas Boarding School is insufficient, scoring a class average of 58.5 and confirming a critical need for focused remedial action. The core difficulties stem from a combination of phonological interference leading to pronunciation errors, a major disconnect between receptive and productive vocabulary skills, and affective barriers rooted in low motivation and limited English exposure within the boarding school environment. These findings serve as a diagnostic foundation for the school to develop and implement appropriate teaching strategies, such as integrating targeted pronunciation instruction and more actively engaging learning methods to convert passive knowledge into active use.

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