

Second-Semester Students' Challenges towards Vocabulary Mastery in English Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the challenges and inhibiting factors that affect vocabulary acquisition in English language learning. The research was conducted using a qualitative method, specifically through structured interviews. Descriptive research was also employed to process the data. The participants were 32 second-semester students from the English Education Study Program at Universitas Nias. Six questions were prepared for the participants, with responses based on their personal experiences. The results revealed that many participants cited laziness as a significant factor hindering their vocabulary improvement, largely due to their infrequent use of English in daily life. Other factors included low motivation and interest, difficulties with word meaning and grammar, and challenges with pronunciation. These factors were categorized into psychological factors—such as low motivation, interest, and laziness in memorizing words—and linguistic factors, which included difficulties with word meaning, grammar, and pronunciation. Additional reasons identified were a lack of confidence in speaking English with others, frequent forgetting of vocabulary, difficulty understanding context, learning dependent on mood, and limited study time. These were further classified into psychological factors, such as lack of confidence and study laziness, and cognitive factors, like difficulty remembering vocabulary.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In (Hadi, Izzah, and Larasati 2021) vocabulary is a crucial aspect of English language acquisition for kids. Vocabulary is a crucial component of learning a language. According to Nordquist (2019), vocabulary refers to a person's or group's understanding of a language's words. Vocabulary impacts the communication process. Vocabulary refers to a person's knowledge and use of commonly used terms in their language. This has an impact on people's willingness and capacity to share their beliefs and ideas effectively. A recent study indicated that vocabulary knowledge, in addition to grammar and pronunciation, is a crucial basis for English proficiency. According to Yovanoff, Duesbery, Alonzo, and Tindal (2017) and

Sovakandan, Jaganathan, and Hussin (2017), effective communication requires proper vocabulary.

In (Rizky Setiawan and Wiedarti 2020) explains that there are numerous definitions of vocabulary. Kusrini (2012) defines vocabulary as commonly used and understood terms by learners. Furthermore, vocabulary is defined as a linguistic word that encompasses individual items, phrases, and clauses with a definition (Clouston, 2013). A vocabulary is a list of words from specific alphabets and their meanings (Alizadeth, 2016).

Nation (2006) in (Afini et al. 2023) also argue that vocabulary is a collection of phrases that people use to interact with one another in a specific language, as well as a person's recall of vocabulary words for that language. A person's vocabulary consists of phrases with which they are familiar (Mujazidah, 2018). Vocabulary is crucial for mastering language abilities, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Laoli et al. n.d.). Without vocabulary, it is difficult to communicate in any language, even English (Asyiah, 2017) in (Afini et al. 2023). Beyond grammar, vocabulary is essential for understanding what children read and hear, particularly in the classroom, and for facilitating interpersonal communication (Gea et al. n.d.)

Based on the above statement, it can be understood that vocabulary is one of the most important things in communication, so one needs to increase vocabulary to be able to communicate with other people, especially in foreign languages. Not only to master language skills, but also to master skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, if it is observed, especially among students majoring in English at the University of Nias, in every class there are some students who do not have much English vocabulary, so when they want to give opinions or explain the material, they do not know what to say because of the lack of vocabulary.

In (Purnomo et al. 2023) their research explains some of the difficulties students encounter when learning English vocabulary. The first is *low motivation and interest*. One of the factors is students' difficulty building English vocabulary due to low motivation to learn English. A questionnaire analysis revealed that 81% of the students in class VIII/A had low motivation for learning English. The second is being *lazy about memorizing words*. This factor contributed to the difficulty in building their English vocabulary, with 84% of class VIII/A students slacking off in this regard. The third is *word meaning and word grammar*. The study found that 84% of VIII/A students struggled with understanding word meaning and grammar, in line with the previous research, and 91% struggled with selecting suitable word meanings. The fourth is *pronunciation*. Most students have difficulty pronouncing words, writing, and spelling. Based on the results of questionnaire number 6 given to students in class VIII/A, it is known that most of them (91%) do not understand the pronunciation structure of English vocabulary. The fifth is *learning facilities*. The researcher found that 97% of VIII/A students faced difficulties in building English vocabulary due to unfilled learning facilities, such as internet connections and cell phones.

(Bima, Dewantara, and Septiana 2018) also explains that the challenges for students towards vocabulary acquisition include lack of interest, inadequate media, lack of language materials, and lack of opportunities to be creative. The researchers identified three factors that hinder students' ability to master vocabulary: a lack of media, a lack of interest, and insufficient vocabulary materials. Research indicates that variables such as limited media exposure and a lack of enthusiasm can hinder pupils' ability to master vocabulary.

In (Afidah, Imam Machfudi, and Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember 2022) also found that a number of students had difficulty mastering vocabulary. This study found that students have difficulty translating words or sentences from English to Indonesian and vice versa. Students

also have difficulty understanding the meaning of words, pronouncing words correctly, misspelling words, and remembering or memorizing English vocabulary.

Based on the explanation above, there are several challenges that students face when it comes to vocabulary acquisition when learning English, namely low motivation and interest, lazy memorization of words, word meanings and grammar, pronunciation, and learning facilities. Lack of motivation to learn can also hinder students' vocabulary improvement, especially if they do not get support from the closest people, such as parents, friends, and teachers. Laziness to memorize can also hinder students' vocabulary improvement because they do not have the intention to memorize new vocabulary. The pronunciation that is difficult for them to mention is also one of the factors, and there are still several other things besides those already mentioned. Lack of learning media and materials that are inadequate for their level are also included in the factors that inhibit their vocabulary because the learning method is not in accordance with the needs of students and media that cannot support the learning process.

Therefore, this study aims to explore in depth the challenges students face in mastering vocabulary while learning English. In contrast to previous studies, which often focused on secondary school students, this study uses second-semester university students as respondents. This allows the researcher to explore not only what the inhibiting factors are but also how they impact the learning process. By focusing on this specific context, it is hoped to provide valuable new insights for educators, curriculum developers, and researchers in the field of teaching English in higher education.

II. METHODS

The research method used is a qualitative method using an interview instrument. Moser and Korstjens (2017) in (Oranga and Matere 2023) argue that qualitative research provides deeper insights into real-world situations by concentrating on participants' views, experiences, and behavior. The data processing used is descriptive research. Descriptive research is about describing how reality is. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) in (Gea et al. n.d.) descriptive research aims to describe a phenomenon and its properties.

Structured and unstructured interviews are the two types of interviews (Sugiono 2012d, p. 194-197) in (Pd 2020). And the one used in this research is the structured interview type. A structured interview is a data collection strategy used by the researcher if the researcher is aware of the information acquired and the data collector has prepared written responses to the questions (Pd 2020). The participants in this study were 2nd semester students at the University of Nias, taking one class of 32 people. The researcher has also compiled interview questions that will be given to participants. The questions are: 1). Are you interested in learning vocabulary? If yes/no, give your reasons. 2). How do you use English in your daily life? Do you have the opportunity to speak with others in English? 3). There are several media such as videos, podcasts, or apps to learn English vocabulary. What media have you used to improve your vocabulary? Tell us about your experience in using these media? Is there any change/improvement in your vocabulary? 4). Do you have support from lecturers, friends or family in learning English vocabulary? So far, who has supported you in learning vocabulary? What actions did he/she take? 5). Factors that hinder vocabulary improvement: *-Low motivation and interest*: having low motivation in English. *-Lazy in memorizing words*: lazy in memorizing vocabulary. *-Word meaning and word grammar*: Do not understand the meaning of various vocabularies in English. *-Pronunciation*: difficulty in pronouncing some English words. *-Learning facilities*: difficulty in having learning facilities (internet connection, cell phone). Among the factors above, what are the causes of your vocabulary improvement based on the factors above? Tell us what are the factors that hinder you above

(based on your own experience) 6). In addition to the factors we have listed, are there any other factors that hinder your vocabulary improvement? Tell us what these factors are.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, there are several options that have been chosen by the participants as the answer to question number 5 regarding the challenges of mastering vocabulary when learning English. And most of them mostly chose lazy memorizing of words as a challenge and also a factor that hinders vocabulary mastery.

Second-Semester Students' Challenges towards Vocabulary Mastery in English Language Learning

The answer to the question given by the researchers, namely:

Table 1. Respondent's Answer

Respondent	Questions	Responses	Classification	Description
Twenty-two respondents	First question	Yes, because vocabulary is the foundation of learning English.	-	There were 22 people who answered that vocabulary is the basis of learning English.
Nine respondents		Yes, by learning vocabulary, you can communicate with someone using English.	-	There were 10 people who answered that by learning vocabulary, they can communicate with someone using English.
Four respondents	Second question	Using cellphone media to improve vocabulary.	-	There were 4 people who answered that they used cell phone media to improve their vocabulary.
Eleven respondents		Presenting the material in front of the class.	-	There were 11 people who gave answers by presenting the material in front of the class.
Sixteen respondents		Speaking English with other people.	-	There were 16 people who answered that it was speaking English with others.
Eleven respondents	Third question	Video	-	There are 11 people who use videos to learn English vocabulary.
Nine respondents		Podcast	-	There are 9 people who use podcast to learn English vocabulary.

Five respondents		Games	-	There are 5 people who use games to learn English vocabulary.
Eight respondents	Fourth question	Instagram	-	There are 8 people who use Instagram to learn English vocabulary.
Four respondents		Youtube	-	There are 4 people who use youtube to learn English vocabulary.
Five respondents		Tik Tok	-	There are 5 people who use Tik Tok to learn English vocabulary.
Seven respondents		Duolingo	-	There are 7 people who use duolingo to learn English vocabulary.
Fifteen respondents	Fifth question	Lecturer	-	There were 15 people who responded that they received support from their lecturers in learning English vocabulary.
Nine respondents		Friends	-	There were 9 people who responded that they received support from their friends in learning English vocabulary.
Eighteen respondents		Family	-	There were 18 people who responded that they received support from their family in learning English vocabulary.
Ten respondents	Sixth question	Low motivation and interested	-	There were 10 people who answered that low motivation and interested were factors that hindered their vocabulary.
Fourteen respondents		Lazy in memorizing words	Psychological factors (thematic classification)	There were 14 people who answered that lazy in memorizing words were factors that hindered their vocabulary.

Ten respondents	Word meaning and word grammar	Psychological factors (thematic classification)	There were 10 people who answered that word meaning and word grammar were factors that hindered their vocabulary.
Eleven respondents	Pronunciation	Linguistic factors (thematic classification)	There were 11 people who answered that pronunciation were factors that hindered their vocabulary.
Two respondents	Not confident in talking to other people using English	Linguistic factors (thematic classification)	2 people responded that another factor that hindered their vocabulary was not being confident speaking with others in English.
Four respondents	Easily forgetting to remember vocabulary	Psychological factors (thematic classification)	4 people responded that another factor that hindered their vocabulary was that they easily forgot to remember vocabulary.
Twelve respondents	Lazy about studying	Cognitive factors (thematic classification)	12 people responded that another factor that hindered their vocabulary was lazy study.

Based on Table 1, it is seen various answers from respondents. As in the first question there were two answers with the first answer totaling R22 and the second answer totaling R10. The second question had three answers, where the first answer amounted to R4, the second answer amounted to R11 and the third answer amounted to R6. The third question had seven answers, where the first answer amounted to R11, the second amounted to R9, the third amounted to R5, the fourth amounted to R8, the fifth amounted to R4, the sixth amounted to R5, and the seventh amounted to R7. The fifth question had four answers, where the first answer amounted to R15, the second amounted to R9, the third amounted to R8. The fourth question had three answers, where the first answer amounted to R15, the second amounted to R9, the third amounted to R18. The fifth question had four answers, where the first answer amounted to R10, the second amounted to R14, the third amounted to R10, and the fourth amounted to R11. The last question had three answers, where the first answer amounted to R2, the second amounted to R4 and the third amounted to R12.

And these factors are also classified in thematic classification (Lungu 2022), where low motivation and interested, lazy in memorizing words, not confident in talking to other people using English are included in psychological factors, whereas, word meaning and word grammar, pronunciation are included in linguistic factors, easily forgetting to remember vocabulary is included in cognitive factors and lazy about studying is included in psychological factors.

Below is the number of students who provided answers to the fifth question.

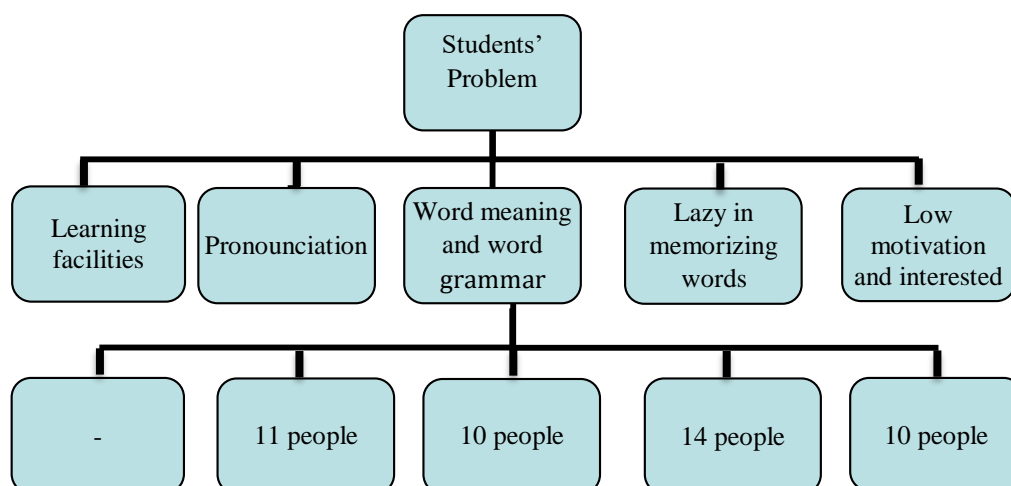


Figure 2. Factors Experienced by Students based on questions number 5

Based on the table above, it shows that many of the participants chose lazy in memorizing than other factors, totaling 14 students. Meanwhile, the factor that does not hinder students' vocabulary is learning facilities. It can be understood that they are lazy to memorize vocabulary especially if the memorized vocabulary is bar, especially if the pronunciation is difficult to pronounce.

Discussion

The problem in this study is the factors that hinder students' vocabulary in learning English. And the results showed that there are four main factors that hinder students' vocabulary, namely low motivation and interest, lazy in memorizing words, word meaning and word grammar, and pronunciation. This finding corroborates the results of (Purnomo et al. 2023) research which presents several factors that hinder students' vocabulary, namely low motivation and interest, laziness in memorizing words, word meaning and word grammar, pronunciation, learning facilities. However, there is one thing that is different between the two. In the results of the study, learning facilities were not included in the factors. However, in contrast to the (Bima et al. 2018) study which placed lack of media, lack of interest, inadequate vocabulary materials, and lack of opportunity to be creative as the main factors. This study shows that low motivation and interest comes second. It is possible that the media and learning media in the English learning process are adequate but the interest and motivation in oneself is still lacking.

This finding has implications for English language learning. There needs to be an effort to improve students' vocabulary. And learning methods are also very important in order to make the learning process more interesting. In (Gea et al. n.d.) explain that flash cards can enhance students' vocabulary acquisition by engaging them and promoting comprehension. Flash cards can help teachers provide vocabulary and increase student enthusiasm for learning English. They also encourage students to speak in front of the class. We could understand

that the use of flash cards is one of the ways that can be used in the learning process related to improving students' word acquisition by engaging them and improving comprehension. It could help teachers to provide new vocabulary to them especially if the flash cards are interesting to see so that it can attract their attention. That way they are excited in learning vocabulary.

Vocabulary learning has long been considered boring and traditional methods have proven ineffective. Games can contribute to vocabulary learning by providing a fun and exciting atmosphere for students to practice and review English. Students demand new approaches to vocabulary teaching, and they also have a positive view of teachers' teaching methods. One of the learning methods is games. Games offer a natural, fun, and engaging way to learn vocabulary, making it easier to memorize and retain information (Yudha and Mandasari 2021).

Future researchers can expand the scope to different levels of education and different geographical areas. And also look for what can be done by students to improve their vocabulary so that it can overcome problems related to barriers to improving vocabulary.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the research, some factors that hinder students' ability to learn English are the lack of use of English in daily life, laziness in memorizing words, lack of understanding and grammar, difficulty in pronunciation, and limited facilities. The use of English that is rarely used in daily life can make students have no motivation to learn English. In addition, students also have difficulty in memorizing new words because they are lazy to remember them, especially if the words are newly introduced. Another influencing factor is the meaning and grammar of English words. Students do not understand the meaning and grammar of various English words. Another factor is pronunciation. Students have difficulty in pronouncing English words that are difficult to pronounce.

It would be nice if students often speak English in daily life, do not be lazy in learning vocabulary, learn more grammar and train themselves in pronouncing a word even though it is difficult. Teachers can also use flash cards to improve their vocabulary especially if the flash cards are interesting so that students like and are excited to learn vocabulary.

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