

English Vocabulary Acquisition of Grade VII Students of SMPN 6 Satap Kupang

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is a key component of language proficiency, supporting comprehension and communication. This study examined the level of English vocabulary mastery among students in class VII-C at SMPN 6 Satap Kupang Tengah. Using a descriptive quantitative design, all 21 students completed a vocabulary test consisting of written and visual-supported sections to measure receptive vocabulary – the ability to recognize and understand grade-appropriate words. Scores were converted to percentages and classified as Very Low (0–40%), Low (41–60%), Moderate (61–80%), or High (81–100%). Results showed a mean score of 41.0% for the written section (Low) and 36.9% for the visual section (Very Low). Overall, students' vocabulary mastery was categorized as Low, with most scoring between 25% and 50%. These findings reflect limited exposure to English outside the classroom and highlight the need for targeted vocabulary instruction to enhance students' English proficiency.

Keywords: *English Vocabulary, Receptive Vocabulary, Junior High School, Indonesian EFL Learners*

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is an essential part of language proficiency because it supports both communication and comprehension. It is widely recognized as a foundation for language learning (Heidari et al., 2012). Having adequate vocabulary allows learners to understand spoken and written texts and express their ideas clearly (Gultom et al., 2022). On the other hand, limited vocabulary can make it difficult for learners to participate in classroom activities, even if they understand grammar (Bakti, 2017). Research also shows that vocabulary knowledge has a strong impact on academic performance (Wessels, 2011). Therefore, developing vocabulary is crucial for building both communicative competence and literacy skills in English (Rafiq, 2017).

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language starting from elementary or junior high school. For junior high school students, mastering vocabulary is particularly important because it helps them understand learning materials, join classroom discussions, and comprehend written texts. However, English instruction at this level often focuses on general language skills rather than systematic vocabulary development. As a result, many students still struggle with vocabulary (Ikhsan et al., 2023). While students sometimes use independent strategies – such as digital apps, multimedia, or structured exercises (Bakti, 2017; Nursila et al., 2023; Mashar, 2023; Thariq, 2023).their vocabulary skills often remain uneven, especially in rural or semi-urban areas with limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

An informal observation during an English class at SMPN 6 Satap Kupang Tengah illustrates this challenge. During a vocabulary activity, several students were able to read words aloud correctly but struggled to explain their meanings or use them in context. Some students hesitated to answer questions or participate in discussions because they were unsure of the correct vocabulary. This scenario highlights how gaps in vocabulary can affect both

comprehension and classroom engagement, emphasizing the need for a detailed examination of students' vocabulary mastery.

Previous studies indicate that vocabulary develops gradually across grade levels (Rafiqa, 2017) and that learners use various strategies such as translation, memorization, pronunciation practice, and media exposure to acquire new words (Patahuddin et al., 2017). Informal exposure through TV, music, social media, video games, and interaction with English speakers can also support vocabulary growth (Tantoun et al., 2021). While these studies provide valuable insights into factors that influence vocabulary acquisition, there is limited research specifically describing the vocabulary mastery of students within a single classroom, particularly in rural schools. Understanding students' current vocabulary abilities is essential for identifying strengths and weaknesses and for designing effective learning interventions.

Given that learners within the same classroom may demonstrate varying levels of vocabulary proficiency, this study focuses on receptive vocabulary knowledge, defined as students' ability to recognize and understand grade-appropriate English words. Vocabulary mastery is measured through written and visual tasks to capture both recognition and contextual understanding. Accordingly, this study aims to determine the level of English vocabulary mastery among students in class VII-C at SMPN 6 Satap Kupang Tengah. The research question guiding this study is: What is the level of English vocabulary mastery among students in class VII-C at SMPN 6 Satap Kupang Tengah?

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a descriptive quantitative design to determine the level of English vocabulary mastery among students in class VII-C at SMPN 6 Satap Kupang Tengah. Descriptive quantitative research is suitable for systematically describing participants' abilities using numerical data without manipulating variables (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 2014). Because the goal was to provide a clear description of students' receptive vocabulary in one classroom, this design was appropriate.

Research Site and Participants

The research took place at SMPN 6 Satap Kupang Tengah. Participants included all 21 students in class VII-C who had completed one semester of English instruction. Total sampling was used, meaning every student in the class participated. This approach ensured that the study represented the classroom comprehensively.

Instrument

The study used a vocabulary test to measure students' receptive vocabulary mastery, defined as the ability to recognize and understand grade-level English words. The test had two sections:

Written Vocabulary Section – included matching and short-definition tasks where students identified the correct meanings of words.

Visual-Supported Vocabulary Section – included picture-based items to assess students' ability to recognize words in a visual context.

The items were based on the school syllabus and adjusted to students' proficiency levels. Instructions and items were designed to be clear and appropriate to accurately measure vocabulary knowledge (Brown, 2010; Read, 2000; Schmitt, 2010).

Data Collection

Data were collected during regular English class hours. All students completed the test under the same conditions and within a set time limit. The test was conducted in a controlled classroom to ensure consistency. Each correct answer was given one point, with no partial credit. Total scores were converted to percentages to show students' mastery in each section and overall.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Students' scores were used to calculate the mean, minimum, and maximum for:

Written vocabulary section

Percentage scores were classified as:

0–40% = *Very Low*

41–60% = *Low*

61–80% = *Moderate*

81–100% = *High*

This method provided a clear numerical description of students' receptive vocabulary mastery, leading to the presentation of the results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the vocabulary test administered to students in class VII-C at SMPN 6 Satap Kupang Tengah. The aim was to determine the level of students' English vocabulary mastery, focusing on their receptive vocabulary knowledge, as measured through written and visual tasks. The results are presented descriptively using percentage scores and classification criteria.

Findings

Data were collected from all 21 students in class VII-C. Test scores were converted into percentages and classified according to the following criteria: 0–40% (Very Low), 41–60% (Low), 61–80% (Moderate), and 81–100% (High).

The mean score for the written vocabulary section was 41.0%, categorized as Low, while the mean score for the visual-supported vocabulary section was 36.9%, categorized as Very Low. These results indicate that students performed slightly better in written tasks than in visual tasks, suggesting that while they could recognize some words in text, they struggled more when identifying words in a visual context.

When considering overall vocabulary mastery, students' scores ranged mostly between 25% and 50%, placing the class in the Low category. Only a few students scored above 60%, and none reached the High category. This demonstrates that the majority of students have limited receptive vocabulary for grade-appropriate English words.

Table 1. Students' Vocabulary Scores

Students	Written	Visual
S1	36%	24%
S2	46%	34%
S3	47%	48%
S4	35%	33%
S5	33%	30%
S6	65%	56%
S7	45%	25%
S8	48%	43%
S9	30%	27%
S10	34%	29%
S11	27%	26%
S12	25%	21%
S13	50%	48%
S14	43%	41%
S15	32%	31%
S16	41%	43%
S17	37%	38%
S18	37%	34%
S19	47%	49%
S20	43%	40%
S21	60%	54%

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the receptive vocabulary mastery of students in class VII-C is generally low. The mean scores in both sections, along with the distribution of individual scores, show that most students have difficulty recognizing and understanding grade-level English words. The slightly higher performance in written tasks compared to

visual tasks suggests that students may be more familiar with words in textual contexts than in contextual or pictorial settings.

These findings are consistent with previous research on Indonesian EFL learners. (Rafiq, 2017) found that vocabulary develops gradually across grade levels but often remains limited if not explicitly reinforced. Similarly, (Patahuddin et al., 2017) reported that while students use strategies such as translation, memorization, and media exposure, overall vocabulary mastery can still be low.

The low level of vocabulary mastery observed in this study also reflects the limited exposure to English outside the classroom, particularly in rural or semi-urban contexts. As noted in the Introduction, informal observations during English class revealed that several students were able to read words aloud but could not explain their meanings or use them in a sentence. Some hesitated to answer questions for fear of mistakes. This classroom behavior is consistent with the test results, highlighting the challenges students face in developing receptive vocabulary without sufficient exposure or practice. (Tantoun et al., 2021) emphasizes that regular and meaningful exposure to language is critical for vocabulary growth, and the findings here support this claim.

The results underline the importance of strengthening vocabulary instruction in junior high school classrooms. Given that vocabulary knowledge is foundational for listening, reading, speaking, and writing, targeted interventions—such as interactive exercises, multimedia resources, and repeated exposure to grade-appropriate words—are essential to improve students' receptive vocabulary skills. In conclusion, the English vocabulary mastery of students in class VII-C at SMPN 6 Satap Kupang Tengah is largely limited, with mean scores in the Low to Very Low range. These findings suggest a need for more focused and supportive vocabulary learning activities that help students recognize, understand, and use English words confidently across different contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the level of English vocabulary mastery among students in class VII-C at SMPN 6 Satap Kupang Tengah, focusing on receptive vocabulary, or students' ability to recognize and understand grade-appropriate English words. Based on the results of a vocabulary test with written and visual-supported sections, students' overall vocabulary mastery was categorized as Low, with a mean score of 41.0% in the written section and 36.9% in the visual section. Most students scored between 25% and 50%, indicating limited and uneven vocabulary knowledge, particularly in contextual and visual recognition. A key strength of this study is that it assessed the entire classroom using both written and visual tasks, providing a comprehensive description of students' receptive vocabulary within a rural context. However, the study is limited by its focus on only one class in a single school, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, the study measured vocabulary knowledge at a single point in time and did not examine factors such as learning strategies, motivation, or classroom practices that could influence vocabulary development. For future research, longitudinal studies could track vocabulary growth over time, and comparative studies could explore differences across schools, regions, or instructional approaches. Investigating the effectiveness of targeted interventions, such as multimedia resources, games, or explicit teaching strategies, may also provide practical guidance for improving vocabulary mastery in junior high school students.

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