Lack Of Students' Vocabulary Repertoire In Learning English

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ABSTRACT

This Action Classroom Research focused on improving the vocabulary skills of the students in English lessons through the use of instructional media in Markus Middle School, Medan. It involved 26 students from the 9th grade and was done in 2 cycles comprising of four stages each: planning, action, observation, and reflection. English songs, visual aids, and vocabulary games were incorporated into the lessons to promote engagement and vocabulary mastery. Data were gathered through vocabulary testing, classroom observations, and student surveys. It was found that there was a marked improvement in the students vocabulary achievement as measured through tests. Their mean scores in the diagnostic test were 30.76% and by the end of Cycle II, this rose to 60.76%. In addition, students' engagement and motivation in the lessons was noticeably high with the use of instructional media. The study suggests that instructional media, when properly integrated, can effectively support learners' challenges related to vocabulary enhancement in an EFL context. It highlights the need for engaging and motivating material that is accompanied with appropriate scaffolding to support understanding and achievement for the learners.

Keywords: vocabulary improvement, instructional media, action research, classroom observation, EFL instruction, learner engagement songs, EFL learning

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the most important elements of English language learning, because it determines the ease with which learners progress toward acquiring English language skill (Pangaribuan et al., 2025). From a learner's perspective, adequate vocabulary is important for understanding, expressing, and participating meaningfully in spoken and written communications (Nation & Meara, 2002). In the case of learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), vocabulary knowledge is important not only for reading, but also for fostering fluency and accuracy, and learner confidence (Fauziati, 2015). Unfortunately, in Indonesian secondary schools, secondary school students are inadequately equipped with basic vocabulary skills and this impedes their ability to learn language and communicate.

A number of studies have documented the issues learners face in vocabulary acquisition, such as, but not limited to, a learner's inability to pronounce, spell, retain, or place a given word in context (Fries, 2013). Most of these problems arise because of the lack of adequate practice and exposure to new vocabulary words in the context of the learner's environment. For example, learners face problems of differentiation in the grammatical form, multiple meanings, and context (Nurjannah, 2016). These issues highlight the need for more systematic and appropriate vocabulary instructional design in instances where learners find themselves in low-proficiency and low motivation situations.

The role of instructional media is pivotal in influencing the language learning process. Instructional media, according to Omenge and Priscah (2016), serves as a link to content as it provides learning through the senses, thus enhancing understanding, motivation, and even memory. The use of songs, games, and images as instructional media provides the students with opportunities to practice vocabulary in a meaningful context, and more importantly, reduces the learner's anxiety. This is in line with Krashen's (2009) Affective Filter Hypothesis which highlights the need for low-anxiety and high-interest environments for effective language learning.

Instructional vocabulary still remains rudimentary in many classrooms in Indonesia (Nurjannah, 2016). Most of the vocabulary taught is through rote memorization and translation drills which makes it impossible for learners to be engaged and utilize the vocabulary in a meaningful context. In the observations of students at Markus Middle School in Medan, a number of learners demonstrated a lack of retention and application of basic English vocabulary. From the interviews and questionnaires, learners reported problems of feeling lost with words, memory problems with vocabulary, and a lack of confidence to use vocabulary in communicative tasks. Such problems cannot be solely viewed as cognitive, they are instructional as well, especially as they relate to the lack of multimedia used to present the materials.

The goal of this study is to analyze the shortcomings of English vocabulary learning and instruction, examining the extent to which media instruction impacts students' vocabulary perception and outcomes. Based on the theories of Nation and Meara (2002), Krashen (2009), and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), the research explores media's dual functions as motivational and scaffolding tools. In particular, the study seeks to answer these two fundamental questions: (1) What instructional media are used by teachers to teach English vocabulary? and (2) How do students perceive the impact of these media on their vocabulary learning?

By seeking answers to these questions, the study aims to advocate the use of media-enriched, student-centered vocabulary instruction, thus contributing to this research gap. The study outcomes will be useful to EFL teachers, curriculum designers, and other educational stakeholders

as the results will highlight the importance of integrating media instruction to resolve vocabulary deficits in secondary school learners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which is beneficial for evaluating and enhancing teaching activities within a particular class. In the words of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), CAR is a reflective, iterative process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting that aims to create purposeful change. In this study, the researcher conducted two action cycles, each containing four stages, which made it possible for the researcher to make adjustments to the vocabulary instruction process, evaluate the results, and improve the teaching methods based on the results and students' responses.

The subjects in this research were students from class IX-C at Markus Middle School in Medan, Indonesia. This included a cohort of 26 students aged 14 to 15 years old. These subjects were a sample of a broader population which included students with a history of consistent attendance. Given practical limitations, this sample was formed from students who struggled with vocabulary retention, and were recommended by the teacher to guide class instruction. To balance practical limitations and ethical considerations, consent was granted from the students, guardians, and the school at the ethical board level, allowing the study to comply with the voluntary ethics framework, confidentiality, and non-coercion principles (Creswell, 2012).

The researcher used vocabulary tests which were administered as a pre and post-test in each cycle to assess vocabulary retention as the primary quantitative measure. These tests aimed to evaluate the students' recognition and comprehension as well as the ability to employ the vocabulary appropriately during the usage stage. The scores from these tests were used to measure vocabulary improvement over the course of the intervention. To evaluate the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction and to measure improvement in the students' vocabulary instruction, a variety of other auxiliary instruments were also utilized.

In relation to tests, observational checklists, student questionnaires, and reflective field notes also served to collect qualitative data. Using the observation checklist, the class teacher and the researcher were able to note and assess the students' behaviors and their engagement levels with the learning content. Students also completed questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions after each cycle, which aimed to capture their views on the instructional media used. All of these instruments made it possible for the students to participate in the learning activities, express the levels of their preferences, and articulate perceived advantages or challenges. Reflective field notes which were completed by the researcher documented instructional changes and observations concerning the class interactions that happened within the lessons. The combination of these instruments contributed to data triangulation, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the results (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The steps of action research are sequential and systematic. In the planning phase, the researcher partnered with the classroom teacher to create lesson plans for vocabulary learning using English songs, flashcards, and visuals. To support vocabulary learning, the song "I Have a Dream" was used to introduce and contextualize vocabulary in a meaningful way. In the action phase, the vocabulary learning activities were conducted in the classroom during the first four sessions of each cycle. The observation phase involved data collection on student participation engagement in learning activities, and the reflection phase required data analyses to test and evaluate reflection components of the cycle.

Quantitative and qualitative analyses were integrated for data interpretation. The vocabulary test scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics which involved calculating the mean scores and the percentage of increase in the scores from cycle to cycle. Qualitative data was analyzed by creating themes to describe the patterns that emerged among the students, teacher, and researcher's responses and reflections during the observation phase. This combination of methodologies achieved the mixed-methods research objectives of the study and enabled the exploration of both the students' experiential responses to vocabulary instruction and the effectiveness of the instructional media used (Creswell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014).

Thus far, constructed this way, the framework could incorporate all the necessary components to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of media on the vocabulary acquisition of junior high school students. By integrating CAR cycles alongside separate quantitative and qualitative data collection methods through triangulation, the research aimed to achieve a more thorough understanding of the impact of modern teaching media on students' motivation, attitudes, and vocabulary learning and acquisition processes, alongside the quantitative aspects of learning achievements.

Data verification and trustworthiness were ensured through triangulation of multiple data sources, including test results, observational records, and student feedback, to cross-validate findings and minimize bias. Member checking was applied by sharing preliminary interpretations with the classroom teacher to confirm accuracy and authenticity of the observations. Peer debriefing was conducted with fellow researchers to examine the consistency of coding and interpretation, enhancing credibility. To maintain dependability and confirmability, an audit trail of research procedures, decisions, and raw data was kept, allowing for transparency in the analytical process. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of the research context, instructional interventions, and classroom dynamics, enabling readers to judge the applicability of the findings to similar educational settings. Through these combined approaches, the methodology ensured that both quantitative and qualitative findings were valid, reliable, and reflective of the actual learning environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study aimed to explore the use of multimedia instruction in mitigating the vocabulary deficiency of learners' in the English language. The integration of media instruction, specifically English songs, was done in two cycles of classroom action research. The subjects of this study were 26 ninth-grade students from Markus Middle School in Medan. The results of vocabulary tests and class observation during the two cycles showed that there was improvement not only in students' vocabulary proficiency, but also in their participation in class activities.

1. Vocabulary Achievement Improvement

The students' vocabulary development was evaluated through diagnostic tests and post-tests conducted during two action cycles. Table 1 summarizes the progression in students' vocabulary scores.

Table 1. Students' Vocabulary Scores Across Research Cycles

Test Type	Total Score	Mean Score (%)	Improvement (%)
Diagnostic Test	80	30.76%	-
Cycle I Post-Test	106	40.76%	10%
Cycle II Post-Test	158	60.76%	20%

The application of enhanced media types of teaching methods applied within the second cycle, such as personal vocabulary storytelling, interactive vocabulary games, and repeated listening, are grounded within the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which emphasize learner interaction and engagement (Harmer, 2007). As a result of the second cycle these students averaged 60.76%, showing a holistic improvement of 30% from the pre-test performed in the first cycle. This improvement also indicates performance, instructional media and context are significant in aiding vocabulary development.

The second cycle data shows an improvement trend and the students showed a improvement in vocabulary, indicating a gradual and steady. 30% improvement in overall diagnostic performance, building upon the previous cycle's 10% improvement.

2. Students' Engagement and Classroom Participation

Observational data and field notes highlighted a notable increase in students' participation during learning activities. Table 2 summarizes behavioral indicators observed during both cycles.

Table 2. Student Participation and Engagement Indicators

Engagement Indicator	Cycle I Observation	Cycle II Observation

Active response to vocabulary prompts	Moderate (50%)	High (85%)
Willingness to sing along and repeat words	Low (35%)	High (80%)
Group interaction and peer support	Moderate (55%)	High (87%)
Group interaction and peer support	Low (35%)	High (80%)
Enthusiasm in vocabulary games	Low to Moderate	High

3. Student Perception Toward Instructional Media

Student perceptions were measured through a post-cycle questionnaire consisting of both Likert-scale and open-ended items. The results are summarized below:

Figure 1. Student Perception of Instructional Media Use
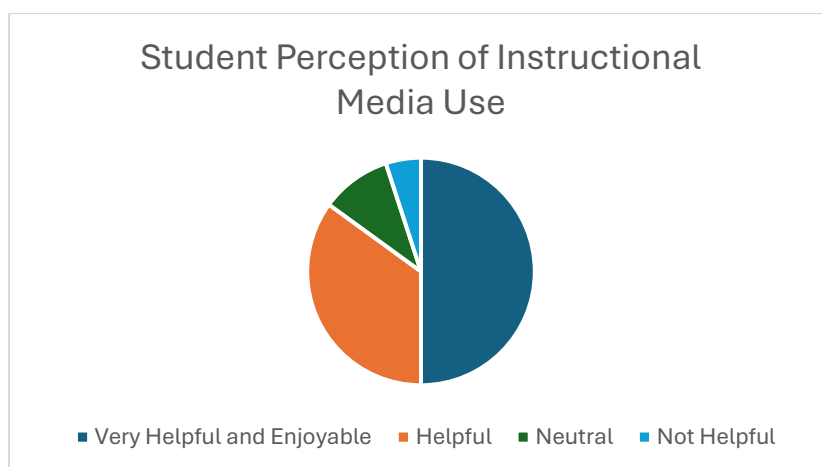
Qualitative responses included statements such as:

1. "I like learning with songs because I remember words easily."
2. "Games made it fun, not boring like before."
3. "Sometimes I need to see the word before I understand the meaning."

Discussion

The notable improvement in vocabulary achievement indicates that the use of instructional media, particularly English songs, integrates student learning outcomes effectively. The use of auditory media, exemplified by the song "I Have a Dream", not only provided opportunities for

authentic language exposure but also enabled the smooth internalization of vocabulary through the use of repetition, rhythm, and melody. Elley (1989) argued that stories or songs meaningfully contextualize vocabulary, which aids in retention. Furthermore, the emphasis on vocabulary learning within a certain context is supported by Nation and Meara (2002) who explained contextualized exposure to a target word enhances the learner's vocabulary. The improvement from Cycle I to Cycle II results indicates the addition of word games and contextual tasks in Cycle II media catered to the learners and supported lexical development.

The notable rise in engagement in Cycle II indicates the motivational effects of the media-centered learning approach. Students participated more actively in the lessons when vocabulary was taught with interactive games and songs. This is in line with Krashen's (2009) Affective Filter Hypothesis which states that enjoyable and low-stress environments aid in the acquisition of a second language. Furthermore, conducting class activities in which students sing and act out the meanings of words or play vocabulary-related games corresponds with the CLT which emphasizes interaction as a basic component of language learning (Harmer, 2007). Such activities provide the learners with chances to interact meaningfully and, because anxiety is minimized, learners are able to freely and eagerly employ new vocabulary.

The majority of the students about 50%, responded well to the instructional media used in class. These responses indicate that students are more engaged and self-assured when they receive stimulating input and when vocabulary is taught meaningfully. While some students did express that they needed visual aid for vocabulary taught in class, this, as Sari and Putra (2021) suggest, calls to attention the need for scaffolding strategies like pre-teaching vocabulary and providing visuals, and framing for lower-level learners. The self-paced approach to the materials and content is also in line with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) of the Zone of Proximal Development, which highlights the impact of guided interaction on independent performance. The collaborative and interactive activities also promoted peer teaching, which enhanced the students' vocabulary retention and confidence in using the language.

CONCLUSION

This research focused on the effectiveness of teaching aids in resolving the problem of limited vocabulary among students in English language skills at Markus Middle School located in Medan. Through two cycles of Classroom Action Research, the use of media—specifically English songs and vocabulary games—was effective in improving students' vocabulary knowledge. Quantitative data indicated marked improvement in students' test scores, increasing from 30.76% in the diagnostic test to 60.76% in Cycle II. In addition, students reported and were observed to show improved engagement with the lesson, better pronunciation, greater enthusiasm for vocabulary tasks, and more overall interaction with the learning activities.

The results support the importance of using instructional media in teaching vocabulary to students. Students' emotional and intellectual engagement is enhanced when they are provided with relevant, meaningful, and well-presented vocabulary stimulation. The success of the intervention strategies is consistent with language acquisition theories such as Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which highlight the importance of motivation, interaction, and learner-centered activities for effective language acquisition. Nevertheless, obstacles still remain for the learners with lower proficiency levels, particularly for those who do not understand the vocabulary due to lack of scaffolding. Therefore, teaching aids must be combined with systematic scaffolding including visual aids, demonstration, and structured learner participation to better support students of all proficiency levels.

This study suggests that EFL teachers incorporate multimedia such as visuals, songs, and games into their vocabulary lessons to enhance engagement and retention. We propose that teacher training programs incorporate media integration as a critical instructional approach to strengthen best practice teaching. Future investigations should consider a larger sample size across multiple schools to improve the generalizability of the findings. In addition, media used for instruction could be the focus of longitudinal studies to determine the long-term impact on vocabulary retention. The role of digital and mobile applications, as well as task-based media, in teaching vocabulary for EFL classes is another area of study that could reveal scalable instruction for EFL teaching.

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