



## Exploring Teachers' Strategies and Challenges in Enhancing Vocabulary Skills of Elementary School Students

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore: 1) vocabulary teaching strategies used by English teachers in elementary schools; 2) the implementation of vocabulary teaching strategies in classroom practices and activities; 3) the challenges faced by teachers in improving students' vocabulary skills. This study used a descriptive qualitative design with data collection through a questionnaire consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions administered to six elementary school teachers. The participants of this study were six elementary school English teachers. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on their experience in teaching English at the elementary school level. The selection of participants was intended to obtain relevant and context-specific insights into vocabulary teaching practices in elementary school classrooms. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns related to teachers' teaching practices, challenges, and solutions. The results of the study: 1) teachers tend to use interactive and visual-based strategies, namely flashcards, pictures, videos, and game-based activities to support vocabulary learning; 2) in teaching practices, vocabulary is introduced through visual representations and reinforced through repetition and practice; 3) teachers face several challenges, particularly limited exposure to English outside the classroom and constraints on students' learning motivation and attention. To address student motivational challenges, teachers employ various adaptive strategies, including creating a fun learning environment and employing a variety of methods. This research illustrates real-world classroom practices and emphasizes the importance of teacher creativity in vocabulary learning. Future research should involve more participants to obtain more comprehensive findings.

*Keywords: exploring teachers' strategies, challenges, enhancing vocabulary skill*

## Eksplorasi Strategi dan Tantangan Guru dalam Meningkatkan Keterampilan Kosakata Siswa Sekolah Dasar

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi: 1) strategi pengajaran kosakata yang digunakan oleh guru bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar; 2) implementasi strategi pengajaran kosakata dalam praktik dan aktivitas di kelas; 3) tantangan yang dihadapi guru dalam meningkatkan kemampuan kosakata siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui kuesioner yang terdiri dari pertanyaan tertutup dan terbuka yang diberikan kepada enam guru Sekolah Dasar. Partisipan penelitian ini adalah enam guru bahasa Inggris Sekolah Dasar. Mereka dipilih menggunakan teknik pengambilan sampel bertujuan, berdasarkan pengalaman mereka dalam mengajar bahasa Inggris di tingkat sekolah dasar. Pemilihan peserta dimaksudkan untuk memperoleh wawasan yang relevan dan spesifik konteks mengenai praktik pengajaran kosakata di kelas sekolah dasar. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola utama terkait praktik pengajaran, tantangan, dan solusi yang dilakukan guru. Hasil penelitian: 1) guru cenderung menggunakan strategi berbasis interaktif dan visual yakni flashcard, gambar, video, serta aktivitas berbasis permainan untuk mendukung pembelajaran kosakata; 2) dalam praktik pembelajaran, kosakata diperkenalkan melalui representasi visual dan diperkuat melalui pengulangan serta latihan; 3) guru menghadapi beberapa tantangan, terutama keterbatasan paparan bahasa Inggris siswa di luar kelas dan kendala motivasi belajar siswa dan perhatian. Untuk mengatasi kendala motivasi belajar siswa, guru menerapkan berbagai strategi adaptif yakni menciptakan suasana belajar yang menyenangkan dan menggunakan metode yang bervariasi. Penelitian ini menggambarkan bahwapraktik nyata di kelas serta menekankan pentingnya kreativitas guru dalam pembelajaran kosakata. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan melibatkan lebih banyak partisipan untuk memperoleh temuan yang lebih komprehensif.

*Kata kunci: pengajaran kosakata, pembelajaran muda, strategi pembelajaran, sekolah dasar, pengajaran bahasa Inggris*

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## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary plays a fundamental role in language learning, particularly for young learners in elementary school. It serves as the foundation for developing other language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students may experience difficulties in understanding and expressing meaning effectively (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2000). Therefore, enhancing students' vocabulary skills has become one of the primary goals in English language teaching at the elementary level.

In classroom practice, teaching vocabulary to young learners requires more than simply introducing new words. Teachers are expected to employ appropriate strategies that align with students' cognitive development and learning characteristics. Young learners tend to have shorter attention spans and respond better to engaging, interactive, and visually supported learning activities (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2017). As a result, the use of strategies such as games, visual aids, and interactive tasks is often emphasized in vocabulary instruction.

However, despite the availability of various teaching strategies, many teachers still face challenges in implementing effective vocabulary instruction. One common issue is students' limited exposure to English outside the classroom, which restricts opportunities for practice and reinforcement (Webb & Nation, 2017; Razak, 2021). In addition, differences in students' abilities, motivation, and classroom engagement can further complicate the teaching and learning process.

Previous studies have discussed various techniques and approaches for teaching vocabulary to young learners. Research has shown that interactive and student-centered strategies, such as games and multimedia-based learning, can improve students' vocabulary acquisition (Shabiralyani et al., 2015; Huyen & Nga, 2020). However, many studies tend to focus on the effectiveness of specific methods rather than exploring teachers' actual classroom practices and the challenges they encounter.

Based on this gap, this study aims to explore how elementary school English teachers implement strategies to enhance students' vocabulary skills. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What vocabulary teaching strategies are used by elementary school English teachers?
- 2) How are these strategies implemented in classroom practices and activities?
- 3) What challenges do teachers face in enhancing students' vocabulary skills?

Accordingly, the purposes of this study are to identify the vocabulary teaching strategies used by elementary school English teachers, to examine how these strategies are implemented in classroom practices and activities, and to investigate the challenges encountered by teachers in enhancing students' vocabulary skills.

By examining teachers' experiences and practices, this study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of vocabulary instruction at the elementary level. The findings may also provide practical insights for teachers in designing more effective and engaging vocabulary learning activities.

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language proficiency, as it enables learners to understand and convey meaning effectively (Nation, 2013; Alqahtani, 2019). In the context of English as a foreign language, vocabulary knowledge is considered a key factor influencing learners' ability to develop other language skills (Schmitt, 2000). For young learners, vocabulary acquisition is particularly important because it serves as the basis for early language development (Cameron, 2001).

Young learners typically learn vocabulary more effectively when it is presented in meaningful and contextualized ways. Rather than memorizing isolated words, students benefit from exposure to vocabulary through activities that connect language with real-life situations (Pinter, 2017). Therefore, vocabulary teaching should involve not only the



introduction of new words but also opportunities for practice and use in context.

Teaching vocabulary to elementary school students requires the use of strategies that are appropriate for their developmental stage. Young learners generally prefer activities that are engaging, interactive, and visually supported (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2017). As a result, teachers often employ strategies such as the use of visual aids, games, and songs to facilitate vocabulary learning.

Visual aids, including pictures, flashcards, and videos, help learners associate words with meanings more easily. These tools provide concrete representations that support comprehension (Shabiralyani et al., 2015). In addition, game-based activities are widely recognized for their ability to increase motivation and participation. Games create a fun learning environment where students can practice vocabulary in a less stressful way. Songs and repetitive activities also play an important role in vocabulary learning. Repetition helps reinforce memory, allowing students to retain new words more effectively (Webb & Nation, 2017). When combined with rhythm and music, repetition becomes more enjoyable and meaningful for young learners.

Despite the availability of various teaching strategies, vocabulary instruction in elementary classrooms is often associated with several challenges. One of the most common issues is the limited exposure to English outside the classroom, particularly in foreign language contexts. Without sufficient opportunities to use the language in daily life, students may struggle to retain and apply newly learned vocabulary (Webb & Nation, 2017). Another challenge is related to students' motivation and attention. Young learners can easily lose interest if the learning activities are not engaging enough (Pinter, 2017). Additionally, differences in students' abilities and learning pace may create difficulties for teachers in managing classroom instruction effectively.

These challenges highlight the importance of teacher creativity and adaptability in designing and

implementing vocabulary teaching strategies (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Teachers are required to continuously adjust their approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of vocabulary teaching, particularly focusing on the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies. Research has shown that interactive and student-centered approaches, such as games and multimedia-based learning, can significantly improve students' vocabulary acquisition (Shabiralyani et al., 2015). Other studies have emphasized the role of repetition and contextual learning in supporting long-term retention (Webb & Nation, 2017). In addition, the use of visual aids and multimodal input has been found to facilitate learners' understanding and recall of vocabulary, particularly among young learners (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2017).

However, many of these studies tend to concentrate on experimental or intervention-based approaches, with less attention given to teachers' actual classroom practices. There is still a need for research that examines how teachers implement vocabulary teaching strategies in real classroom settings, including the challenges they face and the solutions they apply.

## METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore how elementary school English teachers implement strategies to enhance students' vocabulary skills. The study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of teachers' practices, rather than to generalize findings to a larger population.

The participants of this study were six elementary school English teachers. They were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on their experience in teaching English at the elementary level. The selection of participants was intended to obtain relevant and context-specific insights into vocabulary teaching practices in primary classrooms.

The data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of both close-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions were designed to identify the types of vocabulary teaching strategies commonly used by teachers, while the open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate on their classroom practices, challenges, and solutions in teaching vocabulary. The use of open-ended questions enabled the researchers to capture more detailed and reflective responses, making it possible to gain deeper insights into the participants' teaching experiences.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The responses from the open-ended questions were carefully reviewed and categorized into several themes, such as vocabulary teaching strategies, classroom practices, challenges, and solutions. Similar responses were grouped together to identify recurring patterns across participants. In addition, the close-ended responses were analyzed descriptively to support the qualitative findings. The results were then interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of how teachers implement vocabulary teaching strategies in elementary school classrooms.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher carefully reviewed and interpreted the responses to maintain consistency in identifying themes. The combination of close-ended and open-ended questions also allowed for data triangulation, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

## RESULT

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of the questionnaire responses from six elementary school English teachers. The findings are organized into several key themes, including vocabulary teaching strategies, classroom practices, and challenges.

### 1. Vocabulary Teaching Strategies

The findings show that teachers employ a variety of strategies to enhance students' vocabulary skills, with a strong emphasis on

interactive and visual-based approaches. All participants reported using visual aids such as flashcards, pictures, and videos when introducing new vocabulary.

In addition, teachers frequently use game-based activities to engage students during the learning process. Songs and simple classroom activities are also used to support vocabulary learning.

### 2. Classroom Practices

In classroom implementation, teachers typically introduce new vocabulary through visual representation, followed by pronunciation practice and simple usage in sentences.

The teachers reported selecting vocabulary based on curriculum requirements as well as students' needs and levels. To support vocabulary retention, teachers use repetition, quizzes, and practice activities. Repetition was identified as one of the most frequently used techniques in helping students remember new words.

### 3. Challenges in Teaching Vocabulary

The findings also reveal several challenges faced by teachers in enhancing students' vocabulary skills. One major challenge is students' limited exposure to English outside the classroom. All participants reported that students rarely encounter English in their daily lives.

Another challenge is related to students' lack of focus and motivation during the learning process. Teachers noted that some students quickly lose interest, particularly when learning activities are not sufficiently engaging.

In addition, differences in students' abilities were reported as a factor that affects classroom management and the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that elementary school English teachers predominantly employ interactive and visual-based strategies, such as flashcards, pictures, videos, and game-



based activities, in teaching vocabulary. From one perspective, these strategies are considered effective in supporting young learners' vocabulary development, as they align with the characteristics of children who benefit from engaging and multimodal learning environments (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2017). The use of visual aids, in particular, helps learners associate words with concrete meanings, thereby facilitating comprehension (Shabiralyani et al., 2015). This is also consistent with studies highlighting the effectiveness of game-based learning (Huyen & Nga, 2020; Sari & Aminatun, 2021).

However, from another perspective, the effectiveness of these strategies may be limited by external factors, particularly students' lack of exposure to English outside the classroom. Although teachers apply engaging techniques during instruction, students may not have sufficient opportunities to practice and reinforce their vocabulary in real-life contexts. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that limited exposure can hinder vocabulary retention and long-term acquisition (Webb & Nation, 2017). Therefore, the success of vocabulary teaching strategies cannot be viewed solely from classroom practices, but also from the broader learning environment.

In terms of classroom practices, the use of repetition and practice activities reflects an understanding of the importance of repeated exposure in vocabulary learning. On the one hand, repetition is widely recognized as an effective technique for strengthening memory and retention (Webb & Nation, 2017). On the other hand, excessive reliance on repetition without variation may reduce student engagement, particularly among young learners who require dynamic and stimulating activities (Pinter, 2017). This suggests that while repetition is necessary, it should be combined with varied and interactive techniques to maintain students' interest.

The challenges identified in this study, such as students' low motivation and differences in ability, further highlight the complexity of

vocabulary instruction in elementary classrooms. These findings support the view that teaching is not only about applying strategies but also about adapting to diverse student needs (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Teachers' efforts to create a fun and engaging learning atmosphere demonstrate their role as facilitators who actively respond to classroom challenges.

This study also has several strengths. Despite involving a small number of participants, the use of open-ended questionnaire responses allowed for in-depth insights into teachers' actual classroom practices. The combination of close-ended and open-ended questions provided both structured and descriptive data, which enhanced the richness of the analysis. Compared to some previous studies that focus mainly on experimental outcomes, this study offers a more contextualized understanding of how vocabulary teaching strategies are implemented in real classroom settings.

However, this study is not without limitations. The small number of participants limits the generalizability of the findings, and the reliance on self-reported data may affect the depth and objectivity of the analysis. In addition, the study focuses on a limited number of variables, primarily teaching strategies and challenges, without examining other factors such as students' learning outcomes or classroom observations. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a larger sample size and incorporate multiple data collection methods to provide more comprehensive and analytically robust findings.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored how elementary school English teachers implement strategies to enhance students' vocabulary skills. The findings indicate that teachers predominantly use interactive and visual-based strategies, such as flashcards, pictures, videos, and game-based activities, to support vocabulary learning. These strategies are considered effective in engaging young learners and facilitating their understanding of new words. In terms of classroom practices, teachers tend to

introduce vocabulary through visual representation and reinforce learning through repetition, practice activities, and simple assessments. The selection of vocabulary is generally based on both curriculum requirements and students' needs, indicating that teachers attempt to balance instructional goals with classroom realities.

However, the study also reveals several challenges faced by teachers, particularly students' limited exposure to English outside the classroom, as well as issues related to motivation and attention. These challenges affect students' ability to retain and use vocabulary effectively. To address these issues, teachers adopt various adaptive strategies, including creating a more engaging learning environment and applying diverse teaching techniques.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of teacher creativity and adaptability in vocabulary instruction. Despite existing limitations, teachers play a significant role in facilitating students' vocabulary development through the use of appropriate and engaging strategies.

It is important to note that this study is limited by the small number of participants, which may not represent broader teaching contexts. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants and explore vocabulary teaching practices in different educational settings.

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