

Students Vocabulary Mastery and Their Reading Comprehension at the Selected Private Junior High School in Airmadidi

Ate Gueen Simanungkalit^{*1}, Jenita E. Tombeng²

^{1,2}Faculty of Education, Universitas Klabat, Manado, Indonesia

e-mail: ^{1*}agsimanungkalit@unklab.ac.id

Abstract

This study aimed to assess the extent of students' command of vocabulary and their level of reading comprehension among 8th-grade students in a selected private junior high school. It also sought to determine whether a significant correlation existed between students' vocabulary mastery and their reading comprehension. The research followed a quantitative approach, employing descriptive and correlational methods. The study included a sample of 90 students selected through purposive sampling. Two tests were employed as research instruments, one assessing vocabulary mastery and the other measuring reading comprehension. Mean Score and Pearson Correlation Coefficient were used for data analysis. The findings of this study revealed the following: (a) Students exhibited a very low level of vocabulary mastery, suggesting a lack of proficiency in vocabulary; (b) The level of reading comprehension among students was also notably low, indicating a limited understanding of their reading material; (c) A significant relationship was identified between students' vocabulary mastery and their reading comprehension. This implies that a higher level of vocabulary mastery corresponds to improved reading comprehension. However, the correlation was observed to be weak, suggesting the possibility of other influential factors impacting reading comprehension.

Keywords—vocabulary mastery, reading comprehension, junior high school

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai sejauh mana penguasaan kosakata siswa dan tingkat pemahaman membaca mereka di antara siswa kelas 8 di sekolah menengah pertama swasta terpilih. Penelitian ini juga berupaya untuk menentukan apakah ada korelasi signifikan antara penguasaan kosa kata siswa dan pemahaman bacaan mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif dan korelasional. Penelitian ini melibatkan sampel sebanyak 90 siswa yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Dua tes digunakan sebagai instrumen penelitian, satu tes menilai penguasaan kosakata dan tes lainnya mengukur pemahaman membaca. Skor Rata-rata dan Koefisien Korelasi Pearson digunakan untuk analisis data. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan hal-hal berikut: (a) Siswa menunjukkan tingkat penguasaan kosa kata yang sangat rendah, yang menunjukkan kurangnya kemahiran dalam kosa kata; (b) Tingkat pemahaman membaca siswa juga sangat rendah, yang menunjukkan terbatasnya pemahaman terhadap materi bacaan mereka; (c) Terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara penguasaan kosakata siswa dan pemahaman bacaan mereka. Hal ini menyiratkan bahwa tingkat penguasaan kosa kata yang lebih tinggi berhubungan dengan peningkatan pemahaman membaca. Namun, korelasinya terlihat lemah, menunjukkan kemungkinan adanya faktor-faktor lain yang mempengaruhi pemahaman bacaan.

Kata kunci—penguasaan kosakata, pemahaman membaca, sekolah menengah pertama.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, a significant number of individuals use the English language in various settings such as schools, workplaces, and daily life. English, being recognized as an international language, is extensively utilized worldwide. Proficiency in English involves honing four essential skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, mastering English can be challenging, especially for non-native speakers. Each word encountered—heard, read, written, or spoken—is part of one's vocabulary. The ability to comprehend written text is fundamental to academic success and lifelong learning (Beck & Mckeown, 2014). Reading comprehension, the process of deriving meaning and understanding from written language, hinges on various cognitive and linguistic components. Among these, vocabulary mastery emerges as a critical determinant, playing a pivotal role in shaping an individual's comprehension abilities.

In the world of education, there are few things as important and life-changing as getting better at words and understanding what you read (Nagy & Scott, 2000). Being good at these things not only helps you do well in school but also makes you better at learning, thinking, and talking to others (Perfetti, 2007). The way words and understanding what you read work together is like a complicated dance. Having a lot of words in your brain is like having a special tool that helps you open up tricky books and stories. When you go through your school years, being able to grab onto the meaning in more and more complicated reading materials becomes really important (Beck, et al., 2013).

Ulfatussarifah (2017) emphasized that vocabulary in any language encompasses words that contribute to conveying information, meaning, form, and contextual usage in communication. This underlines the importance of vocabulary in language, particularly in English. Aprilia (2019) further supports this by highlighting that language is not merely about words; it also encompasses concepts. Thus, a rich vocabulary allows for a broader range of concepts, enhancing the capacity to articulate ideas. In the context of reading, vocabulary proves valuable as reading inherently involves a group of words. Ali (2010) also emphasized the significance of vocabulary mastery in reading activities, establishing a clear link between vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension.

Fahriany (2015) explains that comprehension involves deriving meaning from text, a process that utilizes the reader's pre-knowledge (schemata) to interpret the text and construct meaning. Among experts in reading, there is consensus that schema theory offers a reasonable explanation of how humans process information. Schemata, the plural form of schema, are viewed as fundamental units in cognition. Readers' prior knowledge concerning their understanding of the world in the context of reading holds comparable importance to the printed words within the text. Additionally, Perfetti and Stafura (2015) argued that the greater the non-visual information a reader possesses, the less reliant they are on visual information. In the realm of teaching and learning, educators are encouraged to employ diverse strategies that cater to the varying pre-existing knowledge and schema of students, ultimately optimizing their learning experience.

Reading is intricately linked to vocabulary development. As noted by Mikulecky and Jeffries, as cited in Bishry (2018), engaging in reading can significantly enhance one's English vocabulary. Consequently, when students delve into reading materials, they inevitably encounter a diverse array of words, which collectively constitute their vocabulary. Septiana and Hanafi (2022) further underscore the importance of mastering vocabulary, emphasizing its role in enhancing reading comprehension. Proficiency in vocabulary equips students with the ability to decipher words within a text, particularly in the context of English.

However, Sudirman's research (2020) presents a contrasting viewpoint, asserting that without a firm grasp of the meanings of most words, students may struggle to comprehend the text effectively. This viewpoint is corroborated by Aprilia (2019), who highlights the challenges some students, especially in Indonesia, face regarding reading

comprehension. These difficulties compound the existing issues related to student vocabulary and their ability to comprehend written texts.

The study by Carlo et al. (2004) investigates the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in adolescents. It highlights the importance of vocabulary development for enhancing comprehension skills. They found that differences in reading performance between Anglo and Latino children are closely tied to disparities in vocabulary knowledge. An intervention was developed to amplify the academic vocabulary of fifth-grade students, involving instruction on the meanings of pertinent words and strategies to deduce meanings from various sources. Key principles guiding the intervention included encountering new words in meaningful text, providing Spanish access for native speakers, exposing words in diverse contexts, and recognizing the multifaceted nature of word knowledge. Results demonstrated that in the intervention group there was significant growth in vocabulary knowledge, depth of understanding, awareness of multiple meanings, and reading comprehension. Swanson, et al. (2019) also uncovered similar results where intervention, namely read-aloud such as dialog reading, repeated reading of stories, and computer assisted story, showed significant and positive effects on the students to overcome reading comprehension difficulties.

Ali's (2010) research focused on second-semester students majoring in English Education at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. His findings unveiled a positive correlation between vocabulary proficiency and reading comprehension, suggesting that a richer lexicon enhances students' ability to comprehend written texts. Achmad (2022) during observations at SMA Negeri 13 Makassar, observes that many students are unfamiliar with the vocabulary words presented in their reading materials, impeding their comprehension of the text. Nurdini and Marlina (2018) report that students frequently encounter unfamiliar vocabulary words while reading.

Lusianah's research (2017) conducted in SMP and SMA Patra Mandiri Palembang reveals a prevalent deficit in vocabulary mastery among students, leading to struggles in understanding the words in their reading texts. Bishry's findings (2018) echo these concerns, noting students' inadequate vocabulary mastery and their consequent difficulties in comprehending reading materials. Hashemi's study (2021) further underscores the notion that insufficient vocabulary hampers students' comprehension of reading texts. Tamboy (2020) embarked on an investigation into vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension among students at Tenera PTPN IV Private Middle School. The outcomes of this research shed light on a significant correlation, underscoring that students equipped with a more extensive vocabulary tend to grasp and interpret texts with greater ease.

In contrast, Bishry (2018) ventured into an exploration involving students at Riau College of Economics in the Banking and Accounting Finance Study Program. Surprisingly, Bishry's findings diverged from the consensus, revealing an absence of a significant correlation between vocabulary mastery and students' reading proficiency. This intriguing discovery challenges the conventional notion that vocabulary is an exclusive determinant of reading comprehension and hints at the potential influence of other factors in this complex relationship. These studies collectively depict the nuanced and context-dependent nature of the link between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension.

The ability to comprehend written text is fundamental to academic success and lifelong learning. Reading comprehension, the process of deriving meaning and understanding from written language, hinges on various cognitive and linguistic components. Among these, vocabulary mastery emerges as a critical determinant, playing a pivotal role in shaping an individual's comprehension abilities.

Understanding how an individual's command of vocabulary influences their comprehension capabilities is essential for educators, researchers, and policymakers alike. A rich vocabulary not only enhances the comprehension of texts but also empowers individuals to articulate their thoughts effectively and communicate proficiently (Beck &

McKeown, 1985). Exploring the interplay between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension skill involves examining how a comprehensive vocabulary repertoire contributes to enhanced comprehension strategies, inferencing abilities, and overall reading proficiency (Perfetti & Stafura, 2015). Additionally, it necessitates an exploration of methodologies and instructional approaches that can effectively bolster vocabulary acquisition and consequently improve reading comprehension outcomes (Marzano & Pickering, 2005; Stahl & Nagy, 2006).

Through a systematic investigation into this relationship, this study aims to shed light on the importance of vocabulary mastery in the realm of reading comprehension, providing valuable insights for educational practices, curriculum design, and interventions aimed at bolstering the language and literacy skills of learners across diverse academic settings (Shanahan, 2005). Understanding how vocabulary and comprehension are interconnected is crucial for optimizing reading instruction and fostering improved reading comprehension abilities among students.

Recognizing that language proficiency is a multifaceted endeavor, this research endeavor seeks to shed light on the pivotal role played by educators, curriculum design, parental involvement, and supplementary programs in shaping the vocabulary and reading comprehension landscape (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). This study delves into the intricate relationship between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension skill. The nexus between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension forms an integral component of English language acquisition. Nevertheless, the researcher's exploration of available references reveals several challenges pertaining to students' vocabulary mastery and their reading comprehension. Hence, the researcher was motivated to undertake a study investigating the proficiency of students in vocabulary and their reading comprehension. This research was carried out among 8th-grade students enrolled in a specific private junior high school in Airmadidi. The primary objective was to assess the students' vocabulary mastery and their level of reading comprehension and to ascertain the existence of a significant correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and their reading comprehension skills.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing tests to collect data from a specific sample. Quantitative research aims to examine populations or samples by using research instruments and statistical analysis to test hypotheses. Additionally, the study employed a descriptive technique to understand and interpret human behavior within social contexts, gathering data from various sources. The correlation technique was also utilized to analyze the relationship between student vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension.

Respondents

In this study, the researcher purposively selected grade 8 students who had enrolled in the odd semester of the 2022/2023 school year at a specific school in Airmadidi. The total population consisted of 96 students, distributed across three classes: 32 in grade 8A, 33 in grade 8B, and 31 in grade 8D. However, during the test distribution, some students were absent. Consequently, the number of respondents from each grade was adjusted to 30 students for grade 8A, 32 students for grade 8B, and 28 students for grade 8C. Therefore, the total number of respondents for the study amounted to 90 students.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized in this study consisted of two tests: vocabulary mastery test and reading comprehension test, which were specifically designed for this research. The

creation of these tests was guided by input from subject teachers and the content of the students' textbooks. Each test was divided into two sections. The initial section served as a practice test, allowing students to familiarize themselves with the question format. The practice test aimed to assess how students could respond to each question effectively, thus facilitating their performance in the subsequent section, which constituted the final test. Both sections of the test encompassed assessments of vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension.

For the vocabulary mastery test, the first two items required students to identify and write down the word classes (noun, verb, adjective) present in the reading text. Additionally, students were asked to provide the meanings of these identified word classes. To assist students, a reference table with answers was provided. Each of the first two items carried a weight of 45 points, contributing to a maximum potential score of 90 points for the vocabulary mastery test.

The reading comprehension test, comprising items three to eight, encompassed various aspects of text comprehension. In the third item, students were tasked with summarizing their understanding of the text by writing relevant keywords. Question four entailed determining the text's main idea, while questions five to seven involved extracting specific information from the text. The final question, number eight, evaluated students' comprehension of vocabulary through a skimming strategy, where students were required to read the text in detail. Point values for these items varied: item three was worth five points, item four was valued at two points, items five and six were each worth two points, item seven was valued at one point, and item eight was worth one point. The total potential score for the reading comprehension test was 12 points.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Level of Student Vocabulary Mastery

The analysis of descriptive statistics for the vocabulary mastery test (See Table 1) uncovers a broad spectrum of scores. The highest score achieved was an impressive 42.00, while the lowest score recorded was a modest 2.0. The calculation showed that the average score for this vocabulary mastery test amounts to 16.86 out of a possible total of 90 points. Applying the Criterion References Evaluation method, it was determined that the outcome of the vocabulary mastery test stands at 19% (calculated as the Mean divided by the Possible Score), classifying it as "Very Low." Consequently, this assessment underscores the fact that the level of vocabulary mastery among students in grades 8A, 8B, and 8D at the selected Private Junior High School in Airmadidi, encompassing a total of 90 respondents, falls squarely within the "Very Low" category.

Utilizing a self-constructed scale adapted from Arikunto's (2013) Classification of Students Score, the result of 19% is unambiguously categorized as residing within the "Very Low" level. This indicates a significant deficiency in vocabulary mastery among the student population. Interestingly, this outcome sharply contrasts with a study conducted by Aprilia (2019), where the researcher identified a commendable "Good" level of vocabulary mastery among the students. Similarly, in a separate investigation by Bishry (2018), the findings revealed an even more commendable "Very Good" level of vocabulary mastery among the students.

Table 1. Description of Vocabulary Mastery

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Vocabulary Mastery	90	2.00	42.00	16.86

The Level of Student Reading Comprehension

The statistical analysis of the reading comprehension test, as presented in Table 4.2, demonstrates a range of scores, with the highest achieving 9.00 and the lowest scoring 1.00, while the maximum possible score was 12. The average score on the reading comprehension test was calculated to be 2.44. Employing the Criterion Reference Evaluation, the result of the reading comprehension test was determined to be 20% (Mean divided by Possible Score), categorizing it as "Very Low." Consequently, this assessment highlights that the level of reading comprehension among students from grade 8A, 8B, and 8D at the selected Private Junior High School in Airmadidi, involving a total of 90 respondents, falls within the "Very Low" category.

Utilizing a self-constructed scale adapted from Arikunto's (2013) Classification of Students Score, the 20% result was categorized as falling within the "Very Low" level. This suggests a significant challenge in terms of students' comprehension of the reading materials. Notably, this outcome diverges from a study conducted by Septiana and Hanafi (2022), where the researcher identified an "Average" level of reading comprehension among the students, indicating variability in comprehension levels among different student populations.

Table 2. Description of Reading Comprehension

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Vocabulary Mastery	90	1.00	9.00	2.44

Correlation between Student Vocabulary Mastery and Their Reading Comprehension

As depicted in Table 3, the significance value p recorded was .000, indicating its significance level was less than the significance level α ($p < .001$). Following the guidance of Amrhein, Nievergelt, and Ryoht (2017), when a p -value hovers just below .001 it is typically interpreted as providing grounds for rejecting the null hypothesis or accepting the alternative hypothesis. This suggests a meaningful correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and their reading comprehension levels, particularly among grade 8 students (A, B, and D) at the selected Private Junior High School in Airmadidi. Moreover, it's worth noting that the correlation observed was very strong and positive ($r = .528$). The results suggest that a higher score in vocabulary mastery significantly and positively corresponds with a higher score in reading comprehension. In simpler terms, the more proficient students are in vocabulary, the better they tend to comprehend their reading materials. These findings align with those of a study conducted by Tamboy (2020), which similarly found a correlation between vocabulary mastery and students' reading comprehension, emphasizing that students with a richer vocabulary found it easier to comprehend textual content.

Table 3. Correlation between Vocabulary Mastery and Reading Comprehension

		Reading Comprehension
Vocabulary Mastery	Pearson Correlation Coefficient r	.528**
	Significance Value P	.000

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the outcomes of this research, it became evident that the level of vocabulary mastery among students was categorized as "very low." This led to the conclusion that the students had not attained proficiency in vocabulary. Additionally, the analysis revealed that the level of reading comprehension among students was also categorized as "very low," indicating a deficiency in their ability to understand what they read. Consequently, it can be inferred that there exists a correlation between the vocabulary mastery of grade 8 students at the selected Private Junior High School in Airmadidi and their reading comprehension.

However, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations that surfaced during the instrument's implementation, such as time constraints during testing and potential challenges in understanding the test instructions. Despite these limitations, the research findings demonstrated a positive and statistically significant correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and their reading comprehension. In simpler terms, as students improve their vocabulary skills, their capacity to comprehend the reading materials also tends to increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's recommendations encompass a multi-faceted approach to enhancing vocabulary and reading comprehension. Firstly, the school should integrate comprehensive vocabulary improvement programs into the curriculum, emphasizing engaging activities and consistent exercises to promote word acquisition and contextual understanding. Secondly, teacher development through training sessions and workshops is vital, empowering educators with effective vocabulary teaching techniques to bolster students' reading comprehension. Additionally, English teachers should encourage diverse reading habits among students and identify those needing specialized support, offering remedial classes or tutoring.

Furthermore, continuous monitoring through vocabulary and reading comprehension assessments is advised to gauge progress and areas requiring attention. Cultivating independent reading habits within the school culture, supported by a well-stocked library catering to different proficiency levels, is essential. Additionally, involving parents in the learning process by emphasizing vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension benefits and encouraging their involvement at home is recommended. Lastly, further research is proposed to explore additional factors impacting reading comprehension, including long-term analysis and potential technology interventions, aiming to develop more comprehensive strategies for addressing these challenges.

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