Strategies in Teaching Vocabulary for the 8th-grade Students: A Case Study at SMP Dwijendra Mataram in Academic Year 2024/2025

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Abstract: This study aims to identify and describe the strategies used by the English teacher in teaching vocabulary to eighth-grade students at SMP Dwijendra Mataram in the 2024/2025 academic year. The research addresses challenges commonly found in vocabulary instruction, such as students' low motivation, lack of interest in reading, and difficulty memorizing new words. To overcome these issues, this study analyzes the effectiveness of combining multiple teaching strategies. A qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach was employed. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews involving one English teacher and nine eighth-grade students. The findings revealed that the teacher used a combination of three main strategies: (1) Formal Practice, involving structured activities like repetition, translation, and drilling; (2) Functional Practice, focusing on real-life contexts to enhance vocabulary use; and (3) Memorization Techniques, utilizing visual media such as YouTube videos and language-learning applications like Duolingo. These strategies significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery and increased their motivation and classroom engagement. This study offers practical implications for English teachers in similar educational contexts, suggesting that an integrated approach combining structured, contextual, and visual strategies can effectively support vocabulary acquisition and learner involvement.

Keywords: Strategy, Teaching Vocabulary, 8th-grade Students.

Introduction

English and Indonesian are unrelated, and many English terms differ from Indonesian ones. This difference often poses challenges for Indonesian learners in mastering English vocabulary. To succeed in learning a foreign language, students must master the four key skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading (Panggabean, 2015). Along with these skills, a firm grasp of English components such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar is essential for effective communication and comprehension.

Vocabulary is a part of language learning that needs to be developed by both native and non-native speakers before learning basic grammar and pronunciation. Therefore, vocabulary is a central element in language learning. As an element of language, it contributes to factors in English language teaching. Nunan (1991: 117) stated that acquiring an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use because, without an extensive vocabulary, we cannot use the structures and functions we may have learned for comprehensible communication. Vocabulary cannot be separated from the language because it is a part of the language. Therefore, vocabulary is essential

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in English language learning. As stated by Melani et al. (2018, p. 64), Vocabulary is the key aspect in language learning, and it becomes the basic foundation for the learners in learning English as foreign language. This reinforces the idea that vocabulary serves as the cornerstone of all language skills, and a strong vocabulary base is crucial for students to succeed in English language learning.

Richards and Renandya (2002:255) emphasize that vocabulary plays a fundamental role in supporting the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For students aiming to achieve language proficiency, a strong vocabulary foundation is crucial. Without enough vocabulary, it becomes challenging to develop these skills, construct meaningful sentences, or express thoughts clearly in English. Since vocabulary is an integral part of the language itself, it is essential in the process of learning English Aisyah et al. (2025).

Alqahtani (2025) One of the aims of teaching and learning English in Indonesia is that they can speak well, read well, convey ideas effectively, and understand books written in English. Moreover, learning English at school is expected to solve daily communication problems and continue studying to a higher level, enter college, or get a job. Therefore, learners teaching and learning English language subjects, especially vocabulary, must begin from the Elementary School level for young learners. It will help students understand and succeed in English more easily.

Teaching and learning English, especially vocabulary, starts in elementary school. However, some students are introduced to English as early as kindergarten or playgroup. Hornby (1974) The teacher should be creative in selecting the materials and able to stimulate the students' interest. Teachers must be creative in selecting materials and implementing strategies to engage students' interest in vocabulary acquisition. Since vocabulary is a core component of English, students must develop a substantial vocabulary foundation before mastering the four primary language skills Crystal (2003).

Mebe et al. (2023) Teaching English to students should be handled appropriately to be successful. It requires skill and dedicated teaching, particularly for middle school students in a critical language development stage. McCarthy (2002) English teachers must clearly understand how students think and learn to teach students effectively. This serves as a foundation for implementing effective teaching strategies.

Teaching vocabulary to 8th-grade junior high school students can be challenging. Hatch and Brown (1995) At this age, students often struggle with concentration and require special attention due to their unique developmental characteristics. In Indonesia, many English teachers still rely on traditional methods to teach vocabulary to teenagers Henriksen (1999).

Teachers should use a variety of techniques to teach vocabulary so that students remain engaged. Nurislam et al. (2023) Vocabulary is best learned when word meanings are shown through visuals, gestures, or real-life objects. One effective approach is to apply strategies from the grammar-translation method. Nunan (2003) outlines four vocabulary teaching strategies: meaning-focused input, deliberate learning, fluency-building activities, and meaning-focused output. Spencer and Guillaume (2006) suggests that teachers can design diverse activities that support vocabulary development. These sample activities can be integrated into second language instruction to boost vocabulary learning and overall language proficiency. Sarıoğlu, and Karatepe (2024) Strategies such as using semantic networks, mnemonics, and context clues have proven effective in teaching words and expressions.

Vocabulary is central to language learning, especially for 8th-grade students transitioning from basic to more advanced English skills. As Nunan (1991) states, "the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use," Without sufficient vocabulary, students will struggle to communicate effectively, even if they know grammar rules. It is crucial to teach vocabulary in meaningful and engaging ways Arslan (2024).

Schmitt (2019) Teaching English vocabulary at junior high school aims to enhance students' ability to read and understand texts, help them express their ideas fluently, and solve communication problems in daily life. This can be achieved through strategies that focus on interactive learning, such as using games, visual aids, and multimedia. According to Cameron (2001: 72), "words are important to develop children's skills and knowledge," making vocabulary a fundamental element of foreign language learning, especially at this academic level. 8th-grade students can gain confidence and prepare for higher education or future opportunities by building a strong vocabulary foundation Hanson and Padua (2011).

SMP Dwijendra Mataram was chosen as the location for the study for several reasons. First, the researcher has firsthand experience teaching and observing students during the four-month Kampus Mengajar program, which provided valuable insights into the challenges students and teachers face in learning and teaching vocabulary. The school operates under the Dharma Laksana Foundation, which also manages an orphanage, and many students hail from various regions outside Mataram. This diversity adds to the student

population's richness and presents an opportunity to develop inclusive teaching strategies tailored to students' social and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the variation in students' interests, foundational knowledge, and vocabulary retention allows them to analyze more adaptive and engaging teaching methods, ultimately improving their understanding and mastery of vocabulary Stahl (2005).

During the Kampus Mengajar program, the researcher observed several obstacles to learning at the school. Susanto (2017) Some students had low interest in reading, lacked basic knowledge of English, and struggled with memorization. One student, in particular, seemed bored during lessons and lacked interest in all subjects. However, when given a cell phone to help with assignments, the student showed a greater willingness to learn.

Webb and Nation (2017) A teacher gave vocabulary memorization tasks a week ago, but the student had not yet memorized the words as the deadline approached. When asked to learn, the student struggled and often forgot the words they should remember. Additionally, they frequently joked around while trying to memorize and lost focus. This behavior demonstrated that they were not interested in memorizing and preferred spending time on more enjoyable activities. The frequent boredom during lessons impacted the student's ability to understand and use English effectively, reducing their confidence in learning the language. Even though the task had been given in advance, boredom and a lack of motivation led to a lack of seriousness in completing it.

This research aims to explore and recommend effective strategies for teaching vocabulary that can address the specific needs of 8th-grade students at SMP Dwijendra Mataram. By identifying these strategies, the study hopes to improve students' English proficiency and overall interest in learning.

To support more effective vocabulary teaching, teachers have used many strategies in the classroom. According to Hanson & Padua (2011), vocabulary teaching strategies can be grouped into three main types:

a. Formal Practice Formal Practice focuses on systematic learning and structured repetition of vocabulary. This strategy aims for accurate reproduction and is often connected to formal instruction tasks such as loud repetition and bilingual dictionaries. It is commonly used in a traditional classroom where teachers provide direct instruction.
Characteristics:
- Encourages structured practice and repeated exposure to vocabulary.
- Uses instructional methods such as repetition drills, vocabulary lists, and dictionary exercises.
- It aims to improve pronunciation accuracy and word retention.
- Applied in a teacher-centered learning environment.

b. Functional Practice Functional Practice is a context-based approach where vocabulary is learned through exposure to real-life situations. This method does not require conscious memorization but immerses students in natural language use through media, social interactions, and contextual learning.
Characteristics:
- Emphasizes learning vocabulary in authentic contexts rather than through rote memorization.
- Encourages incidental learning by using meaningful exposure to language.
- Uses movies, songs, books, and social interaction as tools for vocabulary acquisition.
- It helps students understand words through associative meaning rather than direct translation.

c. Memorizing Memorizing strategies focus on enhancing vocabulary retention through visual and associative techniques. This approach helps students remember words more effectively by linking them to familiar images, concepts, or their first language.
Characteristics:
- Uses visual aids, mnemonic devices, and memory techniques to reinforce learning.
- Encourages association between new vocabulary and prior knowledge.
- It helps students recall words by linking them to images, key phrases, or categorized word groups.

Ramadhani & Mahmudah (2024) During the Kampus Mengajar program, the researcher observed several obstacles to learning at the school. Some students struggled with memorizing, had little interest in reading, and lacked fundamental English understanding. One student in particular didn't seem interested in any of the courses and appeared bored during class. However, the student demonstrated a higher enthusiasm to learn when provided with a cell phone to assist with tasks.

Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive design with a case study approach to explore vocabulary teaching strategies used by an English teacher at SMP

Dwijendra Mataram. According to Chuntala (2019), descriptive research aims to obtain accurate information about a particular phenomenon, Simons (2014) stated that a case study allows in-depth investigation of specific subjects.

This study's participants were one English teacher and nine 8th-grade students at SMP Dwijendra Mataram in the academic year 2024/2025. The students had varied levels of English proficiency, ranging from beginner to intermediate, and came from diverse social backgrounds. Several students lived in the school's affiliated orphanage under the Dharma Laksana Foundation, while others commuted from surrounding areas. This diversity provided a rich classroom context for evaluating vocabulary teaching strategies.

The data were collected through classroom observation and a semi-structured interview. Due to a two-week school break for a religious holiday, the observation was conducted during a single classroom meeting. The observation focused on how the teacher implemented vocabulary strategies and how the students responded during the English lesson. A follow-up semi-structured interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes, was then conducted with the English teacher to gain deeper insights into the rationale behind the chosen strategies.

Regarding research ethics, informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. The researcher explained the study's purpose, procedures, and benefits to the teacher and students. All personal data were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities. The collected data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

The data were analyzed using the qualitative method proposed by Miles and Huberman (in Asipi, 2022), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This approach allowed the researcher to provide a contextual and comprehensive understanding of the vocabulary strategies used and their impact on students' vocabulary development.

Result and Discussion

The findings and discussion are based on data obtained through classroom observations and interviews with the English teacher.

This section presents the study's results based on observation and interviews with English teacher.

The observation took place on Wednesday, April 16, 2025, during an English class for the 8th-grade students at SMP Dwijendra Mataram.

The following is a detailed explanation of the observation based on the teaching and learning activities. This explanation is organized according to each aspect observed during the classroom session, which aligns with the three categories of vocabulary teaching strategies proposed by Hanson & Padua (2011): formal practice, functional practice, and memorizing. These categories serve as the framework for analyzing how the teacher implemented different strategies in the classroom to support students' vocabulary development.

a. Formal Practice (Structured and Repetitive Learning)

Teacher's Role:

- Using repetition exercises

    The teacher asked the students to repeat the English sentences they used during attendance. This activity was done orally and together as a class to help students get used to hearing and pronouncing English sentences correctly.

- Ensuring students write and pronounce words correctly

    Students were instructed to take notes on essential points from the learning video, especially the formula for passive voice. Afterward, they were asked to read sentences aloud, and the teacher corrected any mispronunciations.

- Applying a teacher-centered approach

    The teacher explained the passive voice material directly to the class. Students listened attentively, and the teacher asked questions to check their understanding.

    Student Involvement:

- Participating in repetition exercises

    Students actively followed the teacher's instructions to repeat new words and sentences. Although a few students were shy, most joined in and participated well.

- Taking notes and memorizing word definitions

    While watching the video, students wrote down essential points such as the formula and sentence examples. They later used these notes for review and practice.

- Pronouncing and spelling new words correctly

    Each student was called by name and asked to say a sentence in English. The teacher provided

corrections when there were mistakes in pronunciation or sentence structure.

b. Functional Practice (Context-Based Learning)
Teacher's Role:
- Using real-life situations to teach vocabulary
The teacher related the lesson to everyday situations such as cooking, playing games, or home activities. This made it easier for students to understand the meaning and usage of vocabulary in a real context.
Student Involvement:
- Actively participating in discussions about vocabulary from real-world sources
Some students asked about the meaning of phrases or expressions they found on social media or in games. They seemed curious and eager to learn more.
- Feeling comfortable using vocabulary in real-life communication
Students were asked to create sentences based on their own daily experiences. For example, "I cook breakfast for my family" showed that they were starting to apply vocabulary in real-life contexts.

c. Memorizing (Associative & Visual Techniques)
Teacher's Role:
- Using flashcards, pictures, or other visual aids.
The teacher used a YouTube video that included text and visual explanations. This helped students remember the material better because they could see how the sentences were formed and used.

Based on the interview results, the teacher used a combination of strategies in teaching vocabulary: formal practice, functional practice, and memorization. Below are the strategies along with supporting statements from the interview:

a. Formal Practice
- The teacher used structured repetition activities, requiring students to translate texts and answer questions. She explained:
"Kalau misalkan ada soal teks dan kemudian ada pertanyaan di bawahnya itu… kita artikan sama… saya panggil satu siapa gitu untuk maju ke depan untuk baca dan saya dengerin mereka baca dan mereka artikan per kata."
- Students were also evaluated through written tests:

"Saya biasanya kasih mereka itu tes tulis untuk mengevaluasi mereka."

b. Functional Practice
- The teacher connected vocabulary learning with real-life contexts, particularly using attendance time as an opportunity for students to speak:
"Setiap absen itu biasanya saya minta anak-anak untuk menyebutkan kalimat… mereka harus menghafal vocabulary… karena teks yang dibaca kan itu-itu aja…"
- Spontaneous discussions were encouraged when students asked about idioms or expressions found online:
"Mereka nanya kayak frase, 'I feel blue' itu apa sih artinya, miss? Karena frase itu kan beda…"

c. Memorizing
- The teacher encouraged students to use the Duolingo app to practice vocabulary and grammar:
"Saya kasih aplikasi, ini aplikasi namanya Duolingo… bagus untuk grammar sama untuk pengucapan… anak-anak itu main hp dan belajar nambah vocabulary-nya dari situ."

Elmahdi & Hezam (2020) Based on the observation and interviews, several strategies were identified as being used by the teacher in teaching English vocabulary to the students. Additionally, this study highlighted some of the challenges encountered during the teaching and learning process and the efforts made by the teacher to overcome these challenges. A detailed explanation of these findings is presented in the following sub-sections.

a. Teacher Strategies Used in Teaching Vocabulary

The teacher applied various strategies to teach vocabulary, both directly and indirectly. The strategies included formal practice, functional practice, and memorization.

The teacher used a teacher-centered approach in the formal practice by explaining word meanings, sentence structures, and pronunciation. Students were asked to write down important words, especially during video sessions or while the teacher was explaining. Students also repeated the vocabulary aloud together, aiming to strengthen their memory of the words. The teacher explained meanings through direct translation so students could understand them in familiar contexts. This approach line with Silan (2024), who emphasized that systematic repetition and structured input are crucial in supporting vocabulary retention and pronunciation accuracy.

In functional practice, the teacher created learning situations that reflected real-life

experiences. For example, students were asked to say one English sentence containing everyday vocabulary during attendance. This way, they memorized words and used them in real and meaningful contexts. This method corresponds to Nation's (2011) suggestion that vocabulary should be learned in context to enhance a more profound understanding and practical usage.

The teacher also encouraged students to ask questions about new vocabulary they encountered outside of class, such as from social media or games. This strategy is consistent with Nunan's (2003) view that encouraging learner autonomy and interaction promotes better vocabulary acquisition, as students are motivated to learn words they find relevant to their lives.

Memorization involved the use of visual media, such as YouTube videos. These videos boosted students' focus and interest, especially when they became bored with regular explanations. The videos included engaging visuals and sound, helping students to remember vocabulary more easily through the pictures and illustrations. This supports Fauziati (2010), who stated that visual aids and multimedia can significantly enhance vocabulary learning by associating words with meaningful images and sounds.

These combined strategies show that the teacher used traditional, contextual, and digital approaches to improve students' vocabulary mastery.

b. The Implementation of Strategies in Teaching Vocabulary

Based on the observation the researcher conducted on Wednesday, April 16, 2025, the English teacher at SMP Dwijendra Mataram effectively implemented vocabulary teaching strategies through a combination of formal and functional practice. These strategies were reflected in the structured and interactive learning activities carried out in the classroom.

Before the lesson began, the teacher prepared a learning video from YouTube explaining the topic of Passive Voice. This indicated formal practice, where structured input was provided through audiovisual media. One of the students assisted in setting up the LCD projector and connecting it to the teacher's tablet, which shows the collaboration between the teacher and students in creating a supportive learning environment.

The lesson started with an interactive attendance activity. Instead of simply responding "present," the students were asked to say a complete sentence in English, such as "I cook breakfast for my family" or "He likes to play video games." The teacher then asked about the meaning of each sentence. This activity reflected the application of functional practice, as students were encouraged to use vocabulary in real-life contexts. In addition to practicing speaking, students also had the opportunity to enrich their vocabulary through meaningful use.

After the opening activity, the students watched the video lesson that explained the formula and steps for changing active sentences into passive ones. The teacher asked students to take notes on key points from the video. This represents a formal practice, as students were exposed to a clear and systematic explanation of the grammar topic. After watching the video, the teacher continued by giving additional explanations and examples not included to ensure students thoroughly understood the concept of Passive Voice apply it. They could apply the vocabulary used in passive constructions.

Next, the teacher distributed a worksheet which students were asked to transform active sentences into passive ones. The vocabulary in the exercises was adapted to daily-life contexts, making it easier for students to understand and remember. Using familiar vocabulary helps students relate new words to their personal experiences, which is an effective form of contextual learning.

While the students worked on the exercises, the teacher actively monitored the class and assisted when needed. When a student encountered difficulty, the teacher approached and offered direct explanation, even inviting the student to the front of the class for more focused guidance. This approach showed the teacher's attentiveness to each student's learning needs.

After completing the exercises, the students submitted their work to the teacher, who then provided feedback by correcting the answers and explaining whether the sentences were correct or needed revision. This helped students recognize their mistakes and better understand how to use vocabulary correctly within proper sentence structure.

The teacher conducted a brief review session to conclude the lesson by asking students to recall the steps for changing active sentences into passive ones. This activity reinforced their understanding of the material and helped solidify the vocabulary they had learned throughout the lesson.

From this observation, the researcher concluded that the teacher successfully integrated formal and functional practice in teaching vocabulary. Formal practice was demonstrated through structured material delivery via video and written exercises, while functional practice appeared in speaking activities, contextual vocabulary use, and meaningful classroom interaction. These strategies supported students' vocabulary acquisition and encouraged them to actively use English in both spoken and written contexts relevant to their daily lives.

c. Data Triangulation

The findings of this study were strengthened through triangulation of data, which combined classroom observations and teacher interviews. The observations captured what was happening during real classroom interaction, including students' responses and participation. Meanwhile, the interviews provided insight into the teacher's reasoning, goals, and reflections behind each strategy used. This triangulation helped validate the results by confirming that observed behaviors matched the teacher's intentions.

d. Study Limitations

This study faced several limitations. First, data collection was only conducted during a single class meeting due to a two-week religious holiday at the school. This limited the opportunity to observe multiple sessions or the long-term effect of the strategies used. Second, technical challenges also emerged during the teaching process. The classroom projector initially malfunctioned, which delayed the use of the YouTube video. Fortunately, the teacher resolved the issue by connecting the video through a tablet, assisted by one of the students. Another limitation involved unequal student access to digital tools, such as smartphones and internet connections, which affected their ability to use the Duolingo application outside the classroom. The teacher overcame this by allowing group use of devices and by offering printed alternatives.

e. Comparison with Previous Studies

The results of this study align with Melani et al. (2018), who emphasize that visual media such as YouTube videos can significantly enhance vocabulary learning by increasing student engagement and helping learners associate words with images. However, the results differ from Nation's (2001), who promoted a purely contextual approach to vocabulary instruction. This study supports a combined strategy—formal, functional, and memorization-based—which proved effective

in the observed classroom. Although YouTube videos increased student interest, technical issues such as a broken projector temporarily disrupted the lesson. This finding is consistent with Melani et al. (2018) regarding the benefits of visual media, but contrasts with Nation's (2011) purely contextual approach, highlighting the importance of combining strategies.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the English teacher at SMP Dwijendra Mataram used a variety of strategies to teach vocabulary to 8th-grade students. These strategies included: (a) formal practice, where the teacher applied structured repetition, translation, and drilling techniques through grammar exercises that involved vocabulary, such as worksheets on transforming active sentences into passive voice using familiar vocabulary from students' daily lives; (b) functional practice, in which the teacher connected vocabulary to students' real-life contexts—for example, by asking students during attendance to say English sentences like "I cook breakfast for my family," which were then discussed in terms of meaning and grammar; and (c) memorizing strategies, where the teacher utilized visual media such as YouTube videos to present grammar and vocabulary visually and clearly, and encouraged the use of learning applications like Duolingo to help students expand their vocabulary independently in a fun and engaging way. The implementation of these strategies was carried out by the teacher as part of her regular classroom instruction, while the researcher's role was solely as an observer during the teaching and learning activities. These strategies were observed to be delivered in a structured yet student-centered manner, enabling students to engage actively, receive feedback, and build vocabulary through meaningful and relevant learning experiences.

Teachers are recommended to combine structured memorization with contextual vocabulary activities. For example, utilizing attendance time for functional vocabulary practice, or assigning Duolingo as an independent vocabulary-building task, can enhance students' motivation and involvement.

Future research may explore the long-term impact of these combined strategies on students' vocabulary retention, or investigate their implementation across different grade levels and school settings to assess broader applicability and effectiveness.

Teachers are encouraged to combine structured memorization with contextual vocabulary activities and to make use of digital tools such as Duolingo for

independent learning. For example, using attendance time to practice speaking with daily vocabulary can build both confidence and fluency. Future research could investigate the long-term impact of these strategies on students' vocabulary retention or explore their application at different grade levels to determine broader effectiveness.

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