



Students' Vocabulary Competence at the Seventh Grade of Junior High School

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the vocabulary competence of seventh-grade students at SMPN Satap Pongsamelung. The population consisted of 61 students, from which 29 students were selected through random sampling. A descriptive quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected using a multiple-choice vocabulary test. The results revealed that the highest score obtained by the students was 88, while the lowest score was 19, with a mean score of 55.62. Based on the classification criteria, students' vocabulary competence was categorized as poor. These findings indicate that students still face difficulties in mastering English vocabulary, highlighting the need for improved instructional strategies to enhance vocabulary learning outcomes.

Keywords: *Vocabulary competence, EFL students, Descriptive quantitative, Junior high school*

Introduction

Education is a systematic and structured process aimed at acquiring knowledge and developing abilities (Mahfuddin, 2023). Language plays a fundamental role in enabling individuals to communicate, construct meaning, and interact socially. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, language proficiency involves mastering several interconnected components, among which vocabulary knowledge is essential. Vocabulary serves as the foundation for developing language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners may experience difficulties in expressing ideas and understanding communication effectively (Nurdin, N. N., &

Halim, N. (2021)).

Previous studies have emphasized the importance of vocabulary in language acquisition. Alqahtani (2015) highlighted that vocabulary knowledge significantly influences learners' communicative competence, while Andriani and Sriwahyuningsih (2019) reported that limited vocabulary mastery hinders students' reading and writing performance. Furthermore, Lase (2022) demonstrated that appropriate instructional strategies can enhance vocabulary learning among junior high school students. These findings suggest that vocabulary competence is a crucial factor affecting students' overall language development.

Based on preliminary observation conducted at SMPN Satap Pongsamelung, students showed enthusiasm toward learning English; however, vocabulary remained a major challenge. Many students struggled to understand word meanings, spell vocabulary correctly, or pronounce words appropriately. Additionally, ineffective instructional approaches sometimes led to reduced motivation and engagement in vocabulary learning. Considering the importance of vocabulary competence in language learning and the challenges faced by students, this study aims to examine the vocabulary competence of seventh-grade students at SMPN Satap Pongsamelung.

Vocabulary mastery is widely recognized as a core component of English language learning, as it underpins learners' ability to comprehend and produce language across listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Empirical studies in ESL/EFL contexts consistently report that learners with broader vocabulary knowledge demonstrate stronger reading comprehension and greater accuracy in oral and written communication, while limited vocabulary often constrains idea expression and message interpretation. Research in vocabulary acquisition has also shown that vocabulary size is a significant predictor of overall language proficiency, sometimes accounting for a substantial proportion of variance in learners' performance across language skills.

In recent years, the growing volume of ESL/EFL research has reflected an increasing awareness that vocabulary development is not merely a supplementary aspect of language instruction, but a central factor that interacts with grammar, discourse competence, and communicative effectiveness. (Ahmad Radzuan & Mohd Arif, 2025). Despite its importance, many learners still experience challenges in mastering vocabulary. Difficulties such as limited word retention, lack of exposure, and inadequate learning strategies may hinder language development (Harselina et al., 2024).

This condition suggests that vocabulary competence remains an essential area for investigation, particularly at the secondary school level where foundational language skills are developed. Furthermore, vocabulary knowledge has been found to significantly influence learners' academic performance, especially in reading comprehension. Students with stronger vocabulary mastery tend to understand texts more effectively and achieve better learning outcomes (Ardiyanto, 2024).

Therefore, examining students' vocabulary competence is necessary to identify their current proficiency level and to provide insights for improving English language teaching practices.

1. Definition of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language that enables learners to convey meaning and participate in communication. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) describe vocabulary as an essential element that supports variation and expression in language use. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners may experience difficulty performing language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Linse (2005) further defines vocabulary as the collection of words known by an individual, which functions as the foundation for both receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Therefore, vocabulary knowledge plays a key role in developing students' overall English competence.

2. Types of Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge can be categorized into active and passive vocabulary (Harmer, 1991). Active vocabulary refers to words that learners can use appropriately in speaking or writing. These words are part of their productive language repertoire. In contrast, passive vocabulary refers to words that learners recognize and understand when encountered in listening or reading contexts but may not use actively in communication. Both types are important for language development, as passive knowledge often supports the gradual expansion of active usage. Hiebert and Kamil (2005) classify vocabulary into oral and print vocabulary.

Oral vocabulary includes words used in speaking and listening, while print vocabulary includes words recognized in reading and writing. They also distinguish between productive vocabulary, which refers to words learners can produce, and receptive vocabulary, which refers to words learners can understand when encountered in context. This distinction highlights the multidimensional nature of vocabulary competence.

3. Importance of Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge plays a central role in English language learning because it connects the four language skills. Learners with sufficient vocabulary mastery are better able to express ideas, comprehend spoken and written messages, and engage in communication. A limited vocabulary range, on the other hand, may restrict learners' ability to participate in language activities effectively.

4. Aspects of Vocabulary

Lado (1995) identifies several aspects of vocabulary knowledge that learners need to master, including meaning, spelling, pronunciation, word class, and word use. Understanding meaning enables learners to interpret words across different contexts. Spelling and pronunciation support accurate written and spoken communication. Knowledge of word classes helps learners use words appropriately within grammatical structures, while word use involves understanding how words function in real communication. Harmer (as cited in Ullrich, 2019) further notes that

vocabulary learning involves deeper knowledge such as collocations, word formation, and grammatical application.

5. Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary mastery refers to learners' ability to recognize, understand, and appropriately use words in communication contexts. Cameron (2001) states that knowing a word involves recognizing its meaning when encountered and being able to apply it in meaningful situations. Vocabulary knowledge is therefore not limited to memorization but includes functional usage in language tasks. Mastery of vocabulary develops gradually through exposure, practice, and interaction, and it serves as a crucial foundation for achieving proficiency in English language learning.

Method

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to examine students' vocabulary competence through numerical data analysis. The research was conducted in June 2024 at SMPN Satap Pongsamelung, located in Lamasi, Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi, with the population consisting of all seventh-grade students totaling 61 learners. Using a random sampling technique, 29 students from Class VII/B were selected as the research sample. Data were collected using a vocabulary test in the form of multiple-choice questions comprising 16 items focused on noun vocabulary, which was designed to measure students' ability to identify correct word meanings. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the school principal, and coordination was carried out with the English teacher to ensure appropriate classroom access.

The test was then administered to the selected students, their responses were collected upon completion, and the research process was systematically documented. The collected data were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS version 29, with students' scores calculated using the formula: (total correct answers divided by the number of items) multiplied by 100. The resulting scores were subsequently classified into seven proficiency categories—Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fairly Good, Fair, Poor, and Very Poor—based on the criteria proposed by Gay et al. (2012).

The percentage of each classification was calculated using:

$$P = (F / N) \times 100\%$$

where P represents percentage, F represents frequency, and N represents the number of samples.

Results

This research presents an overview of data analysis based on the results of a vocabulary test to determine the vocabulary competency of students in Class VII SMPN Satap Pongsamelung. The collected data was then analyzed quantitatively. The researcher selected and entered data based on the researcher's aim to summarize students' vocabulary competency abilities.

The data there is only one student who get a test score of 19, one student get a score of 25, two students get a score of 31, three students get a score of 38, two students get a score of 44, four students get a score of 50, two students get a score of 56, seven students get a score of 63, five students get a score of 69, two students get a score of 75 and one student get a score of 88.

Discussion

From the research on the analysis of figurative language in Sing 2 Movie, several main points were found based on the two questions in this study. The first was the types of figurative language used in Sing 2 movie, the second was the meaning of each figurative language sentence used in Sing 2 movie, and the third was the relationship between figurative language used in Sing 2 movie and EFL students. The Sing 2 movie contains many figurative languages. This movie was a good medium for learning idioms and improving the quality of literary works.

This research proves that Sing 2 movie is suitable for learning literature. This is because figurative language is one of the elements that make up literary works. Figurative language is able to improve the quality and deepen the meaning implied in literary works. This can be utilized by EFL students to develop their works. As explained by Giora and Filik (2018) that figurative language is an art that gives beauty and emphasis to literary work.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion from The Analysis of Figurative Language in Sing 2 Movie, the researchers found several types of figurative language contained in this movie. The figurative language found are personification, hyperbole, simile, metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, paradox, litotes, and irony. The meaning of each utterance has been explained at the bottom of each utterance point. This research has a close relationship with the world of education as explained in the third point in the findings and discussion section.

In conclusion, the information above indicates that the Sing 2 movie has a beneficial effect. The amount of figurative language contained can help students and teachers in the teaching and learning process about figurative language. In the end, the figure of speech that has been learned can be used to beautify one's literary work and make its quality increase.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Score	29	19,00	88,00	55,6207	16,13429
Valid (listwise)	N 29				

1. The Classifications and Percentage of Students Vocabulary Test

The researcher compiles the classification and percentage of students' score in the following table:

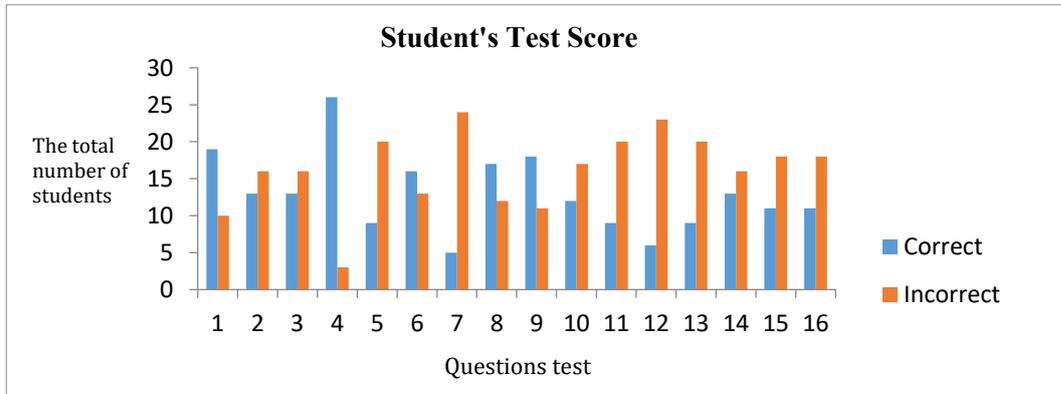
Table 1.1 The students' frequency and percentage of the students' score in test.

No	Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Excelent	96-100	0	0
2	Very Good	86-95	1	3.4
3	Good	76-85	0	0
4	Fairly Good	66-75	7	24.1
5	Fairly	56-65	9	31.0
6	Poor	36-55	9	31.0
7	Very poor	0-35	3	10.3
Total			29	100

Based on table 1.1 above, we can see the students' scores after giving the test, there is no students who get the classification Excellent and Good. The researcher found that only 1 (3.4%) student who are classified as Very Good, there are 7 (24.1%) students who is classified as Fairly Good, and there are 9 (31.0%) students who are classified as Fairly, there are 9 (31.0%) students who are classified as Poor and there are 3 (10.3) students who are classified as Very Poor. In this case, it means that students have low ability in vocabulary competence.

1. Student's Test Score

Picture 1 Students' Score on Each of Vocabulary Question



Based on the diagram above, we can see the comparison of correct and incorrect answers from 16 vocabulary test questions that have been given to 29 students. Where there are 10 students who answer question 1 correctly while 19 students answer incorrectly, questions 2 and 3 have 16 students who are correct while 13 students are incorrect, question 4 has 23 students who are correct and only 3 students are incorrect, question 5 has 20 students who are correct while 9 students are incorrect, question 6 has 16 students who are correct while 13 students are incorrect, question 7 has 24 students who are correct while 5 students are incorrect, question 8 has 12 students who are correct while 17 students are incorrect, question 9 has 11 students who are correct while 18 students are incorrect, question 10 has 17 students who are correct while 12 students are incorrect, question 11 has 20 students who are correct while 9 students are incorrect, question 12 has 23 students who are correct while 6 students are incorrect, question 13 has 20 students who are correct while 9 students are incorrect, question 14 has 16 students who are correct while 13 students are incorrect, questions 15 and 16 have 18 students were correct while 11 students are incorrect.

The findings suggest that students' vocabulary competence remains at a relatively low level. Vocabulary plays a crucial role in supporting language skills, and insufficient vocabulary knowledge may hinder learners' ability to comprehend and produce English effectively. This result aligns with Alqahtani (2015), who emphasized that vocabulary mastery significantly affects communicative competence. Classroom observations and informal interviews with the English teacher indicated that students often struggle with understanding word meanings, spelling vocabulary accurately, and pronouncing words correctly. In addition, some students showed low motivation toward learning English, perceiving it as a difficult subject. These factors may contribute to limited vocabulary development.

The results are also consistent with findings by Lase (2022), which reported that limited exposure and ineffective instructional strategies can lead to low vocabulary mastery among junior high school students. Furthermore, Julianos et al.

(2020) noted that insufficient vocabulary knowledge reduces students' participation in classroom communication and comprehension activities.

Despite these challenges, the presence of a few students achieving higher scores suggests that vocabulary competence can be improved with appropriate learning support. Instructional strategies emphasizing contextual learning, repeated exposure, and interactive activities may help enhance vocabulary acquisition.

Overall, the findings indicate that seventh-grade students at SMPN Satap Pongsamelung demonstrate low vocabulary competence, highlighting the need for improved teaching approaches to strengthen vocabulary development. The findings carry important pedagogical implications for English language teaching at the junior high school level. Teachers are encouraged to implement learner-centered and context-based vocabulary instruction that promotes active engagement rather than rote memorization. Strategies such as task-based learning, visual scaffolding, and repeated contextual exposure may support vocabulary retention and application.

Furthermore, incorporating digital learning tools and ongoing formative assessment could enhance student motivation and track progress in vocabulary development. These pedagogical adjustments may facilitate improved language outcomes and support students' overall communicative competence.

Discussion

By considering the findings, the researcher presented the discussion of data analysis on the vocabulary competence of seventh grade students of SMPN Satap Pongsamelung. Where we know that English is an international language used for communication, English language skills are one of the most important skills for students, one of the initial skills that must be possessed by increasing vocabulary. According to Richard and Renandya (2002:255), vocabulary is a vital element of language proficiency since it determines how well learners listen, talk, read, and write. In accordance with the explanation above, English is a global language, so for those who want to be one step ahead of people in general, it is necessary and even must master English (Pattymahu, 2012).

During the research and interview with one of the English teachers of SMPN Satap Pongsamelung, the learning outcomes of seventh grade students were lower than other subjects due to the lack of vocabulary owned by students. English is considered a difficult and unpleasant subject. When the researcher gave the students a vocabulary test, they immediately complained because they did not understand the questions given, many students did not know the meaning of some of the vocabulary in the questions. Although many students are not interested, there is also those who really want to learn English. This is proven by the vocabulary test score of respondents 29 (EF) who got classified as Very Good with a score of 88.

One of the problems is that students lack motivation to learn English, which makes it even more difficult for them to learn English, and some students don't even like English at all. Based on the assumption of Alqahtani (Arabic:2015), Vocabulary

mastery is defined as a person's significant ability in using words in a language, and it is acquired based on a person's interests, needs, and desires.

The findings of analysis data on vocabulary competence data were collected from 29 students by using a test. The test consisted of 16 questions. The distribution of the scores is: mean score was 55.62, standard deviation was 16.13, minimum score was 19.00, maximum score was 88.00. The test results can be seen in the findings in (table 4.3). Based on the data, there is no students got Excellent and Good. The researcher found that only 1 (3.4%) student who are classified as Very Good, there are 7 (24.1%) students who is classified as Fairly Good, and there are 9 (31.0%) students who are classified as Fairly, there are 9 (31.0%) students who are classified as Poor and there are 3 (10.3) students who are classified as Very Poor. It means that the students had low ability in vocabulary competence.

The results of the data analysis show that the researcher found out that the students' vocabulary competence at the Seventh Grade of SMPN Satap Pongsamelung is categorized as poor and it needs to be improved.

Conclusion

Based on the results of research and data analysis obtained, it can be seen that the students' vocabulary competence at seventh grade of SMPN Satap Pongsamelung is categorized as poor. It is proven by the test that the researcher had given to them with the mean score is 55.62.

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