



The Impact of Environment-Based Education on Students' Vocabulary Development at Junior High School

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of environment-based education on students' mastery of vocabulary at Junior High School. English, recognized as a global language, is essential for both educational and career advancement. However, Indonesian students often struggle with vocabulary acquisition. To evaluate how the integration of environmental elements into English learning can enhance vocabulary skills, this research adopts a qualitative approach. It employs observation, interviews, and documentation as key methods of assessment. The study involved an English teacher and 23 seventh-grade students, with a sample of 15 students selected for the research. The findings reveal that students faced challenges in retaining vocabulary due to conventional teaching methods and insufficient exposure to context. However, after introducing environment-based learning—where students observed and described objects in their school surroundings—they showed remarkable progress in vocabulary retention, comprehension, and application. This approach not only boosted their language skills but also heightened their motivation, engagement, and awareness of the environment. Overall, the results indicate that environment-based education is an effective strategy for enhancing vocabulary mastery, making the learning experience more meaningful and relevant to students' everyday lives.

Keywords: *Education; English learning; Environment-based learning; Vocabulary mastery; Teaching methods; Students*

Introduction

English is one of the international languages that plays a crucial role in various aspects of life, including education, global communication, and career development. English is no longer merely a means of communication but has become an international language used across multiple fields, such as business, technology, tourism, and particularly education. A significant portion of academic literature, research, and educational resources is available in English. By mastering this language, learners can access the latest information and expand their knowledge across different fields of study (Prakoso, 2024).

Proficiency in English also provides a competitive advantage in the professional world, where the ability to communicate in this international language is often a primary requirement in various industries. Additionally, understanding English enables individuals to connect with global communities, expand professional networks, and actively participate in cross-cultural collaborations. Thus, English serves not only as a tool for acquiring information but also as a key to unlocking broader opportunities in the era of globalization. Crystal (2000, p. 1) states that English is a global language, meaning it is used by many countries to communicate with other nations worldwide.

Therefore, English functions not only as an international language but also as a global language. Learning and mastering English have become inevitable necessities. By studying English, individuals can broaden their perspectives and knowledge on an international scale. In Indonesia, English is still considered a foreign language, making it a challenge for many students to master. Vocabulary acquisition is one of the main elements in learning English. Without sufficient vocabulary, students will struggle to understand texts, write, speak, or listen effectively.

Therefore, expanding vocabulary should be a primary focus in the English learning process. Wessels (2011, p. 46) emphasizes that vocabulary mastery is essential for students' academic success. Similarly, David Wilkins (as cited in Thornbury, 2002, p. 13) highlights the importance of learning new words, stating that without vocabulary, communication cannot occur, and with limited grammar, communication can only be minimally achieved. This indicates that grammar alone is insufficient for learning a language, and vocabulary must receive greater attention due to its crucial role in English learning.

A lack of vocabulary limits students' ability to express their thoughts effectively and hinders interpersonal communication. Vocabulary, which consists of the collection of words that form a language, is a key element in language teaching and learning, especially in English. Ivona (2005) suggests that one of the reasons for Indonesian students' low language proficiency may be their limited vocabulary knowledge, which could be influenced by how vocabulary is taught in the learning process.

The learning environment plays a significant role in enhancing students'

abilities, particularly in English learning. Prayitno (2009) categorizes the learning environment into physical environment, socio-emotional relationships, peer environment, community influences, and external environmental influences. Meanwhile, Hasbullah (2012, p. 33) asserts that the environment has a significant impact on learners, both directly and indirectly. An unsupportive environment—such as minimal practice in using English in daily life, limited exposure to English materials outside the classroom, and low student motivation to learn—becomes a major obstacle to vocabulary acquisition.

Environment-based education is an approach that integrates environmental concepts into the learning process, aiming to increase environmental awareness while enriching students' knowledge and skills. One important aspect of language learning is vocabulary development, which is key to improving language skills in speaking, reading, writing, and listening. At Junior High School, English learning still faces challenges, particularly in vocabulary acquisition. Many students struggle to understand and actively use English vocabulary in daily communication. This impacts their ability to express ideas, participate in discussions, and comprehend English learning materials. Implementation of environment-based education in English learning is expected to have a positive impact on students' vocabulary development. By relating learning materials to the surrounding environment, students are expected to find it easier to remember and use vocabulary in more realistic and relevant contexts. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of environment-based education on students' vocabulary development at Junior High School.

Method

This research method uses a qualitative approach, employing three types of data collection: observation, interviews, and documentation (Fadli, 2021). The study involved one English teacher and 23 seventh-grade students, with 15 selected as the sample. During the first meeting, the researcher conducted direct observations in the classroom to examine the process of vocabulary teaching using traditional methods. During the observation process, the researcher took note of all activities that occurred, including the interaction between the teacher and students, as well as the students' behavior in the classroom.

Next, the researcher conducted direct interviews with the teacher to determine if the teacher had ever applied environment-based learning to help students improve their vocabulary mastery. Additionally, the researcher collected several pieces of documentation to support the data gathered. In the second meeting, the researcher introduced the concept of environment-based learning as a method for vocabulary mastery to the students. The researcher then implemented this method directly in the classroom learning process.

To assess the students' progress in vocabulary mastery, the researcher conducted five meetings. During each meeting, the researcher noted the improvements demonstrated by the students as a result of the implementation of

environment-based learning. Through this method, the study aims to identify the effectiveness of environment-based learning in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery.

Results

The results of this study reveal that the implementation of environment-based education has a significant impact on improving students' vocabulary mastery at Junior High School. At the beginning of the study, many students showed difficulties in memorizing and understanding English vocabulary. This was due to several factors, such as the lack of direct experiences relevant to the vocabulary being learned, low student motivation, and traditional teaching approaches that tended to be monotonous.

The vocabulary learned by the students previously was often just memorized without clear context, making it easy to forget. After the implementation of the environment-based education approach, significant improvements were observed in the students' ability to understand and use vocabulary. Through five systematically designed meetings, students were encouraged to learn by utilizing their surrounding environment as the primary learning resource. Activities such as observing objects in the school environment, describing objects in English, and participating in group discussions about environmental topics not only made learning more engaging but also helped students connect new vocabulary to real-life experiences.

This aligns with Setyaningrum's (2023) theory, which emphasizes that environment-based learning creates a direct connection between students and their environment, deepening their understanding of the concepts being taught. During each meeting, students showed gradual improvement. In the first meeting, some students still appeared passive and struggled to remember new vocabulary. However, with the activity-based approach involving direct interaction with the environment, they became more willing to try.

For example, when students were asked to identify objects around the school, such as "tree," "flower," "stone," or "bench," they could more easily remember these words because they saw and physically interacted with the objects. This approach effectively built a connection between theory and practice, helping students internalize new vocabulary into their long-term memory. In subsequent meetings, students' enthusiasm continued to increase. Activities involving direct observation of the surrounding environment also provided opportunities for students to speak more actively. For instance, during a discussion activity, students were asked to describe their favorite place at school or at home using the vocabulary they had learned. This activity not only improved their speaking skills but also helped them understand how vocabulary can be used in different contexts. Students who were previously passive began to show more confidence in speaking and writing in English.

Additionally, the environment-based education method also helped build students' character, such as caring for the environment and developing a sense of social responsibility. Through simple projects like cleaning the school area or planting trees, students not only learned new vocabulary such as "clean," "plant," "water," or "rubbish," but also understood the importance of taking care of their surroundings. Thus, this approach focuses not only on developing language skills but also on fostering positive attitudes towards the environment. Feedback from the teachers involved was also highly positive. Teachers noted that students were more motivated and actively engaged during the learning process. They felt that this approach provided variety to the teaching methods, which had previously been too focused on textbooks. Teachers also realized that integrating the environment into the learning process made it easier for students to understand vocabulary because they were learning through direct experiences.

This study also revealed that students engaged in environment-based learning not only showed improvement in vocabulary mastery but also demonstrated growth in other skills such as speaking, writing, and reading. This indicates that vocabulary learning cannot be separated from other language skills. Vocabulary understood by students helps them in constructing sentences, comprehending texts, and conveying ideas more effectively. Overall, this study proves that environment-based education is an effective approach to overcoming challenges in teaching English vocabulary.

By actively involving students in learning that is relevant to their daily lives, this approach successfully created meaningful, enjoyable, and practical learning experiences. In addition to enhancing vocabulary mastery, this approach also raised students' awareness of the importance of the environment and encouraged them to contribute positively to the sustainability of their surroundings. These findings provide an important contribution to the development of more contextual and relevant teaching methods for students, particularly at the junior high school level.

Discussion

The educational environment plays a crucial role in English language teaching, especially since many students still struggle with vocabulary acquisition. Their difficulties in learning vocabulary may be caused by the complexity of word forms, variations in meaning, and diverse word choices. Moreover, mastering vocabulary and grammar is essential to achieving the primary goals of English language teaching in Indonesia. According to Canggara (1992, p. 1), the success of English language teaching as a foreign language is influenced by various factors, such as teaching materials, the role of teachers, and students' attitudes toward learning. The teaching process involves teachers, students, materials, and the teaching context. Therefore, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation should be designed according to students' needs. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that all fundamental teaching elements are suitable for students and adjusting them

when necessary.

Vocabulary is one of the competencies in language and plays a crucial role in foreign language teaching, as it is connected to the four language skills: writing, speaking, listening, and reading (Nugroho, Nafasya, Hursyana, & Awaliyah, 2021). Vocabulary mastery serves as the most essential tool for speaking fluently as a means of communication, both orally and in writing. Thus, the richer a person's understanding, the greater the likelihood of achieving proficiency in the language. It can be said that individuals with a good quantity and quality of vocabulary comprehension tend to have strong language skills as well. Mastery of comprehension plays an important role in speaking freely as a means of communication, both orally and in writing. Therefore, the more vocabulary a person possesses, the greater the likelihood of mastering the language. Vocabulary is crucial in language teaching. Language is used by humans to communicate their feelings and thoughts. The words used in language constitute vocabulary. Vocabulary is essential for communication, and without it, humans would struggle to communicate effectively.

According to Rahmasari and Brigitta Septarini (2016), vocabulary is the key to language learning. Language is a system of sounds, words, and sentences used by humans to communicate thoughts and feelings. In this context, the words used in a language are referred to as vocabulary. Vocabulary is also a fundamental skill for communication; people will not be able to communicate easily without knowing vocabulary. Wardani (2015) states that vocabulary is a crucial aspect of language as it appears in every language skill, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that vocabulary is one of the key factors in a language, as it is essential for speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It can be said that if one's ability and skill in mastering vocabulary are low, their comprehension in acquiring knowledge and information will also be limited. This also applies to English vocabulary, where its impact will be even broader

In this study, the researcher observed that many students still struggle to memorize vocabulary, even in simple syllabic forms. This issue was evident among the selected subjects, namely the students of SMPN 1 Gunung Sitoli Utara. Such difficulties not only affect their ability to comprehend English texts but also limit their capacity to communicate effectively in the language. Therefore, the researcher seeks to implement an environment-based teaching approach as a strategy to address this issue. This approach is based on the assumption that contextual learning, which involves the surrounding environment, can help students retain vocabulary more easily by allowing them to associate words with objects, situations, or real-life experiences in their environment.

Environment-Based Education (EBE) has gained significant attention as an effective approach to enhancing students' English language skills, particularly in vocabulary development. Environment-Based Education, also known as education rooted in environmental principles, is an innovative approach designed to integrate

an understanding of environmental issues with direct learning experiences outside the classroom. According to Setyaningrum (2023), Environment-Based Education is a method designed to strengthen the connection between students and their surroundings through experiential learning in real-life environments. This approach goes beyond academic knowledge, aiming to build students' awareness of pressing environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, and resource degradation. By implementing this method, students are encouraged to engage directly with their environment, fostering a deeper and more realistic understanding of the concepts they learn in class. In this sense, Environment-Based Education bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, creating meaningful and contextual learning experiences for students.

Setyaningrum (2023) further emphasizes that the primary goal of Environment-Based Education is to make a tangible contribution to shaping ecological awareness among younger generations. This approach encourages students not only to understand environmental challenges conceptually but also to develop practical skills that enable them to participate in sustainability efforts. For example, through activities such as observing local ecosystems or participating in conservation programs, students can directly learn the importance of maintaining environmental balance.

This process not only enhances their awareness but also motivates them to become part of the solution to global environmental challenges. Thus, Environment-Based Education serves as a method that enriches students' knowledge while empowering them to actively contribute to a more sustainable future. Similarly, Zulkifli and Kartini (2021) define Environment-Based Education as a learning model that actively utilizes the surrounding environment as a source of real-life learning.

The environment functions as a "living laboratory" that allows students to gain direct experiences, helping them better understand the academic concepts taught in school. This approach has a significant impact on students' learning motivation, as they can directly see the relevance of lessons to their everyday lives. For example, learning about the water cycle becomes more effective when students observe the flow of a nearby river or the rainfall process in their environment. Such experiences not only deepen their understanding but also instill a sense of responsibility for maintaining the sustainability of the environment.

In addition to enhancing motivation, Environment-Based Education is also designed to build students' character. This approach teaches values such as care for nature, social responsibility, and respect for ecosystem balance. During this process, students are encouraged to become active participants in efforts to preserve and protect their environment. This can be achieved through various environmental-related projects, such as cleaning local areas, planting trees, or managing waste independently. In this way, students not only learn about environmental issues theoretically but also contribute directly to creating positive change.

Through this approach, students are expected to be more active and engaged

in the learning process as they are presented with material that is relevant to their daily lives. Furthermore, this approach also provides opportunities for students to learn collaboratively with their peers, thus creating a more enjoyable learning environment that supports the development of their vocabulary. In its implementation, the researcher uses various activities such as the introduction of objects in the school environment, direct observations, and vocabulary games that involve active interaction between students and their surroundings.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that environment-based education significantly improves students' vocabulary mastery at Junior High School. This approach helps students better understand new vocabulary through direct experiences relevant to their environment. Students not only find it easier to remember vocabulary but also feel more confident in using it in speaking, writing, and understanding texts. Furthermore, this approach also successfully boosts students' motivation to learn, as they feel actively engaged in contextual and enjoyable learning. Environment-based education not only enriches students' vocabulary mastery but also shapes their character, such as fostering environmental awareness and a sense of social responsibility.

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