



Teacher's Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary at Sixth Grade Students of Raudhatul Jannah Islamic Elementary School

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Abstract: The aim of this research was to identify the strategies used by the teacher in teaching English vocabulary to sixth-grade students at Raudhatul Jannah Islamic Elementary School, to explore how these strategies were implemented, and to examine the challenges faced by the teacher during the teaching process. This study employed a qualitative approach to answer the formulated research questions. The instruments used in collecting the data were observation, interviews, questionnaire and document review. The findings revealed that the teacher applied four main strategies in teaching vocabulary: (1) using pictures, (2) games, (3) song, and (4) making task. The implementation of these strategies involved various interactive and student-centered activities such as visual aids, singing, sentence construction, and game-based learning. However, the study also found that the teacher faced several challenges in the teaching process, including students' lack of motivation (1), Insufficient Time (2), and students' limited vocabulary (3). Despite these obstacles, the teacher made continuous efforts to adapt teaching methods and support student learning.

Keywords: Strategies, Teaching, Vocabulary

Introduction

Currently, mastering various teaching strategies is one of the essential efforts made by teachers to address challenges encountered during the teaching and learning process. These challenges may include variations in students' learning styles, low levels of motivation, and difficulties in understanding instructional material. By implementing appropriate strategies, teachers aim to help each student reach their full potential and to establish an inclusive and effective learning environment. Teaching strategies are deliberate actions used by teachers to make learning simpler, quicker, more engaging, more independent, more effective, and easier to apply in new situations (Oxford, 1990). As (Daryanto, 2011) explains, a teacher's strategy is essentially a planned method or policy created to accomplish specific educational goals. Designing good strategies will be one of the important ways to achieve teaching goals in schools (Wardah & Mustika, 2021). Therefore, teaching strategies play a significant role in the learning process, as they influence the effectiveness of instruction and students' achievement in understanding the subject matter.

In the context of English language teaching, vocabulary plays a vital role and is considered a key component of language proficiency. Without grammar very little can be expressed, but without vocabulary nothing can be expressed (Wilkins, 1972). Vocabulary is important for learning any language—whether it is a first, second, or foreign language (Nunan, 2003). According to Richards and Renandya (2002), vocabulary forms a major foundation for learners' ability to speak, listen, read, and write effectively. This is supported by (Clouston, 2013), who asserts that students need sufficient vocabulary to understand others and to express their own thoughts clearly. Vocabulary knowledge includes both active vocabulary, which students can use productively, and passive vocabulary, which they recognize and understand (Nation, 2001). In addition, (Hiebert and Michael, 2005) define vocabulary as the understanding and recognition of word meanings, indicating its importance in overall language competence.

Teaching English to elementary school students requires special attention, particularly in the area of vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary learning at the primary level is vital, as it serves as the foundation for developing the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Cameron, 2001). Therefore, teachers are encouraged to design varied instructional methods by incorporating activities that are interactive, enjoyable, and cognitively engaging, in order to strengthen vocabulary learning in an effective and sustainable manner. As (Murcia, 2001) points out, teachers can bring variety to classroom methods by incorporating language games that reinforce vocabulary and maintain students' interest.

Based on preliminary observations conducted by the researcher at Raudhatul Jannah Islamic Elementary School, it was found that the teacher employed a variety of strategies to stimulate students' interest in learning English vocabulary. However, several problems were also identified during the teaching and learning process. First, many students experienced difficulty maintaining concentration during lessons, primarily due to low motivation and a perception that English is a difficult subject. Second, students struggled with correct pronunciation of vocabulary words, which hindered their confidence and oral performance in class. To address these issues, this study aims to investigate the strategies used by the teacher in teaching English vocabulary, examine how the teacher implements these strategies, and identify the challenges faced by the teacher during the process. Therefore, the present study is entitled "Teacher's Strategies in Teaching English Vocabulary at Sixth Grade Students of Raudhatul Jannah Islamic Elementary School."

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. It aimed to investigate the strategies used by a teacher in teaching English vocabulary, how those strategies were implemented, and the challenges encountered in the process. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the key instrument, and data are collected in a natural setting using multiple techniques (Sugiyono, 2013). Moreover, qualitative research allows researchers to ask participants general, open-ended questions, giving them the freedom to express their views broadly without being constrained by the researcher's perspective

(Creswell, 2015). This flexible and participant-centered approach was suitable for exploring the teaching practices and experiences of the teacher in a real classroom context.

First, the researcher conducted classroom observations to gather data relevant to the research questions, particularly to identify the vocabulary teaching strategies applied by the teacher during the learning process. Second, a structured interview was carried out with the sixth-grade English teacher to gain deeper insights into how the strategies were implemented in the classroom, as well as to explore the challenges faced by the teacher during the teaching and learning process. Third, questionnaires were distributed to ten sixth-grade students to collect their perspectives on the effectiveness of the vocabulary teaching strategies used by the teacher. Lastly, document analysis was conducted by reviewing lesson plans and other instructional materials to support and validate the data obtained from observations, interviews, questionnaire and document review. This combination of data sources enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of both the strategies employed and the obstacles encountered by the teacher in teaching English vocabulary.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes that emerge from the data. Through this approach, the researcher was able to explore recurring ideas and meaningful insights related to the teacher's strategies, their implementation, and the challenges faced in teaching vocabulary (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Result and Discussion

During the research conducted between April and July 2025, the teacher at Raudhatul Jannah Islamic Elementary School applied four main strategies in teaching English vocabulary: using pictures, games, songs, and task-based activities. These strategies were implemented through various engaging classroom practices and were observed directly during lessons. The data were also supported by interviews, questionnaires, and document review. The following are the findings:

1. Using Pictures

The teacher used pictures as a visual aid to help students better comprehend and memorize vocabulary, particularly those related to past activities. For example, illustrations representing actions such as studying or reading were shown to support students in linking words to concrete meanings. Students were asked to guess the depicted activities and pronounce the vocabulary collectively. These visuals were not only used during individual practice but also integrated into group activities, where students matched pictures with appropriate past actions. This strategy encouraged collaboration and made vocabulary learning more interactive. According to Zurgawi, Amirullah, and Maemuna (2023), pictures enable students to understand meanings more quickly and simplify the process of learning a target language. The frequent repetition and interaction around visual cues supported better retention and understanding among students.

2. Games

Games were a regular and important part of the teacher's vocabulary instruction. They helped create a more dynamic and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, thereby increasing students' motivation. The teacher used physical games such as a shoe pathway game, where students jumped from one shoe to another and completed vocabulary-based challenges upon reaching the whiteboard. This approach made the learning process more engaging and memorable. The physical movement and competitive element encouraged active participation from all students. As noted by Dourda et al. (2013), games can enhance the enjoyment of language learning while providing a contextual and immersive learning environment that promotes better vocabulary retention.

3. Songs

Songs were also incorporated into vocabulary instruction to support auditory learning and emotional engagement. The teacher selected songs relevant to the lesson topic and asked students to memorize and sing them together in class. One example was the use of the song "I Have a Dream", which introduced students to vocabulary related to abstract concepts such as dreams and hopes. After singing, students participated in a discussion to identify unfamiliar words and practice their meanings. This activity helped students absorb vocabulary in a natural and enjoyable way while also enhancing their familiarity with sentence patterns. (Turang, Sanerita, and Paula, 2022) highlight that English songs are an effective medium for reviewing and remembering vocabulary.

4. Making task

Following interactive sessions like games or songs, the teacher assigned follow-up tasks that required students to apply the vocabulary they had learned. These assignments served both as reinforcement and informal assessment tools. For instance, students completed worksheets that involved sentence completion with past tense verbs and matching images to actions. These activities allowed students to demonstrate understanding and promoted independent application of vocabulary in context. The teacher also provided feedback and monitored students' progress during these tasks, helping to consolidate learning. Task-based vocabulary learning fosters an interactive and meaningful learning atmosphere, enabling students to engage more deeply with the material and use language purposefully (Hastuti, Rahmawatilela, & Sudewi, 2023).

In addition to the teacher interview and classroom observations, ten students participated in completing a questionnaire designed to gather their perceptions of the teacher's strategies in teaching English vocabulary. The results of the questionnaire indicated a positive response from the students. Most of them agreed that the use of pictures, games, songs, and task-based activities made the learning process more enjoyable, interactive, and easier to understand. These findings suggest that the strategies implemented by the teacher were not only effective from an instructional perspective but also well-received by the students, contributing to a more supportive and engaging learning environment. Furthermore, to identifying the strategies used in vocabulary teaching, this study also investigated the challenges faced by teachers during the learning process, including:

1) Lack of Student Motivation

Motivation plays a key role in students' participation and success in learning English. However, observations and interviews revealed that many students were passive, unenthusiastic, and often disengaged during class. The teacher noted that despite using various strategies, some students remained uninterested, possibly due to the perception that English is a difficult subject.

2) Insufficient Time

Time constraints emerged as a significant challenge. At Raudhatul Islamic Elementary SchoolJannah, more learning time is allocated for religious subjects. As a result, English lessons receive limited time, making it difficult for teachers to deliver material effectively especially vocabulary, which requires repetition and consistent practice.

3) Students' Limited Vocabulary

Students' lack of basic vocabulary knowledge hindered their ability to understand lessons, follow instructions, and communicate. Many students were unfamiliar with even simple words like "eat" or "sleep," as English instruction at the school begins relatively late. This weak foundation makes it challenging to introduce new vocabulary.

Discussion

The study found that the teacher employed four strategies to teach vocabulary: using pictures, games, songs, and task-based activities. Pictures helped students associate words with real-life objects, enhancing comprehension and retention. Pictures have motivated the students, made the subjects they are dealing with clearer, and illustrated the general idea (Wright, 1989). Games, such as competitions and matching activities, made learning more engaging and enjoyable. Game strategy can make students feel happy and interested in learning vocabulary (Hidayat, 2016). The fun factor of games may help make words more memorable, a competitive element often serves to animate even the most lethargic students (Thornbury). Songs naturally incorporate repetition, rhythm, and melody, which help reinforce vocabulary in a way that is both enjoyable and memorable for students. Song with catchy melodies, strong rhythms, and simple vocabulary create an atmosphere that supports learning without pressure (Triwardani & Yuni, 2022). Task-based activities, including sentence construction and word matching, allowed students to apply vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Task-based learning is considered effective in facilitating learners' mastery of learning materials, especially for those whose proficiency level is not yet advanced (Putri & Sidik, 2022).

Despite of the strategies used, the teacher faced several challenges. Many students lacked motivation and often appeared disengaged during lessons. Lack of motivation in learning can negatively impact students' vocabulary development, particularly when they lack encouragement from those around them including parents, peers, and teachers (Telaumbanua et al, 2024) Limited class time also became a barrier, reducing opportunities for practice and reinforcement. The significant reduction in instructional time likely affected students' learning outcomes, as the limited time may have hindered effective instruction and engagement (Sukyadi & Lukman, 2023) Furthermore, students' limited vocabulary

made it difficult to introduce new terms effectively. Challenges faced by students in communicating in English often stem from having a limited vocabulary. To develop vocabulary skills, consistent learning and practice are essential. The more words a person knows, the stronger their overall language proficiency becomes (Amalia, Hasnawati & Ratu, 2023). As a result, the teacher had to simplify materials and provide additional support to help students follow the lessons.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study indicates that the English teacher employed a variety of strategies in teaching vocabulary to sixth-grade students at SD Islam Raudhatul Jannah, including the use of pictures, games, songs, and making task. These strategies were implemented to enhance student engagement and support vocabulary acquisition through different learning modalities. These strategies were selected based on the learning materials and the students' needs in the classroom. Their implementation helped create a more engaging and interactive learning environment by incorporating visual, auditory, and experiential elements that supported students' vocabulary comprehension. The teacher's ability to apply appropriate strategies played an important role in increasing student participation and making the learning process more meaningful. However, the effectiveness of these strategies was also influenced by external factors beyond the teacher's control. The study also, identified three main challenges in the vocabulary teaching process: lack of student motivation, insufficient learning time due to the school's emphasis on religious subjects, and students' limited vocabulary mastery. These obstacles hindered the teacher's ability to deliver material effectively and achieve optimal learning outcomes. Although the teacher made efforts to overcome these issues by adjusting teaching methods and implementing various strategies, the constraints of time and students' weak foundational knowledge continued to be significant barriers in maximizing vocabulary learning in the classroom.

Based on these findings, English teachers are encouraged to continue using various strategies in teaching vocabulary, in order to make the learning process more interesting, enjoyable, and effective in helping students understand and remember new vocabulary. Teachers should implement the vocabulary teaching strategies consistently and adjust them based on students' learning styles and needs. It is recommended that schools provide more balanced time allocation between language and religious subjects to support comprehensive language development. Additionally, the integration of vocabulary instruction into other subject areas could help reinforce learning. Teachers are also encouraged to continuously adapt their strategies to maintain student interest and address motivational issues, possibly through the use of more contextualized, student-centered, and culturally relevant materials. Collaboration with parents to support vocabulary practice at home may also contribute to better learning outcomes.

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