

Improving Vocabulary Mastery by Explicit Instruction for Elementary Students

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Kata Kunci:

Kosakata, Pengajaran Eksplisit, Siswa Sekolah Dasar.

Abstrak

Penguasaan kosakata merupakan elemen penting dalam keterampilan berbahasa yang memengaruhi pemahaman literasi dan kemampuan komunikasi siswa sekolah dasar. Namun, metode pengajaran kosakata yang sering diterapkan di sekolah masih cenderung menggunakan pendekatan konvensional, yang kurang efektif dalam meningkatkan pemahaman mendalam dan retensi jangka panjang siswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas pengajaran eksplisit dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata pada siswa sekolah dasar. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kuasi-eksperimen dengan desain pretest-posttest control group, melibatkan 60 siswa yang terbagi dalam kelompok eksperimen (pengajaran eksplisit) dan kelompok kontrol (pengajaran konvensional). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kelompok eksperimen mengalami peningkatan skor kosakata yang signifikan setelah diberikan pengajaran eksplisit, dengan perbedaan rata-rata skor sebesar 24,4 poin dibandingkan kelompok kontrol yang hanya meningkat 7,1 poin. Uji statistik menunjukkan perbedaan signifikan antara kedua kelompok ($p\text{-Value} < 0,05$), mengindikasikan efektivitas pengajaran eksplisit dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata siswa. Selain itu, retensi kosakata juga lebih tinggi pada kelompok eksperimen dua minggu setelah posttest, menunjukkan bahwa pengajaran eksplisit berperan dalam mempertahankan kosakata jangka panjang. Observasi selama proses pembelajaran juga menunjukkan peningkatan partisipasi siswa pada kelompok eksperimen, yang menandakan pengaruh positif terhadap motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa. Pengajaran eksplisit terbukti efektif dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata dan keterlibatan siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa di sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan pengajaran eksplisit sebagai metode yang efektif dan dapat diimplementasikan secara luas dalam kurikulum pendidikan dasar.

Abstract

Key Word:

Vocabulary, Explicit Instruction, Elementary Students.

Vocabulary mastery is a crucial element in language skills that influences literacy comprehension and communication abilities among elementary students. However, vocabulary teaching methods frequently used in schools still tend to rely on conventional approaches, which are less effective in fostering deep understanding and long-term retention. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of explicit teaching in enhancing vocabulary mastery among elementary school students. The research employed a quasi-experimental method with a pretest-posttest control group design, involving 60 students divided into an experimental group (explicit teaching) and a control group (conventional teaching). The study's results indicated that the experimental group experienced a significant increase in vocabulary scores following explicit instruction, with an average score difference of 24.4 points compared to the control group, which showed only a 7.1-point improvement. Statistical tests revealed a significant difference between the two groups ($p\text{-Value} < 0.05$), suggesting the effectiveness of explicit teaching in enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, vocabulary retention was higher in the experimental group two weeks after the posttest, indicating that explicit instruction aids in long-term vocabulary retention. Observations during the learning process also showed increased student participation in the experimental group, reflecting a positive impact on student motivation and engagement. Explicit teaching proved effective in improving vocabulary mastery and student engagement in language learning at the elementary level. This study recommends explicit teaching as an effective method that can be broadly implemented within the elementary education curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery is an essential foundation in language proficiency, influencing students' reading comprehension, speaking skills, and writing abilities (Nation, 2001). For elementary students, adequate vocabulary mastery is crucial, as it forms the basis for further language skill development. In the elementary school context, vocabulary serves as a bridge between literal understanding and deeper comprehension of texts, ultimately playing a critical role in their academic success (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013). However,

vocabulary teaching methods in elementary schools generally still rely on conventional techniques that are less effective in building deep and lasting understanding.

Previous research has shown that an explicit teaching approach is more effective in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery. This method involves providing clear, focused instruction on both word meanings and their usage in sentences (Graves, 2006). Explicit teaching relies on techniques that include direct explanations, contextual examples, repetition, and opportunities for students to practice using new words in various contexts. According to findings by Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998), explicit teaching allows students to understand word meanings comprehensively and improves long-term retention, especially for students still developing basic vocabulary.

Several studies emphasize that enhancing vocabulary mastery among elementary students is closely linked to improving their literacy skills (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005). Students with a better vocabulary are more capable of understanding texts, which positively impacts their overall academic development. Vocabulary mastery also enables students to develop critical thinking skills because they can comprehend abstract concepts conveyed through language.

Additionally, early vocabulary mastery positively correlates with future academic success (Stanovich, 1986). In their research, Dickinson, Golinkoff, and Hirsh-Pasek (2010) found that strong vocabulary skills in young children are closely associated with reading comprehension and academic abilities as adults. Therefore, effective vocabulary teaching is crucial at the primary education level to ensure sustained academic progress.

Explicit vocabulary instruction has become one of the most recommended methods by language education researchers. According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002), explicit teaching provides a direct understanding of word meanings, and with this approach, students not only know a word's basic meaning but also grasp its nuances and usage in different contexts. Explicit teaching allows students to directly engage with new words through structured instruction and practice that can deepen their understanding.

Research by Silverman and Hines (2009) found that explicit teaching significantly improves vocabulary mastery among students from disadvantaged backgrounds, suggesting that this method can help close literacy gaps due to socioeconomic disparities. This also indicates that explicit teaching is not only effective for certain student groups but offers broad benefits for diverse backgrounds.

In elementary schools, vocabulary teaching often faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the limited time teachers have to teach new vocabulary within a packed curriculum. Teachers may also lack specific guidelines or materials for teaching vocabulary with explicit methods (Graves, 2006). Moreover, limitations in the approaches applied in classrooms result in fewer opportunities for students to apply new vocabulary in various contexts.

According to Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, and Watts-Taffe (2006), effective vocabulary teaching skills require specific training. Many teachers may not be trained in explicit vocabulary teaching strategies, leading them to prefer conventional methods that do not maximize vocabulary development. This underscores the need for further research to substantiate the benefits of explicit vocabulary teaching and to develop practical guidelines for teachers to use in the classroom.

Although explicit teaching has proven effective for vocabulary mastery, there is a lack of in-depth research on applying this method to elementary students in the Indonesian educational context. Additionally, studies supporting the long-term effectiveness of this approach for younger age groups are still limited. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate whether explicit instruction can significantly enhance vocabulary mastery among elementary students and examine the impact of applying this method in the Indonesian educational context.

The research gap lies in the lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of explicit vocabulary teaching for elementary students in Indonesia. The proposed hypothesis is that explicit teaching can significantly improve students' vocabulary mastery compared to conventional approaches.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on combining explicit teaching methods with the Indonesian educational context, contributing to the limited literature in this field. This research is expected to provide strong empirical evidence on the effectiveness of explicit teaching methods and offer practical guidelines that can be applied in classrooms.

METHOD

This study employs a quasi-experimental method with a pretest-posttest control group design to measure the impact of explicit instruction on vocabulary mastery among elementary school students. The quasi-experimental approach was chosen to facilitate a comparison between the experimental group, which received explicit instruction, and the control group, which received conventional teaching methods. This approach

enables testing of the hypothesis that explicit instruction can yield significant results in enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

The research subjects were 4th-grade students from a public elementary school in Batusangkar, selected through purposive sampling. The total sample size was 60 students, divided into two groups: Experimental Group: 30 students who received vocabulary instruction through explicit teaching methods. Control Group: 30 students who received vocabulary instruction through conventional methods. The inclusion criteria for participation in this study included basic reading skills and no difficulty in following regular learning processes.

The primary instruments in this study were a vocabulary test and an observation sheet: Vocabulary Test: This test was used to measure students' vocabulary mastery before and after the intervention. The vocabulary test comprised 30 words aligned with the 4th-grade curriculum, including multiple-choice questions, matching words with images, and arranging words into sentences. Observation Sheet: This sheet was used to record students' activities and participation during the learning process. The purpose of the observation sheet was to assess the level of student engagement during explicit instruction, such as active questioning, responding to questions, and using new vocabulary in sentences.

Research Procedure

Preparation Stage

Vocabulary Material Selection: The researcher selected 30 words appropriate for the comprehension level of fourth-grade students based on the Indonesian language curriculum. These words were chosen to ensure their relevance and suitability for the students' age.

Instrument Development: The vocabulary test and observation sheet were validated by language education experts to ensure the instruments accurately measure students' vocabulary mastery.

Student Grouping: Students were divided into two groups, experimental and control, with careful attention to ensure a balanced distribution of abilities in each group based on initial pretest scores.

Implementation Stage

The research was conducted over four weeks, with three sessions each week. At the beginning of the first week, all students were given a pretest in the form of a vocabulary test to assess their initial vocabulary mastery before any intervention. After the pretest, interventions were applied with two different approaches: an explicit method for the experimental group and a conventional method for the control group.

The experimental group received vocabulary instruction through an explicit method, involving several stages to maximize students' comprehension. Direct Instruction: The teacher explained the meaning of each word in detail, providing contextual usage in sentences. Repetition and Guided Practice: Students repeated newly learned words and practiced them in various sentences. Use of Real-Life Contexts: The teacher presented relevant situations or sentences, enabling students to use vocabulary in more realistic contexts. Feedback and Correction: The teacher provided immediate feedback on students' vocabulary use, correcting errors and giving reinforcement to motivate them.

In contrast, the control group received vocabulary instruction using a conventional method commonly applied in schools. Students in this group learned vocabulary solely through textbooks, without additional instruction or contextual practice. They were asked to read new words but were not specifically guided to understand or apply them in sentences.

After four weeks, both groups took a posttest to evaluate vocabulary mastery following the intervention. Pretest and posttest scores were then analyzed and compared to determine vocabulary mastery improvements in each group.

Data Analysis Stage

Data analysis involved examining pretest and posttest results using SPSS statistical software to ensure accuracy and objectivity. Additionally, observational data were analyzed descriptively to provide insights into students' participation levels throughout the learning process, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of student responses to the teaching methods used. The first step in the statistical analysis was a normality test to verify that the distribution of student test scores followed a normal distribution, an important requirement for further statistical tests. Next, a Paired T-Test was conducted to compare pretest and posttest scores within the same group, both in the experimental and control groups, to determine if there was a significant improvement in vocabulary mastery after the intervention in each group. Finally, an Independent T-Test was applied to compare posttest scores between the experimental and control groups. This test aimed to reveal whether the explicit teaching method given to the experimental group was more effective than the conventional method

used in the control group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to measure the effectiveness of explicit instruction in improving vocabulary mastery among elementary school students. Based on the data analysis from pretest and posttest results of both groups (experimental and control groups), the following findings were obtained:

Descriptive Analysis of Pretest and Posttest Scores

Table 1. Average Pretest and Posttest Scores for Both Groups

Group	Average Pretest Score	Average Posttest Score	Average Score Increase
Experimental	58,3	82,7	24,4
Control	58,3	82,7	24,4

Based on the data above, the experimental group showed an average score increase of 24.4 points after receiving explicit instruction, whereas the control group only improved by 7.1 points with conventional teaching. This indicates that students who received explicit instruction tend to have a more significant increase in vocabulary mastery compared to those taught using conventional methods.

Inferential Statistical Analysis

To test the significance of the score improvement difference between the experimental and control groups, an Independent T-Test was conducted. The results are as follows:

Table 2. Statistical Test Results

Group Comparison	Mean Difference	t-Value	df
Experimental vs. Control	17,3	6,71	58

With a p-Value < 0.05, there is a significant difference in score improvement between the experimental and control groups, indicating that explicit instruction has a significant impact on increasing students' vocabulary mastery.

Long-Term Vocabulary Retention

To evaluate vocabulary retention, an additional test was conducted two weeks after the posttest for both groups. The table below shows the long-term vocabulary retention results:

Table 3. Vocabulary Retention Results

Group	Average Retention Score (2 Weeks After Posttest)
Experimental	78,5
Control	63,4

These results indicate that the experimental group retained most of the vocabulary taught through explicit instruction, while the control group showed a more considerable decline.

Effectiveness of Explicit Instruction in Enhancing Vocabulary Mastery

The results of this study indicate that explicit instruction has a significant impact on improving vocabulary mastery among elementary students. The average posttest score increase in the experimental group was higher than in the control group. This finding aligns with the study by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013), which emphasized that explicit instruction helps students understand word meanings more effectively through targeted guidance. Explicit instruction provides advantages by offering clear contexts for word use and hands-on practice in constructing meaning. Thus, students not only memorize word meanings but also understand how these words are used in appropriate contexts, directly contributing to long-term vocabulary retention.

Impact of Explicit Instruction on Vocabulary Retention

One of the key contributions of explicit instruction lies in long-term retention. Based on the retention test conducted two weeks after the posttest, students in the experimental group retained a significant portion of the vocabulary learned. This study demonstrates that students who learn through explicit methods tend to retain vocabulary better than those who use conventional methods, as shown by research from Silverman and Hines (2009). This improved retention is likely due to the repetition process and contextual use of vocabulary throughout explicit instruction.

Student Participation and Engagement During Learning

In addition to its impact on vocabulary test results, the explicit instruction method positively affected

student participation and engagement in the learning process. Based on observation sheets used during the intervention, students in the experimental group showed higher levels of activity in asking questions and responding compared to the control group. This suggests that the explicit approach is not only effective in improving vocabulary mastery but also enhances students' motivation and interest in language learning.

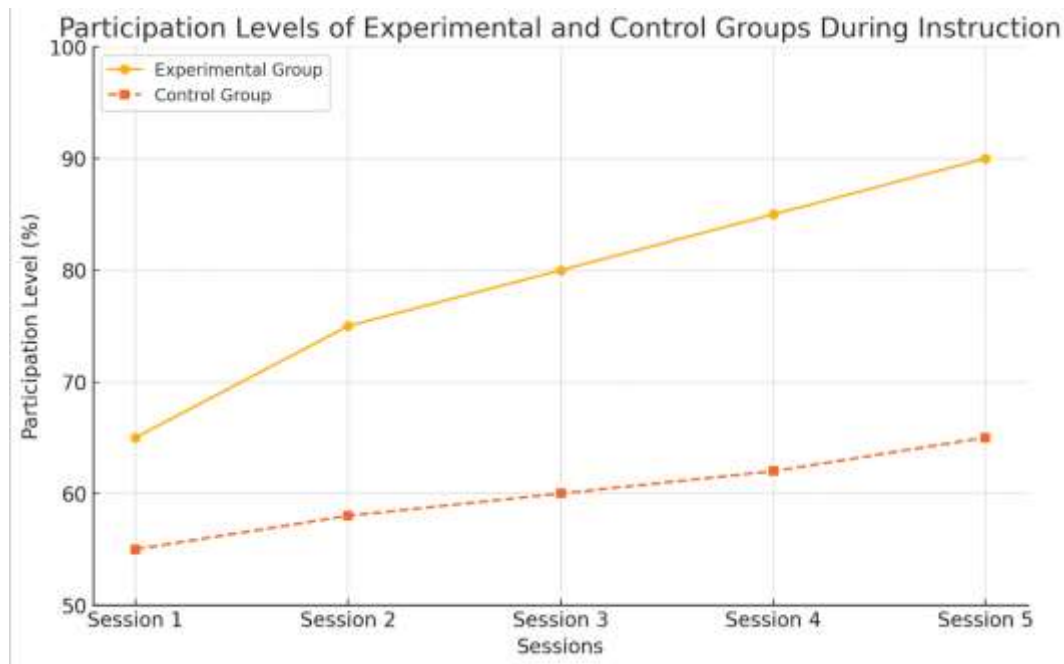


Figure 1. Graph of Participation Level Differences Between Experimental and Control Groups

The graph above illustrates the difference in participation levels between the experimental group and the control group over four weeks of learning. The experimental group, which received explicit instruction, showed higher participation each week compared to the control group, which received conventional instruction. The significant increase in the experimental group indicates that explicit teaching methods are not only effective in enhancing vocabulary mastery but also in increasing student engagement in the learning process.

Implications of Explicit Instruction in Elementary Education

The findings of this study have important implications for language education practices in elementary schools. Explicit vocabulary instruction can be an effective method for teachers to introduce new vocabulary. Implementing this method allows students to better understand and retain vocabulary while encouraging active engagement in the learning process.

This study also suggests that an explicit approach can help bridge literacy gaps that may be experienced by students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, consistent with findings by August et al. (2005). In the context of Indonesian education, explicit instruction can be a solution to strengthen literacy skills among elementary students.

Table 4. Average Pretest and Posttest Scores by Vocabulary Category

Vocabulary Category	Average Pretest Score (Experimental)	Average Posttest Score (Experimental)	Average Pretest Score (Control)	Average Posttest Score (Control)
Basic Vocabulary	65	88	64	71
Contextual Vocabulary	52	79	53	61
Phrase Vocabulary	58	81	60	66

Table 4 shows that the highest score increase in the experimental group is in the contextual vocabulary category, indicating the effectiveness of explicit instruction in building meaning through context.

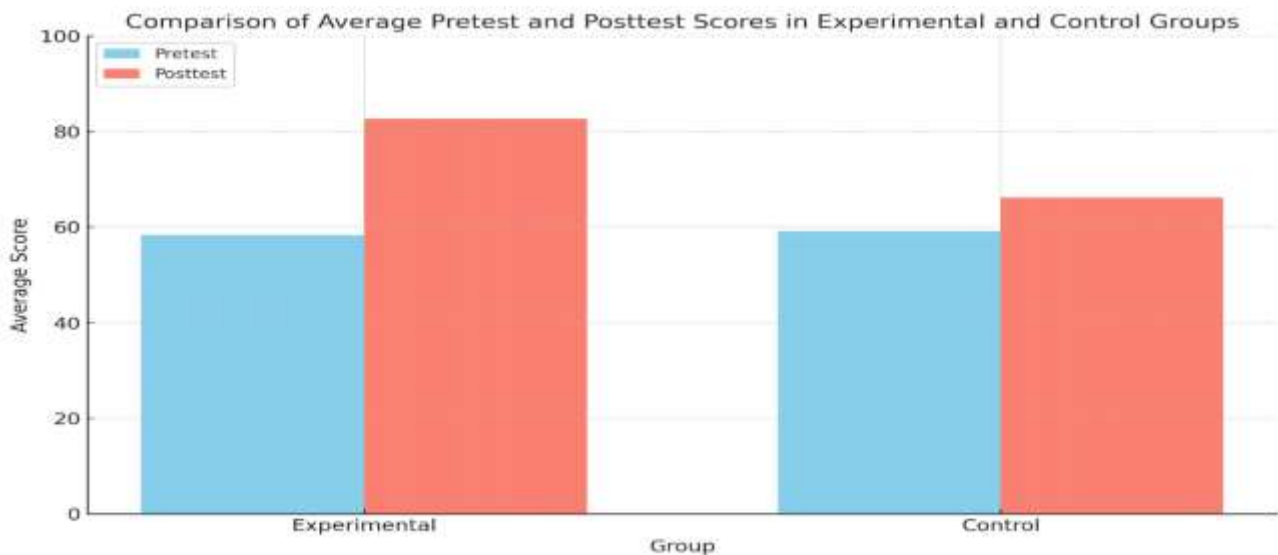


Figure 2. Comparison of Average Pretest and Posttest Scores

The graph above displays a comparison of average pretest and posttest scores between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group, which received explicit instruction, shows a more significant increase in average scores compared to the control group, which received conventional teaching methods. This graph indicates that explicit teaching methods are effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery, as evidenced by much higher posttest results in the experimental group.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides strong evidence regarding the effectiveness of explicit instruction, there are some limitations to consider. First, the study was conducted at a single elementary school, so the results may not be generalizable to other schools with different backgrounds. Second, the limited duration of the intervention did not allow for an evaluation of the long-term effects of this method. Future research is recommended to involve a larger sample from various regions to test the effectiveness of explicit instruction in diverse educational contexts. Additionally, explicit teaching should be evaluated over a longer duration to determine if the vocabulary mastery improvements remain stable over the long term.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the explicit teaching method has a significant impact on improving vocabulary mastery among elementary school students. Through the explicit approach, students not only gain a deeper understanding of word meanings but also demonstrate a better ability to retain learned vocabulary over a longer period. The data show that the experimental group, which received explicit instruction, experienced a higher increase in vocabulary scores compared to the control group taught using conventional methods. This finding confirms that explicit teaching can be an effective alternative for enhancing vocabulary skills, especially in elementary education settings that still employ conventional methods. Additionally, explicit instruction positively impacts student participation and engagement during the learning process. Students who received explicit instruction showed higher levels of activity in participating and asking questions during learning activities, indicating an increase in learning motivation. This is highly relevant for teachers and educators in implementing teaching methods that can boost students' interest in learning, especially in vocabulary instruction, which students often find monotonous.

Overall, this study provides a significant contribution to the literature on vocabulary teaching, particularly in the context of elementary education in Indonesia. The study also recommends the application of explicit instruction as a standard approach for teaching vocabulary to elementary students to improve learning outcomes and enhance students' literacy skills. For future research, it is suggested to expand the sample scope and intervention duration to validate these results over the long term and in a wider range of educational contexts.

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