

Investigating the Utilization of *Vocabulary Builder* Courseware in Broadening EFL Learners' Vocabulary Mastery

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Abstrak

Penguasaan kosakata merupakan komponen penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa, khususnya dalam konteks Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Landasan kosakata yang kuat tidak hanya memfasilitasi pemahaman dan komunikasi yang lebih baik tetapi juga memungkinkan pembelajar untuk terlibat lebih dalam dengan bahasa tersebut. Namun, memperluas kosa kata seseorang dalam bahasa non-pribumi menghadirkan tantangan yang signifikan, seringkali memerlukan metode pengajaran yang inovatif untuk meningkatkan hasil pembelajaran. Dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, perangkat kursus *Vocabulary Builder* telah muncul sebagai alat yang menjanjikan dalam lanskap teknologi pendidikan, menawarkan pendekatan terstruktur dan interaktif untuk penguasaan kosakata. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dalam menganalisis data dari kuesioner. Pengajaran bahasa juga sangat membutuhkan bantuan teknologi agar lebih mudah dan efektif. Dengan menggabungkan metode dan teknologi tradisional, banyak penelitian telah membuktikan bahwa ini jauh lebih baik dibandingkan hanya menggunakan metode tradisional. Oleh karena itu, pengajaran kosakata melalui perangkat kursus akan memberikan hasil yang baik karena tidak hanya ditekankan pada pengenalan kata baru tetapi juga pengucapannya ditingkatkan.

Abstract

Key Word:

Vocabulary Mastery, ICT, English as a Foreign Language.

The mastery of vocabulary is a crucial component of language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A strong vocabulary foundation not only facilitates better comprehension and communication but also enables learners to engage more deeply with the language. However, expanding one's vocabulary in a non-native language presents significant challenges, often requiring innovative instructional methods to enhance learning outcomes. In recent years, Vocabulary Builder courseware has emerged as a promising tool in the educational technology landscape, offering structured and interactive approaches to vocabulary acquisition. This research employed qualitative method in analyzing the data from the questionnaire. Teaching a language also highly needs technology assistance to make it easier and more effective. By combining both traditional method and technology, many research have proven that it is more way better than just using the traditional one. To that reason, teaching a vocabulary through a courseware will give a great result since it is not only emphasized in introducing a new word but also pronunciation is promoted.

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INTRODUCTION

The mastery of vocabulary is a crucial component of language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A strong vocabulary foundation not only facilitates better comprehension and communication but also enables learners to engage more deeply with the language. However, expanding one's vocabulary in a non-native language presents significant challenges, often requiring innovative instructional methods to enhance learning outcomes. In recent years, *Vocabulary Builder* courseware has emerged as a promising tool in the educational technology landscape, offering structured and interactive approaches to vocabulary acquisition.

Having a broad knowledge of vocabulary will assist students in learning the four skills; speaking, listening, reading, and writing which are emphasized in the class. Yet, teaching vocabulary is not like a piece of cake. Many EFL students are unaware how to deal with questions which asking about the synonym or antonym of a word in the text or a close text question. They said that they are sometimes confused to answer

that typical question because they have no broad knowledge of vocabulary. It means that vocabulary is the basic competence to make students perform the four skills easier and greater (Nation: 2001). To support the previous statement, Garcia (1991) conducted a research about the reason on the low performance reading test of Hispanic children, and surprisingly the result showed that lack of vocabulary in the questions becomes the biggest factor of their low performance reading comprehension. Thus, it is understandable that vocabulary holds the primary role in language learning process.

These days, many people are interested in using technology to ease their activities and entertain their own self. Moreover, in education field, technology has also been flowering as its advantage to help teachers deliver their material. This research found some interesting findings that by using courseware in the class can motivate learners in learning vocabulary. They state that they are happy to have a new method in learning a vocabulary and it is more interesting. They also became highly motivated to learn many new words and are aware that it can be useful to help them solving some challenges in doing school assignments and answering questions in the exam. VB is a kind of vocabulary courseware which provides some quizzes that can scaffold students to learn vocabulary while they solve the questions. In its quiz, VB assigns students to find a synonym and description of every word displayed. Talking about synonym, it is one of discussions in semantics which deals with the word that can give the same meaning. Teaching synonym means teacher also broaden students' insight of vocabulary.

Learning vocabulary is crucial in learning language process. As stated by Krashen (1989), "A large vocabulary is, of course, essential for mastery a language." This means that to mastery a language, learners have to extend their vocabulary knowledge so that they can be fluency in language they intend to learn. It is important for English language learners to have an extensive insight of English vocabulary. Meara (1996:35) writes, "Lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence". Undoubtedly, to be a good communicator English language learners need to grasp as much as possible lexical competence. Also, having lexical competence determines his or her level of English proficiency.

Richards and Renadya assert, "Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write." It is totally understandable that to be able mastery a language, vocabulary becomes the main aspect to be mastered before going to other skills such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening. In order to achieve instructional objectives, teachers have to initially build strong vocabulary insight to the learners.

Many experts give their thought about the categories of vocabulary. Nation (2001) endorses vocabulary divided into two categories; receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. Nation (2001:24-25) explained that receptive use of vocabulary "involves perceiving the form of a word while listening or reading or retrieving its meaning"; productive use of vocabulary means "wanting to express a meaning through speaking or writing and retrieving and producing appropriate spoken or written word form". In brief, receptive vocabulary is the word that can be understood when the English language learners hear or read. While if the English language learners can use a word properly when they speak or write, meaning they have productive vocabulary control.

Regarding to the increasing of ICT in instructional process, many platforms and courseware are created to teach material effectively. In vocabulary field, a courseware attracted my attention to apply it in her research; *Vocabulary Builder* (VB). VB offers an interesting learning process through a quiz. Wang (2013) asserts that learning a vocabulary through English vocabulary teaching courseware is easier to be grasped by students. Besides, VB does not only teach vocabulary, it also gives the proper pronunciation in every word asked in quiz so that students can also improve their pronunciation while learning vocabulary. This advantage is in line with the courseware module design which is stated by Wang (2013) that a vocabulary courseware must have the legible module. Legible module is related to how students can solve the pronunciation problem. Wang (2013) also states five principles that should be paid attention to while designing and choosing the courseware; scientific principle, teaching principle, artistic principle, interactivity principle, and simplicity principle. In this research, the reason why VB is implemented simply because it fulfills all the principles in designing and choosing the courseware especially and English vocabulary teaching courseware. Furthermore, this courseware can also be the main means in teaching vocabulary or to be additional means to assist teacher to build language learners' vocabulary insight.

Talking about the importance of vocabulary in language learning, many researchers have conducted some research to examine some methods, techniques or media to enhance learners' vocabulary competence. Suwantarathip and Orawiatnakul (2015) conducted research about the use of mobile-assisted exercises to support students' vocabulary mastery. They use SMS and MMS to be the means to teach vocabulary. Their research is quantitative method and it showed that the use of SMS and MMS does really work on students'

vocabulary mastery as it is indicated by the learners' increased score from the pre-test to the post-test and from students' answer to the questionnaire. The experiment group is given the vocabularies through the SMS while the control group uses paper-based material. Their students claim that by having materials sent to SMS, they can read it every time and everywhere. Yet, they only get lists of words without knowing how to pronounce it properly.

Another researcher is Tambun (2014) who applied a game as the media. She conducted research about the use of crossword puzzle to increase learners' vocabulary mastery. Quantitative method is used in her research and the result of her research shows that the use of crossword puzzle is effective to promote learners' vocabulary knowledge. This result is indicated by the learners' score in pre-test and post-test which are increased after applying the media. Yet, the students only learn a word without any examples which can help them to practice the word. The third or the last researcher who conducted research on vocabulary mastery is Ariana and Mirabella (2014). Interestingly, they also use Information and Communication Technology to increase learners' vocabulary mastery yet they choose platform instead of courseware so that they need to provide the materials themselves. They choose *Facebook* platform as a media for learners to broaden their vocabulary knowledge. This study is a case study which means it used a qualitative method. The finding of the research shows there are no significant differences on the experimental group which uses *Facebook* platform and the control group which uses the traditional technique in developing their vocabulary mastery. However, there is an improvement from the score of the pre-test to the post-test. It can be said that *Facebook* platform is worth applying in enhancing learners' vocabulary knowledge.

This research focuses on investigating the utilization of Vocabulary Builder courseware and its effectiveness in broadening the vocabulary mastery of EFL learners. Vocabulary Builder courseware typically incorporates features such as multimedia content, spaced repetition systems, and gamified elements to support the learning process. These features aim to enhance retention, facilitate the contextual understanding of words, and make the learning experience more engaging. Despite the growing interest in digital learning tools, there is a need for more empirical evidence to evaluate their impact on vocabulary acquisition and to understand how they can be best integrated into language education.

METHODS

This research conducted in University of Al-Khairiyah University specifically in Islamic Religion Faculty (FAI) in English Education Program. This research employed qualitative method in analyzing the data from the questionnaire. The questionnaire is given as the instrument in order to know the impact of the implementation of VB to students in English Education Program. Six students were interviewed using the questions in the questionnaire. The questionnaire adopted the Likert-Scale and the result of the questionnaire will be discussed in the later part of this paper.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the questionnaire employed in this research, the result is satisfying knowing that most of them think that VB can highly increase their vocabulary mastery. The questionnaire consisted of ten close-ended questions and Likert-Scale was used as the answer options which consists of five answers; strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, strongly agree.

The first question was about the utilization of VB in learning vocabulary. It is such a surprising result since all of them answered 5 (strongly agree) and it means 100% students strongly agree that VB is useful to be implemented to reach their goal in learning vocabulary. The second question was about the utilization of VB to help them memorize new words. 40% of students answered 4 which means they agree and the rest of them (60%) answered 5 which means strongly agree. For the third question, the students were asked whether VB make learning vocabulary more interesting or not. The result showed that all of them answered 5 which means they all agree that learning vocabulary through VB is more interesting than the traditional method. The next question or question number 4 was about the access to use VB. Some of them (40%) responded 3 (uncertain) since it is quite burdening for them to always use mobile data whenever they want to accomplish the quiz. The rest of them (60%) responded by giving 5 (strongly agree) as the answer which means they agree that VB is easy to get access.

The fifth question asked them whether VB could enable them to review the vocabulary. All of them (100%) answered 5 (strongly agree) since they can redo the quiz to review the words whenever they want to. The sixth question was about the increasing of vocabulary knowledge by using VB. The result showed that 100% of students answered 5 (strongly agree). The seventh question was about their eagerness to learn a new vocabulary by the VB utilization. All of the students answered 5 so it means that they are strongly agree to the

utilization of VB can make them eager to learn a new word. The eighth question was about the utilization of VB helps them in solving their problem while completing exercises from their teacher, and the result showed 20% of them answered 3 (uncertain) 40% answered 4 (agree) and the rest (40%) answered 5 (strongly agree). The ninth question asked whether VB provides freedom of learning and all of them (100%) answered 5 (strongly agree) since they are free to learn a vocabulary through VB without having any limitation. The last question or the tenth question was about the awareness of vocabulary usage. 20% of them answered 4 (agree) while the rest (80%) answered 5 (strongly agree).

After checking the answer to the questionnaire about the use of VB, it is safe to state that the students responded positively on the implementation of VB in broadening their vocabulary mastery. However, the utilization of VB should be combined by the traditional method which the teacher also has to explain the words broader. Also, since its implementation needs to use mobile and PC which sometimes in the school is restricted, teacher can use VB as the supplemental material outside the class. Teacher can assign students to complete some levels of quiz outside the class and both teacher and students can discuss those words and give exercise by asking them to write something using words they have learned. Thus, the teacher can use blended course which combines both traditional method and technology.

CONCLUSION

In this digital era, the utilization of technology is widely implemented in almost all human activities including in teaching and learning process. Teaching a language also highly needs technology assistance to make it easier and more effective. By combining both traditional method and technology, many research have proven that it is more way better than just using the traditional one. To that reason, teaching a vocabulary through a courseware will give a great result since it is not only emphasized in introducing a new word but also pronunciation is promoted. Yet, teacher cannot rely only on the use of courseware as the main activity in the classroom; it also needs to be done along with teacher's instruction.

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