The Use of Vocabulary Books in Vocabulary Development: A Case Study of The Tenth Grades

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Keywords:
Vocabulary, Vocabulary Book,
Vocabulary Development

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Abstract: Low mastery of English vocabulary remains a significant challenge for vocational high school students, particularly those in the 10th-grade TSM class at SMK Islam 2 Wlingi. Many students experience difficulties with pronunciation, spelling, and understanding words with multiple meanings, which limits their ability to develop broader language skills. The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation of a vocabulary book as a learning medium and to investigate students' responses toward its use in vocabulary development. This research employed a qualitative case study design involving one English teacher and three students with different proficiency levels. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and documentation from November 2024 to June 2025. Thematic analysis was applied based on the framework of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that the vocabulary book was implemented through activities such as vocabulary listing, contextual reading, sentence making, quizzes, and assessments. Students responded positively, showing increased motivation, improved comprehension, and better vocabulary retention, although engagement varied according to proficiency levels. In conclusion, the study suggests that vocabulary books can serve as an effective instructional tool for teachers and as a valuable resource for students to support independent and consistent vocabulary learning.

INTRODUCTION

English has long held a pivotal role in Indonesian education as the country's first foreign language. While it does not function as the official national language like Indonesian, its presence is deeply embedded in the education system as a tool to prepare students for global interactions. The mastery of English is viewed as a gateway to international communication, higher education opportunities, and career advancement. In particular, the rapid growth of globalization and technological development has made English an indispensable skill for future generations. Alfarisy (2021) highlights that globalization not only

Fastest cross-cultural interaction but also accelerates digital innovation, requiring learners to acquire language skill that are flexible, practical, and adaptive. Therefore, students who are competent in English are expected to be better prepared to contribute to national competitiveness in the global arena.

The central role of English in globalization extends beyond communication skills. In practice, English is closely tied to the transfer of knowledge, since most of the academic resources, research articles, and technical documentation are produced in English. This makes English not only a tool for daily interactions but also a medium for accessing cutting-edge scientific and technological knowledge. As a result, education policies in Indonesia increasingly emphasize the importance of English proficiency as part of preparing students for global challenges. At the same time, these policies underscore the necessity of preserving national cultural identity. Havifah & Khosiyono (2018) note that language education should promote cross-cultural competence, enabling students to communicate effectively in global contexts while maintaining Indonesian cultural values. This dual orientation ensures that Indonesian learners are not only globally competitive but also rooted in their national identity.

In this context, vocational high schools (SMK) in Indonesia hold a particularly strategic position. SMKs are designed to provide practical and industry-relevant education, equipping students with skills that directly align with their future careers. Consequently, English instruction in vocational settings must reflect the specific needs of students' majors and professional pathways. A needs analysis conducted for students majoring in computer network engineering (TKJ) illustrates this point clearly. The analysis revealed that students required English materials focusing on professional communication, technical vocabulary, and applied language skills, such as writing formal emails and conducting business conversations (Cahyati et al., 2015). Interestingly, grammar instruction was found to be less of a priority, as students rarely used advanced grammar in daily practice. Instead, vocabulary knowledge and communicative competence were regarded as the more urgent needs for vocational learners.

Despite this, textbooks and curricula in vocational schools often emphasize general English skills rather than specialized content tailored to industry requirements. This mismatch between classroom instruction and workplace demands raises significant challenges for both students and teachers. To bridge this gap, scholars and policymakers recommend integrating English for Specific Purposes (ESP) into vocational education. ESP is designed to align language instruction with professional contexts, ensuring that learners acquire communication skills that are directly applicable to their future workplaces. Nurdiana et al. (2022) argue that ESP emphasizes effective communication in professional environments, which allows students to master the terminology, expressions, and discourse patterns relevant to their fields. This alignment is crucial for vocational schools, where the success of education is measured not only by academic performance but also by employability and readiness to face industry demands.

Within ESP, vocabulary mastery stands as a fundamental requirement. Without adequate vocabulary, students struggle to understand technical instructions, participate in professional dialogues, or engage with workplace documents. Saripah (2022) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge enables learners to acquire and transmit information both orally and in writing. Vocabulary, in this sense, goes beyond simple word lists; it includes idioms, technical terms, and context-specific expressions that learners must master to function effectively. The acquisition of vocabulary thus forms the foundation of students' communicative competence, which supports their academic and professional development.

From an educational perspective, vocabulary acquisition influences not only linguistic ability but also broader academic success. Students with an extensive vocabulary are more likely to comprehend complex reading materials, participate in class discussions, and articulate their ideas with clarity. Hadist & Rosdiana, (2021) underline that vocabulary is the key competency that underpins other language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Without enough vocabulary, these skills cannot be effectively developed. This aligns with Zahro et

al. (2020), who argue that children's vocabulary mastery significantly shapes their learning outcomes and overall success in school. Thus, vocabulary development should be prioritized in teaching practices, and educators must design strategies to support its acquisition in both general and vocational contexts.

Educators have implemented a range of strategies to promote vocabulary mastery. One approach is to integrate vocabulary exercises into daily lessons, ensuring consistent exposure and reinforcement. Another is to encourage extensive reading across multiple genres, which provides students with opportunities to encounter vocabulary in diverse contexts. Classroom discussions can also serve as platforms for students to actively practice new words actively, thereby deepening their engagement with language. Additionally, technological innovations, such as vocabulary-building apps, interactive platforms, and online quizzes, have expanded opportunities for learners to practice vocabulary outside the classroom. These strategies complement traditional methods and highlight the importance of combining various tools to support successful learning.

The use of vocabulary instruction can be understood through Thornbury (2002) principles of vocabulary teaching. These ten principles: contextualization, repetition, retrieval, spaced rehearsal, mnemonics, recording, affective depth, semantic networks, language awareness, and personalization, form a comprehensive framework for vocabulary development. Contextualization ensures that new words are introduced in meaningful settings, helping learners associate vocabulary with real-life usage. Repetition and spaced rehearsal strengthen memory through repeated exposure over time, while retrieval emphasizes the importance of active recall. Mnemonics offer creative strategies for memorization, and recording provides learners with systematic ways to organize and review vocabulary. Affective depth highlights the role of emotional connection in learning, as words tied to personal experiences are more memorable. Semantic networks enable learners to understand the relationships among words, such as synonyms and thematic clusters. Language awareness encourages reflection on word forms, collocations, and grammatical usage, while personalization connects vocabulary to learners' own lives, making it more relevant and meaningful.

Together, these principles demonstrate that vocabulary acquisition is not a passive process but an active, multifaceted endeavor requiring thoughtful instructional design.

However, despite the availability of these strategies, many learners continue to face significant difficulties in acquiring vocabulary. Amalia (2023) identifies several barriers, including students' unfamiliarity with dictionaries, limited use of English in daily life, difficulties in producing synonyms and antonyms, and challenges in spelling words correctly. These individual challenges are compounded by external factors such as limited access to English reading materials, unsupportive learning environments, inappropriate teaching methods, low student motivation, and the minimal integration of technology. These obstacles illustrate that vocabulary acquisition is influenced by both cognitive and contextual factors, requiring interventions that address not only individual learner needs but also institutional and environmental conditions.

Preliminary observations at SMK Islam 2 Wlingi confirmed that students encounter similar challenges in vocabulary acquisition. Grade 10 TSM students reported difficulties stemming from pronunciation similarities, spelling inconsistencies, multiple meanings of words, and the sheer number of vocabulary items to be learned. These issues often cause frustration and demotivation, leading students to perceive vocabulary learning as burdensome. The lack of understanding of word meanings, both in English and Indonesian, contributed to a sense of reluctance in engaging with English lessons. This situation highlights the need for practical, structured, and student-centered approaches to vocabulary learning that can re-engage students and make the process more accessible.

One strategy adopted at SMK Islam 2 Wlingi was the implementation of vocabulary books. In this approach, students were given lists of foreign vocabulary words to record in their books. During subsequent lessons, teachers provided reading texts to help students contextualize the vocabulary. Students were also tasked with identifying additional unfamiliar words and recording them, followed by sentence construction exercises that promoted active use. To reinforce learning, teachers conducted quizzes and daily tests to evaluate mastery.

This cycle of recording, contextualizing, practicing, and testing reflects a structured method of vocabulary teaching that aligns with Thornbury's principles. By consistently engaging with vocabulary through multiple modalities, students were able to internalize words more effectively.

The use of vocabulary books is supported by findings from previous studies. Faizah & Imamah (2023) demonstrated that storybook media could serve as effective tools for increasing vocabulary among young learners, offering broader implications for educators in designing literacy interventions. Similarly, Amalinda & Widyasari (2022) emphasized that vocabulary books substantially enhance students' language proficiency when integrated systematically into instruction. These findings underscore the value of simple yet structured learning tools in supporting vocabulary acquisition.

A growing body of research also highlights the effectiveness of vocabulary notebooks in both academic and everyday learning contexts. Utama & Qomariyah (2022) reported that vocabulary notebooks significantly aided students in remembering and applying new vocabulary through independent recording and repetition. Nggolaon & Mombilia (2021) found that students demonstrated greater enthusiasm and active participation when using notebooks, largely because the method fostered a sense of autonomy in their learning process. Tran & Do (2023) concluded that vocabulary notebooks positively influenced the growth of productive vocabulary, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language. Together, these studies suggest that vocabulary notebooks are effective not only in promoting retention but also in supporting active and independent learning.

Despite these positive findings, much of the existing research has focused primarily on learning outcomes, such as vocabulary test scores or student perceptions, rather than the detailed implementation of vocabulary notebooks in vocational classrooms. This presents a gap in the literature, as the process of how vocabulary books are used in practice and how they shape student engagement remains underexplored. In vocational schools, where the demands of industry-specific communication are unique, understanding the implementation process is

particularly important. Addressing this gap requires research that examines both the instructional practices surrounding vocabulary books and students' responses to their use in vocational contexts.

The distinctive feature of SMK Islam 2 Wlingi further underscores the importance of this study. Unlike many schools that have adopted digital platforms and vocabulary applications, SMK Islam 2 Wlingi continues to rely on printed vocabulary books as a core instructional tool. Surprisingly, this traditional approach has yielded promising outcomes in enhancing students' vocabulary proficiency. The continued use of printed vocabulary books, despite the widespread adoption of digital tools, provides a unique case for examining the relevance and effectiveness of traditional media in contemporary classrooms. This uniqueness motivated the researcher to investigate the implementation of vocabulary books and the responses of students toward their use in English learning.

By situating this research within the broader context of English language education in Indonesia, the study aims to provide insights into the practical strategies that can support vocabulary acquisition in vocational schools. Specifically, it seeks to examine how vocabulary books are implemented in classroom practice, how they align with principles of vocabulary teaching, and how students respond to this approach. In doing so, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of vocabulary development in vocational contexts and offers practical implications for teachers, policymakers, and curriculum developers seeking to strengthen English instruction in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study aims to explore the implementation and student response to using a vocabulary book in developing students' vocabulary. To achieve this objective, the research design was carefully selected to match the nature of the data and the educational context. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomena occurring in the classroom, particularly related to the experiences of both teachers and students in

using this learning tool. Thus, the study emphasizes detailed descriptions, social interactions, and subjective experiences of the participants within their natural setting.

The qualitative approach aligns with Creswell (2014) who asserts that this method enables researchers to capture the meanings individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem. The data required in this study consist of verbal expressions, observed behaviors, and documented classroom activities. Instruments such as interviews, observations, and field notes were utilized to capture rich and meaningful data. Through this process, the researcher obtained a comprehensive picture of how the teacher implemented the vocabulary book and how students responded to its use in their learning.

The research design applied in this study is a case study. Yin (2018) emphasizes that case study design is most suitable when the boundary between a phenomenon and its context is unclear, as is the case with the use of a vocabulary book, which cannot be separated from teaching strategies, student behavior, and classroom dynamics. The focus of the study was one tenth-grade class at SMK Islam 2 Wlingi, making the scope clear and measurable. Through this design, the researcher was able to explore not only what happened, but also why and how the process occurred in the context of English language learning.

The research procedure followed the stages outlined by Creswell (2014) In the planning stage, the researcher conducted a preliminary study, selected the site, and identified the problem, followed by the preparation of research protocols. The next stage was data collection through interviews, observation, and documentation. The collected data were organized, coded, and categorized according to the research focus, and then analyzed using thematic analysis. The final stage involved synthesizing the data into conclusions, accompanied by a comprehensive research report including findings, implications, and recommendations.

The research site was SMK Islam 2 Wlingi, Blitar Regency. The selection of this school was based on preliminary interviews, indicating that the school had implemented the use of a vocabulary book in English learning, particularly in

vocabulary development. Furthermore, the school granted permission and provided full administrative support for the research. The data collection was conducted in two stages: the preliminary stage in November 2024 and the main stage between May and June 2025, which included interviews, observations, and documentation. This timeline ensured that the data obtained were consistent and reflected actual classroom activities (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher's presence in this study was non-participatory, meaning that the researcher acted as an observer without directly engaging in teaching and learning activities. This role allowed the classroom activities to proceed naturally without external interference. Creswell (2014) notes that non-participant observation helps maintain objectivity and ensures that the data collected genuinely reflect the natural conditions. Therefore, the findings obtained are considered more credible because they are derived from authentic classroom dynamics.

The participants in this study included one English teacher, Mrs. Risma, and three tenth-grade students categorized as high, medium, and low achievers. The teacher was selected through purposive sampling (Creswell, 2014) because she was directly responsible for implementing the vocabulary book. Meanwhile, the students were selected using snowball sampling based on the teacher's recommendations, followed by criterion sampling according to their proficiency levels as explained by Miles et al. (2018). This procedure ensured that the data represented diverse student abilities and provided a more comprehensive perspective.

Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with the teacher and students to explore their experiences. The first interview guide was developed based on Thornbury (2002) principles of vocabulary teaching, including contextualization, repetition, retrieval, spaced rehearsal, recording, and affective depth. The second interview focused on student responses in terms of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, as outlined by Sardiman (2011). These interviews were complemented by

non-participant classroom observation and documentation such as field notes, transcripts, photos, and supporting documents.

The data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2018) which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, the interview, observation, and documentation results were selected, simplified, and categorized. The reduced data were then displayed in narrative form, tables, and matrices to reveal patterns and relationships. The final stage was concluding, conducted iteratively through verification, triangulation, and critical reflection to ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis.

The trustworthiness of the data was established through four criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. To ensure credibility, the researcher conducted field checks, triangulated techniques and sources, used visual documentation, and consulted with supervisors. Dependability was maintained through supervisory involvement in every research stage. Transferability was ensured by presenting detailed findings that could be used in other contexts. Confirmability was achieved by verifying findings directly with supervisors and the teacher as the key informant. With these methodological procedures, the study provides a thorough account of the implementation of vocabulary books at SMK Islam 2 Wlingi and students' responses to their use, ensuring valid and meaningful contributions to vocabulary teaching and learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide insights into the implementation of vocabulary books in English language learning at SMK Islam 2 Wlingi and the responses of students toward their use. Data analysis revealed that the use of vocabulary books was systematically organized and effectively supported vocabulary development in vocational education.

The first focus concerns the **implementation of vocabulary books**. Analysis at the selective coding stage revealed three interconnected themes: (1) vocabulary planning and delivery by teachers, (2) strategies for reinforcing and

actively using vocabulary, and (3) retention and evaluation of vocabulary mastery. Teachers played a central role in selecting and introducing key vocabulary at the beginning of lessons, which provided students with an initial foundation before moving into independent exploration. This teacher-led stage then transitioned into student-centered activities, where learners independently searched for new words from reading texts and recorded them in their vocabulary books. This process created a balanced classroom environment that fostered both guidance and autonomy.

To reinforce vocabulary mastery, teachers implemented repetition through exercises and informal evaluations, complemented by engaging activities such as guessing games. Students were further encouraged to use vocabulary in meaningful contexts by writing sentences, composing short stories, and performing oral presentations. These activities not only deepened students' comprehension but also promoted confidence and creativity in applying English vocabulary. In terms of retention, vocabulary books served as small and portable tools that students could review both inside and outside the classroom. Repeated reading practices, along with quizzes and daily tests, ensured that vocabulary learning was consistently monitored and strengthened.

Table 1 summarizes the selective coding for focus one

Table 1 Selective coding focus 1

No	Selective theme	Axial category	Thematic description
1	Vocabulary planning and delivery by teachers	Teacher introduction, independent search, and recording	Teachers provide key vocabulary, then guide students to record unfamiliar words from reading texts.
2	Reinforcing and actively using vocabulary	Repetition, informal evaluation, active use in context	Vocabulary reinforced through exercises, games, and applied in sentences, stories, and presentations.
3	Retention and evaluation of mastery	Accessibility, formal evaluation	Vocabulary notebooks support repeated review, while quizzes and tests track progress.

The integration of these three themes illustrates that the vocabulary book functioned as more than a recording tool; it provided a structured system for

vocabulary development, supporting planning, active practice, and evaluation. This finding aligns with Thornbury (2002) principles of vocabulary teaching, particularly *contextualization*, *repetition*, *retrieval*, *recording*, and *affective depth*. Similar patterns are also reported by Taufan (2020) and Siswanto et al. (2019) who emphasize the roles of context-based instruction, repetition, and student involvement in reinforcing vocabulary retention.

The second focus concerns students' responses to the vocabulary book, which were categorized into three domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. From the cognitive perspective, students reported improvement in vocabulary mastery, both in the number of words learned and their ability to understand meaning within sentences and texts. High-ability students showed stronger gains, while students at lower levels still benefited, particularly through repeated reading and note-taking activities. These findings support Ayana et al. (2024) who demonstrated that structured use of vocabulary notebooks can enhance both mastery and motivation.

From the affective perspective, students expressed enthusiasm and joy in using the vocabulary book. The medium was perceived as helpful in clarifying difficult vocabulary, while activities such as quizzes and games created a more enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Teachers also observed greater student enthusiasm when lessons involved vocabulary notebooks. This positive affective response indicates that vocabulary learning became more engaging and less monotonous, a finding consistent with Taufan (2020), who highlighted the importance of emotional involvement in vocabulary learning.

In terms of psychomotor involvement, students were actively engaged in recording new words and reviewing them during class. However, the level of independent use outside the classroom remained limited. Only high-ability students reported consistent use at home, while moderate and lower-ability students rarely did so, partly due to the lack of supervision. This suggests that although the vocabulary book encouraged active classroom participation, strategies are still needed to strengthen independent use beyond the classroom. Findings of Kömür & Özdemir (2015) support this observation, noting that

consistent engagement with vocabulary notebooks fosters productive vocabulary growth in academic contexts.

Table 2 summarizes the selective coding for focus two.

Table 2 Selective coding focus 2

No	Core category	Axial category	Description
1	Cognitive development	Vocabulary improvement, retention strategies	Vocabulary books expand word mastery and contextual understanding through repeated reading and independent note-taking.
2	Affective response	Enthusiasm, enjoyment, motivation	Students feel motivated and supported in learning, with quizzes and games creating a fun learning atmosphere.
3	Psychomotor involvement	Active note-taking, limited outside use	Students actively use the book in class, while outside use is consistent only among high-ability learners.

Overall, these results indicate that vocabulary books positively influence learning by strengthening knowledge, motivation, and engagement. The findings align with Sardiman (2011) A framework of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, showing that the medium supports comprehensive learning. Furthermore, the study corroborates research by Nurdini & Marlina (2017) and Nggolaon & Mombilia (2021), which emphasizes the role of vocabulary journals in enhancing engagement, reflection, and long-term retention.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating Thornbury 2002) vocabulary teaching principles with Sardiman (2011) learning domains in a vocational school context. The study highlights that vocabulary books not only help students remember new words but also encourage independent and reflective learning habits. The systematic process developed from vocabulary introduction, recording, contextual use, reinforcement, and reflection provides a practical model that is both theoretically grounded and adaptable to vocational education.

In conclusion, the use of vocabulary books at SMK Islam 2 Wlingi proved to be an effective learning medium, fostering cognitive gains, positive emotional engagement, and active participation. It contributes not only to vocabulary mastery but also to developing independent learning strategies suitable for vocational school contexts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions are based on the analysis of data from interviews, observations, and documentation, as well as comparisons with previous theories and research. Based on the findings of the first focus, it can be concluded that the use of vocabulary books in vocabulary learning at SMK Islam 2 Wlingi is systematic and targeted. Teachers introduce new vocabulary to students directly, then students record it in their vocabulary books, categorize it according to specific categories, and practice its use in sentences. Students also actively review the vocabulary they have recorded through regular exercises. This process forms a consistent learning pattern, where students not only receive material but are also actively involved in recording, organizing, and using vocabulary independently. Additionally, students demonstrate interest, enthusiasm, and confidence when using vocabulary that they have learned, both orally and in writing. This shows that the use of vocabulary books can support comprehensive vocabulary learning in terms of understanding, engagement, and application.

Based on the findings of the second focus, it can be concluded that the use of vocabulary books elicits a positive response from students in the vocabulary learning process. Students feel that the books help them because they make it easier for them to record, remember, and learn vocabulary in a more structured way. Some students showed the initiative to review their notes independently outside of class hours, even developing their own methods for recording and organizing vocabulary. Additionally, students felt more confident when using new vocabulary in exercises and conversations. Affective responses such as enthusiasm, joy, and a desire to learn were evident throughout the learning process. Thus, it can be concluded that vocabulary books not only function as learning aids but also shape a more independent, reflective, and positive attitude toward vocabulary mastery.

Overall, the results of the study show that the use of vocabulary books plays a significant role in the vocabulary learning process in class X at SMK Islam 2 Wlingi. This book is used not only as a place to take notes but also as a

tool for students to understand, categorize, and actively use vocabulary in appropriate contexts. The learning process, which involves note-taking, exercises, and reflection, has formed a systematic learning pattern and made it easier for students to master new vocabulary. Additionally, students have responded positively to the use of vocabulary books, both in terms of ease of learning, self-confidence, and growing interest in independently studying vocabulary. These findings demonstrate that simple media, such as vocabulary books, can be optimized to support vocabulary learning that focuses not only on outcomes but also on the learning process and students' overall learning experiences.

Based on the findings, several suggestions are proposed for education practitioners and future researchers. For teachers, it is recommended to consistently integrate vocabulary books into the English learning process, not only as tools for recording words but also as media for reflection, contextual practice, and retention. Teachers are encouraged to design varied strategies, such as quizzes, sentence-making, and the use of authentic texts, to increase student engagement and motivation. At the school level, principals are advised to support the use of simple yet effective media like vocabulary books by facilitating training or professional discussions that allow teachers to share best practices. Such initiatives can also be incorporated into literacy programs to further strengthen English learning quality in vocational education.

For future researchers, the present study provides an initial step that can be expanded in several directions. Broader coverage across multiple classes, schools, or educational levels would enhance the comprehensiveness and transferability of findings. In addition, employing a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques, as well as extending the duration of research, may provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of vocabulary book usage. Further studies are also encouraged to examine additional factors such as student learning styles, the use of digital tools compared to traditional vocabulary books, and variations in teaching strategies. These efforts would enrich the understanding of vocabulary instruction and contribute to the development of more effective approaches in different learning contexts.

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