The Implementation of Vocabulary Journal in English Learning: A Case Study at SMP Negeri 2 Blitar

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Abstract
This study aims to explore the implementation of vocabulary journals as an alternative strategy for improving vocabulary acquisition in English language learning at SMP Negeri 2 Blitar. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with a sample consisting of one English teacher and four eighth-grade students selected for interviews. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of students' vocabulary journals. The findings indicate that vocabulary journals significantly improved students' vocabulary acquisition. 80% of the students showed substantial progress in recalling and using new vocabulary, while 10% showed moderate progress, and another 10% demonstrated minimal improvement. The discussion emphasizes that vocabulary journals, when implemented with regular teacher feedback and review sessions, are an effective tool for enhancing vocabulary learning. Based on these findings, future research could explore the integration of vocabulary journals with other language learning strategies and investigate their impact across different educational contexts and age groups.

Keywords: Vocabulary Journal, Vocabulary Acquisition, Classroom Observation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition plays a pivotal role in mastering the English language. It serves as the foundation for developing key linguistic skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Nation, 2013). Without sufficient vocabulary, learners often struggle to comprehend texts, articulate thoughts, and engage in meaningful communication. Schmitt (2010) emphasizes that vocabulary is the building block of language proficiency, making it an indispensable component of second language (L2) learning. Despite its significance, vocabulary acquisition remains a persistent challenge among English language learners in Indonesia. National and international assessments reveal that Indonesian students often

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lag behind their counterparts in English proficiency. The EF English Proficiency Index (2022) ranked Indonesia 81st out of 111 countries, highlighting vocabulary limitations as a significant barrier to achieving higher proficiency. Similarly, research conducted by Lestari et al. (2020) found that Indonesian middle school students typically possess an active vocabulary of fewer than 1,000 words, far below the threshold needed for basic communicative competence. This issue underscores the need for effective vocabulary learning strategies. Traditional methods of rote memorization, commonly employed in Indonesian classrooms, have proven inadequate in fostering long-term retention and practical usage. Innovative approaches that promote active engagement and contextual learning are therefore critical to improving students' vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency.

A growing body of research has explored various strategies to enhance vocabulary acquisition in English learning. Among these, three studies are particularly noteworthy a study by Nakata (2011) investigated the effectiveness of flashcards in enhancing vocabulary retention among Japanese EFL learners. The findings revealed that flashcards, when combined with spaced repetition, significantly improved word recall. However, the study also highlighted a limitation: flashcards often lack contextual information, making it difficult for learners to use new vocabulary in real-life situations.Chen et al. (2019) examined the impact of mobile applications on vocabulary acquisition. Their study demonstrated that gamified learning platforms, such as Quizlet and Duolingo, increased learner motivation and engagement. While effective in promoting short-term retention, the study identified a gap in fostering deeper understanding and long-term retention of words. Rahimi and Momeni (2012) explored the use of task-based activities to improve vocabulary learning. The results indicated that TBLT encouraged learners to use new words in meaningful contexts, enhancing their ability to recall and apply vocabulary. However, the study pointed out that task-based approaches require considerable preparation and may not be feasible in large classrooms with limited resources.

While these studies offer valuable insights into vocabulary learning, they also reveal critical gaps. Many strategies focus on short-term gains or require resources that are often unavailable in typical Indonesian classrooms. There is a need for a practical, low-cost approach that fosters both contextual learning and long-term retention. To address these gaps, this study proposes the implementation of a vocabulary journal as an alternative strategy for vocabulary learning. Vocabulary journals provide a structured yet flexible framework for students to actively engage with new words. By encouraging learners to record, define, and use vocabulary in sentences or personal contexts, journals promote deeper processing and retention of words (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). Additionally, vocabulary journals can be easily adapted to suit different learning environments, making them a practical solution for resource-limited classrooms. This study seeks to explore the following research questions: 1) How is the implementation of vocabulary journals in English learning at SMP Negeri 2 Blitar? 2) What is the impact of using vocabulary journals on students' vocabulary achievement? By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on vocabulary acquisition and provide actionable recommendations for English teachers seeking to enhance their students' vocabulary learning experiences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary acquisition is the essence of language learning that determines learners' proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Nation, 2013). However, most learners, particularly Indonesian students, find it hard to retain their vocabulary due to ineffective vocabulary learning processes. Traditional rote learning, commonly practiced in the classroom, has a tendency to hinder long-term storage and functional application of vocabulary (Schmitt, 2010). Consequently, new and innovative vocabulary learning strategies have been explored to enhance learners' interest and retention.

2.1. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Various approaches have been tried in previous research in an attempt to improve vocabulary acquisition. Flashcards, particularly when used with spaced repetition techniques, were shown by Nakata (2011) to significantly improve recall of words. A major limitation, however, was the lack of contextual use, making it difficult for learners to utilize newly acquired words in effective communication. Similarly, Chen et al.'s (2019) research highlighted the utility of mobile apps such as Quizlet and Duolingo in facilitating student motivation and engagement. Despite their success in short-term retention, these apps did not necessarily facilitate deep learning or long-term retention.

Another widely investigated approach is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), where the emphasis is laid on learning vocabulary through communicative tasks. Rahimi and Momeni (2012) found that TBLT led to learners using vocabulary in context, thereby enhancing their recall and effective usage of words. This approach does demand a lot of classroom planning and may not always be feasible in low-resource environments. Additionally, Darmayanti, Fadhilawati, and Fauzi (2022) noted that creative, low-cost vocabulary learning media, such as puzzle-based activities, can effectively enhance vocabulary acquisition even in settings with limited access to advanced technology, offering an adaptable alternative for schools with minimal resources. In line with this, Yusriyyah and Mafulah (2024) emphasized that providing engaging and accessible media is crucial to stimulate students' vocabulary development, especially considering that student motivation is a key factor in successful vocabulary acquisition.

2.2 The Role of Vocabulary Journals in Language Learning

In as much as existing methods have their pitfalls, vocabulary journals are now offered as an alternative solution that provides systematic yet adaptive learning. According to Schmitt and Schmitt (2020), vocabulary journals elicit deeper cognitive processing by making learners write down, define, and use new words in various contexts. The activity conforms to Craik and Lockhart's (1972) Depth of Processing Theory, where more deep processing of linguistic input is shown to enhance retention. In addition, Nation (2001) highlighted that learning vocabulary works best when students are repeatedly exposed to and practicing words in a variety of situations, supporting the use of vocabulary journals in extended learning.

Several studies have established the effectiveness of vocabulary journals in different learning settings. Walters and Bozkurt (2009) confirmed that vocabulary journals enhanced learner autonomy and retention among university students. They, however, noted that lack of teacher intervention at times resulted in uneven maintenance

of journals. The present study, in contrast, targets the significance of teacher guidance in maintaining regular use and realizing the full potential of vocabulary journals.

## **2.3 Previous Research on Vocabulary Learning in the Indonesian Context**

Indonesian vocabulary learning studies have primarily focused on computer tools and interactive media. Puspitasari et al. (2022) examined the usage of Android apps for learning vocabulary and found mobile technology to improve student interest. Similarly, Sari et al. (2018) produced flashcard media for seventh graders and observed positive outcomes for vocabulary retention. Sari et al. (2023) researched an online vocabulary learning program for vocational school students with a focus on its ability to improve industry-specific vocabulary learning. In addition, Cahyono et al. (2023) studied Memrise as a vocabulary-learning tool, demonstrating how it solves vocabulary retention problems. However, Winarsih and Kusuma (2021) emphasized that effective vocabulary acquisition does not always require advanced technology, highlighting the importance of accessible and simple learning media that can support student independence and vocabulary development.

Against this backdrop, there remains a need for technology-free, inexpensive, and easily implementable approaches. Vocabulary journals present a cost-effective and accessible alternative, particularly for schools that have minimal facilities for computer systems. Additionally, Sari and Setiawan's (2021) study emphasized the merit of non-computer vocabulary learning strategies designed by teachers and reinforced the merit of these vocabulary journals as a teaching instrument.

The study shows that vocabulary journals are promising as a vocabulary acquisition technique, with benefits such as deeper cognitive processing, contextualization, and higher learner autonomy. Although mobile technology and computer tools have been successful in some contexts, long-term retention is not always assured. Vocabulary journals, supported by teacher guidance and planned usage, represent a practical and viable solution. Following the findings of previous studies, further study must analyze the method's scalability in different educational settings and investigate ways to support students who struggle to keep up with vocabulary journals.

3. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, following the framework established by Miles and Huberman (1994). A case study design is chosen to provide an in-depth exploration of the implementation of vocabulary journals in a real-world classroom setting. The qualitative approach allows for a rich and detailed understanding of the processes and outcomes associated with this strategy. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Blitar, a public middle school in Indonesia. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who were directly involved in the implementation of vocabulary journals. The sample included one English teacher and four eight-grade students. These students were chosen based on specific criteria: 1) One student showing significant progress in vocabulary acquisition; 2) One student showing average progress; 3) One student showing minimal progress; 4) One student who frequently struggles with maintaining their vocabulary journal.
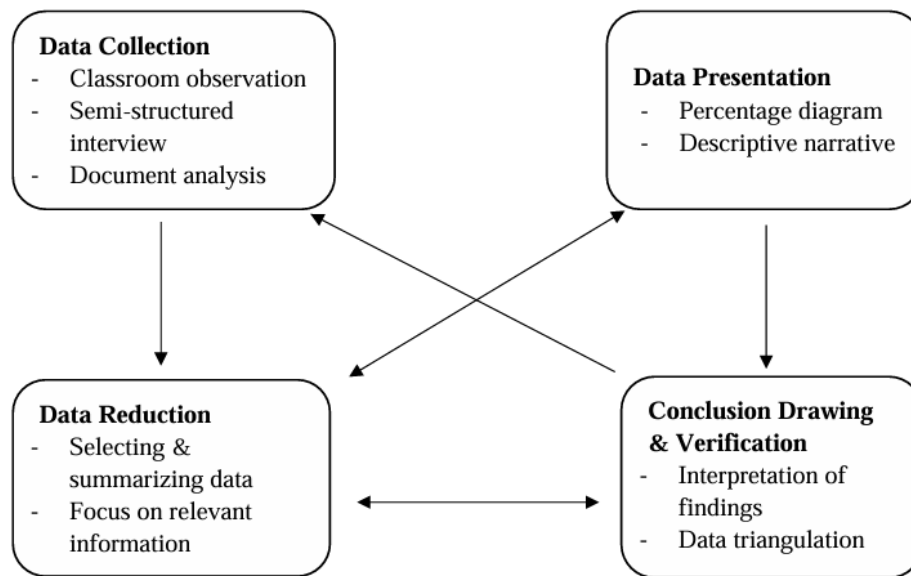
Figure 1. Milles & Huberman (1994) interactive model

In picture 1, it is explained this sampling method ensures that the data collected is relevant and aligned with the research objectives (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data collection was carried out using multiple qualitative methods to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings; 1) Classroom observations were conducted to examine how vocabulary journals were implemented during English lessons. Detailed field notes were taken to capture the interactions, activities, and responses of both the teacher and students, 2) Semi structured interviews were conducted with the English teacher and a subset of students to gain insights into their perceptions and experiences with vocabulary journals. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis, 3) Document Analysis of students' vocabulary journals were collected and analyzed to evaluate how they engaged with the learning material and documented new vocabulary. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves three concurrent activities: 1) Data Reduction: The raw data collected from observations, interviews, and documents were organized and condensed to focus on the most relevant information. Codes and themes were developed to categorize the data, 2) Data Display: The reduced data were presented in the form of chart percentage and narratives to facilitate interpretation and identify patterns or relationships, 3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification: The findings were interpreted to draw conclusions about the implementation and impact of vocabulary journals. These conclusions were verified through triangulation of data sources and member checking with participants.

4. RESULTS
4.1 Findings on the implementation of vocabulary journals in English learning at SMP Negeri 2 Blitar

The implementation of vocabulary journals followed a structured yet adaptable framework. The English teacher introduced the concept of vocabulary journals at the beginning of the semester, providing students with guidelines on how to document new words. Students were required to record the word, its definition, synonyms, antonyms,

and an example sentence. Weekly review sessions were conducted to discuss the entries, during which students shared their journals with peers and received feedback. Additionally, the teacher integrated journal activities into classroom lessons by assigning tasks that encouraged students to use their recorded vocabulary in writing or speaking exercises.

Vocabulary journals are implemented at structured stages in learning, particularly flexible, so it can be adjusted to the needs of students. First, there is the introduction of vocabulary journals, which the English teacher does at the beginning of the semester. During this stage, the teacher has to introduce the concept and explain the purpose of using the vocabulary journal as a means of enriching the students' vocabulary. The teacher then goes on to give a guide to the new vocabulary recording, with the format of writing down the new word, definition, synonyms, antonyms, and example sentences. By so doing, it will help students to be aware of the importance of recording and reflecting upon new vocabulary encountered during learning. This is supported by the Schmitt's 2000 theory, which states that recording vocabulary in a journal helps students in self-learning and also their memory about the new vocabulary.

The second stage is the utilization of vocabulary journals in learning, where a student starts to actively record new words encountered either from reading texts, lesson materials, or even class discussions. The vocabulary journal will be integrated with various activities that will be given by the teacher, such as writing, speaking, and group activities. For example, students are expected to create essays or presentations using the words they have recorded in the vocabulary journal. The teacher also monitors students' progress and guides them to use the vocabulary in various contexts. This stage is also in line with Nation's (2001) theory, which states that using vocabulary in different contexts - writing and speaking - can help students strengthen their understanding and apply the words more appropriately.

The third stage is reflection and evaluation, which is conducted regularly in the form of weekly review sessions. In these sessions, students discuss with peers the contents of their vocabulary journals to exchange feedback. In addition, teachers also check students' mastery of new vocabulary through various types of formative assessments, such as vocabulary quizzes or writing assignments involving words from students' vocabulary journals. The teachers can provide constructive feedback, and therefore, the students can revise their vocabulary journals and improve their quality. At this stage of reflection and evaluation, as Harmer's (2007) theory says, discussion and feedback provided by teachers and peers make students better understand new vocabulary, and students can be more active in learning.

4.2 Finding on impact of using vocabulary journals on students' vocabulary achievement

The analysis of students' performance revealed significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition. Based on the evaluation of vocabulary test scores and journal entries, the results are 24 students (80%) showed marked improvement in vocabulary acquisition, with consistent progress observed in their ability to recall and use new words. 3 Students (10%) demonstrated average progress, indicating that while they benefited from the journal activities, their improvement was less pronounced. Another 3 students (10%) exhibited minimal progress, suggesting the need for additional support or alternative strategies to address their specific challenges.

4.3 The findings are summarized in the following diagram:

The analysis of the vocabulary test scores and the entries in the vocabulary journals has shown that the majority of students significantly improved in vocabulary acquisition. The pie graph shows that 80% of the students (24) did remarkably well and consistently showed improvement in the ability to recall and use new words in different contexts. It can be suggested that vocabulary journaling as a learning strategy contributed to the effective development of the vocabularies by students.

The mean progress was 10% (3 students) who, while benefiting from the vocabulary journaling activity, were not as strong as the bulk of the subjects. On the other hand, 10% of the students, or 3 students, made little progress, which can be taken to mean that such students might encounter some difficulty in using this strategy effectively. Further approaches or strategy modifications are needed for such categories of students in order to assist them in breaking barriers to the acquisition of vocabulary.
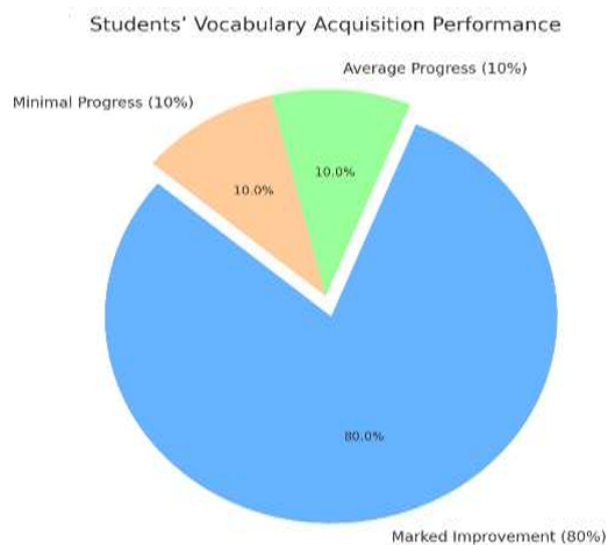
Figure 2. Despicts The Percentage Distribution of Student's Vocabulary Improvement

The results obtained after statistical analysis shown in Figure 2, show that 80% of students experienced significant improvement in their vocabulary mastery. In addition, 10% of students showed average improvement while the other 10% showed minimal improvement. These observations can be compared with various theories available in terms of vocabulary learning.

According to Nation (2001), the condition for effectively learning vocabulary will only be complete if there is enough exposure of it, and being used diversely in reflection. As they became actively engaged in recording new words in their vocabulary journals and using them throughout different writing and speaking activities, a large number of the participants in this experiment showed great improvements. This is in line with Craik & Lockhart's idea of "depth of processing" (1972), in which information, such as writing definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and example sentences, the deeper one processes, the more likely it gets to remain in long-term memory.

On the other hand, students who evidence average or minimal development may face some obstacles in deeper engagement or processing of information. According to Schmitt (2000), some students need additional strategies, such as repetition, social interaction, or multimodal use-visual, auditive, kinesthetic-to strengthen their vocabulary retention. In this respect, a differentiated approach is necessary for students who have difficulties, for example, additional context-based exercises, or mnemonic techniques that will help them understand and remember new vocabulary.

Overall, the findings of this study support those theories emphasizing vocabulary journaling strategies, active learning, and variety in methods that improve students' recall of new words. While vocabulary journaling was effective for the majority of the students, it is important to make modifications in the strategy for those students who experience difficulties, as the principle of individual needs-centered learning suggests (Tomlinson, 2011).

Students who actively engaged with their vocabulary journals reported higher levels of confidence in using new words during classroom discussions and writing assignments. Many students attributed their improvement to the opportunity to personalize their learning through journal activities. The teacher noted that the structured approach to recording and reviewing vocabulary facilitated better retention and encouraged students to take ownership of their learning. For the 10% of students with average progress, challenges such as irregular journal maintenance and difficulty in understanding word meanings were identified as contributing factors. The 10% of students with minimal progress faced additional barriers, including limited motivation and external factors such as lack of parental support. These findings highlight the effectiveness of vocabulary journals as a practical and adaptable tool for enhancing vocabulary acquisition while also emphasizing the importance of providing targeted support for students who may require additional assistance.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of vocabulary journals offers a practical and effective strategy for enhancing vocabulary acquisition. The structured framework of the journals allows students to actively engage with new words, fostering deeper cognitive processing and long-term retention. Weekly review sessions further support this process by providing opportunities for feedback and collaborative learning. These elements align with the principles of meaningful learning, as described by Ausubel (2000), which emphasize the importance of integrating new knowledge into existing cognitive structures. This study's findings corroborate previous research on vocabulary journals. For instance, Walters and Bozkurt (2009) found that vocabulary journals were effective in promoting learner autonomy and retention in an EFL context. However, while Walters and Bozkurt's study focused on higher education students, this research extends the application of vocabulary journals to middle school learners, demonstrating their adaptability across different age groups and educational settings. Unlike Walters and Bozkurt's findings, which highlighted a lack of teacher involvement as a limitation, the current study underscores the importance of teacher guidance in maximizing the effectiveness of vocabulary journals.

A key distinction of this study lies in its focus on personalization and context. By requiring students to use new vocabulary in sentences that reflect their own experiences or interests, the journals provide a meaningful and memorable learning experience. This

personalized approach aligns with the Depth of Processing Theory (Craik & Lockhart, 1972), which posits that deeper cognitive engagement leads to better retention of information. The study's findings differ from prior research in several ways. For example, while Walters and Bozkurt (2009) focused on the autonomy that vocabulary journals foster, this study highlights the critical role of teacher facilitation. The weekly review sessions and teacher feedback implemented in this study were pivotal in maintaining student engagement and ensuring consistent progress. Furthermore, this study provides evidence of the scalability of vocabulary journals to a younger demographic and resource-limited settings, which were not emphasized in previous research.

The interviews conducted with the teacher and students provide additional context to the findings. Below are selected excerpts from the interviews:

Teacher's Perspective:

"The vocabulary journal has been a game changer in my classroom. It encourages students to take responsibility for their learning, and I've noticed a significant improvement in their vocabulary retention. The weekly review sessions are particularly useful because they give me the opportunity to address any misunderstandings and provide personalized feedback."

Student Perspectives:

"I enjoy using the vocabulary journal because it helps me remember new words better. Writing my own sentences using the words makes learning fun and meaningful."
"Sometimes I forget to update my journal, but when I do, it's really helpful for studying. I feel more confident using new words in class."

The teacher also highlighted challenges, such as ensuring consistent journal maintenance among students and addressing the needs of those who struggled with the activity. The 10% of students who showed minimal progress often required additional support to stay motivated and understand the relevance of the journal tasks. By integrating the findings from interviews and prior studies, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and limitations of vocabulary journals. The results underscore the importance of teacher involvement, personalization, and consistent practice in maximizing the benefits of this learning tool.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of vocabulary journals is an effective strategy for enhancing vocabulary acquisition among middle school students. The structured model, which includes personalized entries, regular updates, and weekly review sessions, promotes active engagement and facilitates long-term retention of vocabulary. The findings reveal that 85% of students demonstrated significant improvement in vocabulary acquisition, highlighting the potential of vocabulary journals to address challenges in vocabulary learning.

The inclusion of teacher facilitation and personalized learning further distinguishes this approach from previous studies, emphasizing its adaptability to various educational

contexts. By providing opportunities for students to connect new vocabulary to their personal experiences, the vocabulary journal fosters meaningful learning and builds learner confidence in using new words. Despite some challenges, such as inconsistent journal maintenance and limited progress among a small percentage of students, the overall outcomes affirm the value of this innovative teaching strategy.

Future research could explore the scalability of this approach in different educational settings and investigate additional support mechanisms to address the needs of students with minimal progress. Nonetheless, the results of this study underscore the potential of vocabulary journals to transform vocabulary acquisition in English language learning.

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