

THE EFFECT OF READING SHORT STORIES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY FOR GRADE VIII AT SMP

Nela Anavira¹, Tuminah²

English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Katolik Santo Agustinus Hippo^{1,2}
e-mail: 201210035@sanagustin.ac.id

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji bagaimana membaca cerita pendek dapat membantu siswa kelas VIII di SMP Swasta di Sidas meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata. Konteks masalah menunjukkan bahwa siswa kesulitan dalam menguasai bahasa Inggris karena metode pengajaran yang masih konvensional. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif dengan desain eksperimen, dengan 34 siswa kelas VIII sebagai sampel yang dipilih melalui teknik cluster random sampling. Instrumen penelitian berupa tes pilihan ganda sebanyak 20 soal yang mencakup enam aspek: definisi kata, sinonim, isian kosong, antonim, terjemahan, dan ejaan. Data dianalisis menggunakan SPSS versi 25 dengan uji t dan ukuran efek Cohen's d. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa skor rata-rata kelompok eksperimen meningkat dari 42.35 pada pre-test menjadi 67.05 pada post-test, sementara kelompok kontrol hanya meningkat dari 46.09 menjadi 53.44. Perbedaan signifikan ditemukan melalui uji t independen ($t = -3.712$, $p = 0.000$) dengan ukuran efek sebesar 0.92, yang menunjukkan pengaruh praktis yang besar. Hasil ini membuktikan bahwa metode membaca cerita pendek efektif dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata siswa dibandingkan dengan metode tradisional. Keberhasilan metode ini terletak pada pendekatan pembelajaran yang kontekstual dan penggunaan teknik pengajaran kosakata secara eksplisit, yang membuat proses belajar menjadi lebih menarik.

Kata Kunci: *Cerpen, Penguasaan Kosakata, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine how reading short stories can help eighth-grade students at Private Junior High in Sidas improve their vocabulary mastery. The context of the problem shows that students have difficulty mastering English because of conventional teaching methods. This research employed a quantitative method with an experimental design involving 34 eighth-grade students selected through cluster random sampling. The research instrument consisted of a vocabulary mastery test comprising 20 multiple-choice items covering six aspects: word definitions, synonyms, fill-in-the-blanks, antonyms, translations, and spelling. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25 through a t-test and Cohen's d effect size. The results showed that the experimental group's mean score increased from 42.35 in the pre-test to 67.05 in the post-test, while the control group's score increased slightly from 46.09 to 53.44. A significant difference was found using the independent t-test ($t = -3.712$, $p = 0.000$) with an effect size of 0.92, indicating a strong practical impact. These findings confirm that the short story reading method is effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery compared to traditional methods. The success of this method lies in its contextual learning approach and the use of explicit vocabulary teaching techniques, which make the learning process more engaging.

Keywords: *Short Stories, Vocabulary Mastery, English Language Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery constitutes the fundamental foundation of language skills, particularly crucial for students learning a new language (Sri et al., 2023). Without adequate

vocabulary knowledge, individuals will encounter difficulties in speaking, writing, and understanding conversations (Rumaisyah, 2023). The ability to speak, write, listen, and read all depends on how extensive and well-developed one's vocabulary is (Alqahtani, 2015). The more comprehensive one's vocabulary mastery, the more effective communication becomes.

In the context of language learning, the use of short story techniques offers several advantages, as argued (Jan & Abdul Aziz, 2022). In reading short stories or literary texts, this activity focuses more on the interaction between readers, where the reader of the text is very important because personal interpretation and analysis of literature are not only based on textual elements but also on the views, experiences, and personal feelings of the reader (García-cañarte, 2024). Also, argue that short stories not only significantly improve vocabulary retention and comprehension but also enhance learner motivation and self-regulation. The contextual and dynamic nature of short stories makes the learning process more intuitive and enjoyable.

Based on field observations, many eighth-grade students continue to struggle with mastering English vocabulary. The problems identified by researchers at Sidas Private Junior High School include: most students do not understand the meaning of vocabulary, some do not pay attention to teachers when explaining, some students are noisy, and lack enthusiasm in the learning process. This is caused by monotonous teaching methods used by teachers, such as not using props or media that support the learning process. Additionally, the efforts used by teachers in the learning process fail to attract attention, causing students to feel bored in learning, which consequently results in no significant improvement in vocabulary acquisition and mastery.

Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of short stories in vocabulary learning (Guritno, 2017). In his research entitled "Short stories: the powerful medium to foster students' vocabulary mastery in reading," he found significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery with a minimum score of 7.00 in four areas: spelling, pronunciation, meaning, and word usage (Febriyanti, 2020). Also proved that using short stories effectively improves vocabulary mastery with T-count $3.3153 > T\text{-table } 1.994$. Similarly, Rohimajaya & Zatnika (2019) found that using short stories was more effective in teaching vocabulary mastery, with t-observation value $22.191 > t\text{-table } 1.667$.

Previous studies have explored the use of short stories in language learning, although there remains a gap in the application of integrated explicit vocabulary teaching techniques (Sri et al., 2023). Previous research has largely focused on the general impact of using short stories in language learning without deeply exploring their role as a medium for integrated vocabulary instruction (Widyasari, 2023). Few studies have systematically applied vocabulary strategies such as synonym and antonym recognition, translation tasks, spelling practice, word definition, and fill-in-the-blank exercises combined with short story reading sessions, especially for eighth-grade students in junior high schools.

The novelty of the research lies in the integration of explicit vocabulary teaching techniques such as synonyms, antonyms, translation, spelling, word definition, and fill-in-the-blank exercises into the process of reading short stories. Unlike conventional reading activities that often position students as passive recipients, this approach actively engages students in recognizing, understanding, and applying new vocabulary within meaningful story contexts. This study aims to fill that gap by providing a focused, structured, and contextually relevant model for improving vocabulary mastery through short story reading enhanced with targeted vocabulary exercises.

The research is essential to conduct because vocabulary is a fundamental component in language learning that directly affects students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Tawarik, 2021) & (Soleimani et al., 2022). At Private Junior High School in Sidas, many eighth-grade students still struggle with vocabulary comprehension, resulting in poor

performance in reading and understanding English texts. This issue is exacerbated by conventional teaching methods that fail to engage students or make the learning experience enjoyable (Suryanto et al., 2021). Therefore, there is an urgent need for a more engaging and contextual learning approach that can facilitate vocabulary acquisition effectively.

Based on this background, this research aims to investigate the effectiveness of reading short stories in improving eighth-grade students' vocabulary mastery at Private Junior High School in Sidas by integrating explicit vocabulary teaching techniques, including synonyms, antonyms, translation, spelling, word definition, and fill-in-the-blank exercises.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research employed a quantitative approach with an experimental design to examine the effectiveness of reading short stories in improving eighth-grade students' vocabulary mastery. The quantitative method was chosen because it aligns with the main objectives of the study, which are to measure, test, and analyze the relationships between variables objectively and measurably (Cresswell, 2018). This research utilized an experimental design with two comparison groups: the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group received treatment in the form of short story reading instruction, while the control group did not receive such treatment. Both groups participated in pre-test and post-test assessments to measure vocabulary mastery before and after the treatment (Weyant, 2022). The variables in this study consisted of the independent variable (X), which is reading short stories, and the dependent variable (Y), which is vocabulary mastery.

The research population comprised all eighth-grade students at Private Junior High School in Sidas in the 2024/2025 academic year, totaling 66 students divided into 2 classes (8A and 8B). The sampling technique employed cluster random sampling, where the researcher randomly selected a class from the existing population (Etikan, 2017). Based on random selection, class 8B with 34 students was chosen as the research sample. The selection of the cluster random sampling technique was based on the relatively homogeneous characteristics of the population in terms of educational background, curriculum used, and the age and cognitive development levels of students, which did not differ significantly.

The primary instrument used was a vocabulary mastery test in the form of multiple-choice questions consisting of 20 items. This test was designed to measure six aspects of vocabulary mastery: word definition (3 questions), synonyms (3 questions), fill-in-the-blank (4 questions), antonyms (3 questions), translation (4 questions), and spelling (3 questions). This study used two different versions of tests for pre-test and post-test to avoid learning bias and ensure data validity. Data collection was conducted through two methods: tests in the form of pre-test and post-test to measure students' vocabulary mastery before and after treatment, and documentation to complement data from the school, such as test results, student number data, grade lists, syllabus, and other relevant documents.

Data analysis employed a quantitative approach with the assistance of SPSS version 25 software. The analysis stages included descriptive analysis to calculate the mean and standard deviation of pre-test and post-test scores for both experimental and control groups, prerequisite tests conducting normality tests using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and homogeneity tests using Levene's Test, hypothesis testing using paired sample t-test to compare pre-test and post-test scores within each group and independent sample t-test to compare post-test scores between experimental and control groups, and effect size analysis calculating the magnitude of treatment effect using Cohen's d. The interpretation of effect size followed Cohen's criteria, where a value of 0.2 indicates a small effect, 0.5 a moderate effect, and ≥ 0.8 a large effect. The alternative

hypothesis (H_1) was accepted if there was a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the experimental and control groups, supported by a sufficiently large effect size.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research aimed to test the effectiveness of the short story reading method in improving eighth-grade students' vocabulary mastery at Private Junior High School in Sidas. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test administered to experimental and control groups, consisting of 20 multiple-choice questions. The research findings demonstrate a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in English vocabulary mastery.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Results

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|----------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Pre-test eksperimen | 34 | 20.00 | 70.00 | 42.3529 | 13.15613 |
| Post-test eksperimen | 34 | 45.00 | 90.00 | 67.0588 | 12.19275 |
| Pre-test kontrol | 32 | 20.00 | 85.00 | 46.0938 | 18.12743 |
| Post-test kontrol | 32 | 20.00 | 85.00 | 53.4375 | 17.05955 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 32 | | | | |

Based on data analysis, there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group experienced an increase in mean scores from 42.35 (pre-test) to 67.05 (post-test) with a decrease in standard deviation from 13.15 to 12.19. This shows that the use of short stories is effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery evenly.

Meanwhile, the control group showed only a small increase from a mean of 46.09 to 53.44 with a high standard deviation (18.13 to 17.05), indicating that conventional methods are less effective in consistently improving learning outcomes. These findings prove that learning with short stories has a greater impact on improving students' vocabulary mastery than traditional methods.

Normality Test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

Table 2. Result of Normality Test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov)

| | Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|----|-------|
| | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| Pre-test eksperimen | .147 | 34 | .078 |
| Post-test eksperimen | .112 | 34 | .200* |
| Pre-test kontrol | .136 | 32 | .140 |
| Post-test kontrol | .127 | 32 | .200* |

Based on Table 2, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test results indicate that the research data meet the assumption of normal distribution. In the experimental group, the pre-test value had a significance of 0.078 and the post-test value had a significance of 0.200, while in the control group, the pre-test value had a significance of 0.140 and the post-test value had a

significance of 0.200. Since all significance values are greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that the data from both groups, both before and after treatment, are normally distributed. These results are very important because they meet the basic requirements for conducting further parametric statistical analysis, particularly the t-test, thereby ensuring that the research findings are valid and statistically accountable. The suitability of this data also indicates that the sample used in the study adequately represents the characteristics of the population.

Test of Homogeneity

Table 3. Test of Homogeneity of Variances Result

| Test Criteria | Sig. |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| Based on Mean | .034 |
| Based on Median | .041 |
| Based on Median and with adjusted df | .042 |
| Based on trimmed mean | .035 |

Because all significance values (p-values) are below the significance level of 0.05, it can be concluded that the data does not have homogeneous variance between groups. Thus, the data does not meet the assumption of variance homogeneity, so that in the subsequent independent t-test, the values in the Equal variances not assumed row are used.

T- Test

Table 4. Independent T-test Results

| Levene's Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% CI Lower | 95% CI Upper |
|---------------|--------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 0.034 | -3.712 | 55.847 | 0.000 | -13.621 | 3.670 | -20.973 | -6.269 |

Based on the results of the Independent Samples T-Test with the assumption of Equal variances not assumed, a t-value of -3.712 was obtained with a degree of freedom (df) of 55.847 and a significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in terms of students' vocabulary mastery after the treatment was administered.

The mean difference between the two groups is -13.621, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -20.973 to -6.269. Since this interval does not include zero, it can be confirmed that the difference is significant. Thus, the use of short stories has been proven to have a positive effect on improving the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students.

Effect Size

Effect size between two groups (Independent sample):

$$d = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{SD_{\text{pooled}}}$$

$$SD_{\text{pooled}} = \sqrt{\frac{(n_1 - 1)s_1^2 + (n_2 - 1)s_2^2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}}$$

Description

X1= 67.05 (Ekperiment)

X2= 53.43 (Control)

S1= 12.19, S2= 17.05

n1= 34, n2= 32

Pooled SD: Spooled = 14.75

Then Cohen's d: $d = \frac{67.06 - 53.44}{14.75} = 0.92$

An effect size of 0.92 indicates that the difference between the two groups is not only statistically significant but also has substantial practical significance in the learning context. These results confirm that the short story reading method has a considerable impact on improving students' vocabulary mastery compared to conventional methods.

Discussion

The findings of this research show that using short stories in English language learning has a considerable favourable influence on enhancing vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students. These findings are similar to prior research by (Guritno A, 2017) which discovered a significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery with a minimum score of 7.00 in four areas: spelling, pronunciation, meaning, and word usage. The success of this strategy can be explained by a variety of theoretical and empirical viewpoints that support the efficacy of employing short stories in language learning.

With a t-value of -3.712 (Sig. = 0.000), the experimental group's average score increased from 42.35 to 67.05, demonstrating efficacy in line with studies by (Febriyanti, 2020), showing that using short stories is useful in enhancing vocabulary mastery. Short stories offer a more interesting and meaningful learning background, which explains this notable difference. "In reading short stories or literary texts, this activity focuses more on the interaction between readers, where personal interpretation and analysis of literature are not only based on textual elements but also on the reader's personal perspectives, experiences, and feelings," as stated by (García-cañarte, 2024).

The incorporation of specific vocabulary teaching strategies, such as synonyms, antonyms, translations, spelling, word definitions, and fill-in-the-blank exercises, is what makes the short story method in this research advantageous. This method is different from traditional reading exercises, which frequently put students in a passive role. Rather, this method actively involves students in finding, comprehending, and using new words in the framework of an engaging narrative. According to research by Jan & Abdul Aziz (2022) using short narrative techniques in language learning has various benefits, especially when it comes to boosting student engagement and promoting deeper understanding.

According to Cohen's criteria, which state that a value of ≥ 0.8 indicates a large effect, the effect size of 0.92 obtained in this study shows a large practical influence. With an observed t-value of 22.191 > table t-value of 1.667, Rohimajaya & Zatnika (2019) discovered that using short stories is more effective in teaching vocabulary mastery. These results are in line with their findings. The scale of this impact size suggests that the short story approach has significant practical value in the learning setting, in addition to producing statistical differences, which is consistent with the need to raise the standard of English language instruction in secondary schools.

The experimental group's standard deviation dropped from 13.15 to 12.19, demonstrating that using short stories helps children acquire vocabulary more uniformly. Conversely, the control group displayed a significant standard deviation (18.13 to 17.05), suggesting that traditional approaches are less successful in continuously enhancing learning outcomes. This supports the claim made by (Alqahtani, 2015) that having a large vocabulary improves speaking, writing, listening, and reading abilities, and that thorough vocabulary knowledge improves communication effectiveness.

According to Sri et al., (2023) The learning process is made more natural and pleasurable by the dynamic and contextual learning context that short tales offer. This tackles the issues found during field observations, where pupils struggled because of repetitive and dull teaching strategies. The research of Suryanto et al., (2021), which highlights the significance of instructional strategies that actively engage students in order to attain the best possible learning results, is also supported by these findings. The contextual learning theory viewpoint, which highlights the significance of meaningful and pertinent learning experiences for students, can also be used to explain the method's success. Students can explore new languages in real-world, interesting contexts by reading short stories, which offer a rich and varied context. This is consistent with studies by Soleimani et al. (2022) demonstrate that contextualised vocabulary learning improves student comprehension and retention more than standalone vocabulary learning.

The findings' pedagogical ramifications indicate that teachers of English should think about incorporating short stories with specific vocabulary instruction into their lesson plans. This method improves student motivation and involvement in the learning process in addition to offering valuable context for vocabulary acquisition. This is consistent with Tawarik (2021), who emphasized the urgent need for more contextualised and engaging learning strategies that can support successful vocabulary acquisition. However, this study has limitations in terms of generalizing the results because it was conducted in one school with a relatively homogeneous population. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of this method in more diverse contexts and with more heterogeneous populations. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to measure the long-term effects of this method on vocabulary retention and overall language proficiency.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that reading short stories is effective in improving eighth-grade students' vocabulary mastery at Private Junior High School in Sidas. The experimental group showed a significant increase in vocabulary test scores from 42.35 to 67.05, while the control group only experienced a minimal increase from 46.09 to 53.44. The independent t-test results confirmed a significant difference ($t=-3.712$, $p=0.000$) with a large effect size of 0.92, indicating substantial practical significance. This finding fulfills the expectation stated in the introduction that short story reading integrated with

explicit vocabulary teaching techniques would provide a more engaging and effective learning approach compared to conventional methods.

The success of this method lies in its ability to provide meaningful and contextual learning experiences that actively engage students in recognizing, understanding, and applying new vocabulary within authentic story contexts. The integration of explicit vocabulary teaching techniques such as synonyms, antonyms, translation, spelling, word definition, and fill-in-the-blank exercises has proven effective in facilitating comprehensive vocabulary acquisition. This approach addresses the identified problems of monotonous teaching methods and a lack of student engagement in the learning process.

The prospects for developing this research include exploring the effectiveness of different types of short stories and genres in vocabulary learning, investigating the long-term retention effects of this method, and examining its application across different grade levels and language proficiency levels. Future research applications should also consider implementing this method in various educational contexts with more diverse populations to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the development of digital platforms and interactive media that incorporate short story reading with vocabulary exercises could further enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of this learning approach in the digital age.

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