

An Analysis of Teachers' Strategies in Improving Students' Vocabulary at SMP Negeri 2 Tondano

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery is an essential aspect of learning English; therefore, appropriate learning strategies are needed to help students improve their understanding and effective use of vocabulary. In practice, the implementation of these strategies is inseparable from various challenges, making it important to examine how teachers apply vocabulary-learning strategies, the obstacles they encounter, and the efforts they make to overcome them. This study examines the strategies employed by teachers to improve students' vocabulary, identifies the obstacles they face, and explains the methods used to address these challenges. A descriptive qualitative method was employed in this study, which was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Tondano during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants were two English teachers, and the data were collected through interviews and documentation. The collected data were analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that teachers use strategies such as translation, drills, memorization, singing, and games. The obstacles identified include limited instructional time, low student motivation, a lack of learning media, and variations in students' language proficiency. To overcome these challenges, teachers adapt their strategies, create simple learning resources, and apply engaging instructional methods. In conclusion, effective teaching strategies play a crucial role in improving students' vocabulary mastery. This research aims to provide guidance for teachers and researchers in developing more effective vocabulary-learning approaches. In addition, the findings offer practical insights that can support educators and schools in designing vocabulary instruction that is more responsive to students' needs and classroom conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a crucial instrument for humans to share thoughts, convey information, and articulate feelings and ideas. In today's globalized world, proficiency in a foreign language, particularly English, has become increasingly vital because it serves as a medium of communication that connects people to global knowledge and interactions. This urgency is reflected in the Indonesian government's initiative to position English as the primary foreign language within the national education framework from elementary through secondary education, as it is considered essential for helping students access global perspectives and communication (Christianto & Karin, 2019). Consequently, the inclusion of English in the educational curriculum is not only relevant but also a strategic effort to prepare students for effective competition and collaboration in an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

The focus of English education at the junior high school level is on enhancing students' skills by integrating the four language abilities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as stated in both the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. The 2013 Curriculum aims to develop students' communicative competence through a text-based approach, which requires learners to understand and apply language in various social contexts. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes a more flexible, meaningful, and student-centered learning experience through activities that promote authentic

and collaborative communication. In both curricula, vocabulary mastery is essential because it supports students' ability to develop the four language skills in an integrated manner. This view aligns with Khasanah, Chamdani, and Susiani (2014), who state that vocabulary plays an important role in learning English; however, this role is often neglected in classroom practice. As noted by Fitriyani and Nulanda (2017), without sufficient vocabulary mastery, students will experience difficulties in learning English effectively.

Vocabulary is crucial in learning English because it is a key factor in assessing students' speaking skills. Speaking, as a complex skill, requires the simultaneous use of various components such as grammar, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension, which work together to enable effective communication. Among these components, vocabulary serves as a fundamental element that allows learners to express ideas, convey meaning clearly, and communicate effectively (Angyuningsih, 2013). Supporting this view, Tarigan (2011) explains that an individual's language proficiency can be measured by vocabulary size; the broader a person's vocabulary, the greater the likelihood of achieving language proficiency (Hotimah, 2010). In addition, Nation (2001) describes the reciprocal relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language proficiency, in which strong vocabulary knowledge supports effective language use, and proficient language use contributes to vocabulary development (Alqahtani, 2015).

One important factor influencing students' vocabulary development is the role of the teacher in the learning process. Slattery and Willis (2013) explain that teachers do not only function as instructors, but also act as motivators, guides, behavior managers, providers of appropriate language models, counselors, companions, needs analysts, material developers, and evaluators (Sariakin & Faizah, 2023). In line with this perspective, Maru (2014) emphasizes that teachers are not only responsible for delivering language material but also serve as cultural mediators who help students understand how language reflects the values and social habits of its speakers. Given these extensive responsibilities, teachers are required not only to teach but also to select and implement appropriate learning strategies so that instructional objectives can be achieved optimally. However, Baleghizadeh and Ashoori (2011) note that one of the greatest challenges teachers face is determining and applying suitable teaching strategies. Therefore, teachers carry a significant responsibility in selecting and implementing effective vocabulary learning strategies to support students' language development (Fitriyani & Nulanda, 2017).

Teachers play a central role in developing and improving students' vocabulary skills, making the topic of analyzing teachers' strategies for improving students' vocabulary highly relevant in educational contexts. Komachali and Khodareza (2012) emphasize that, to teach vocabulary effectively, teachers must adjust instructional strategies according to students' age and needs, as English instruction requires different approaches compared to teaching Indonesian (Fitriyani & Nulanda, 2017). Furthermore, Rahman (2018) defines educational strategy as a plan, design, method, or activity formulated to achieve specific learning objectives. Similarly, Awang (2017) explains that learning strategies consist of a series of actions that must be carefully implemented throughout the instructional process. In addition, Panjaitan, Sirait, and Saragih (2022) state that an effective strategy should address students' needs and provide clear direction toward achieving expected learning outcomes. Thus, teachers' ability to design effective learning strategies contributes not only to improved vocabulary mastery but also to the creation of meaningful and sustainable learning experiences.

Appropriate and innovative learning strategies play a crucial role in helping students develop vocabulary mastery and enhance their overall English language skills. Students' interest and engagement in learning vocabulary are strongly influenced by teachers' creativity in selecting and applying strategies that align with students' learning needs. Harmer (1991) identifies several strategies that can be used in vocabulary instruction, including translation, memorization, language games, singing, and the use of pictures. The application of varied strategies enables the learning process to become more engaging, flexible, and effective, encouraging students to participate actively and use vocabulary in communicative contexts. Therefore, the success of vocabulary learning is determined not only by the instructional content but also by teachers' ability to select and integrate appropriate learning strategies. The implementation of suitable strategies is expected to enhance learning motivation, improve comprehension, and strengthen vocabulary retention. Consequently, the development of vocabulary learning strategies is an important aspect that must be considered to achieve quality English language instruction.

Based on the preceding explanation, the problem in vocabulary instruction lies not only in students' ability to understand and memorize new vocabulary but also in how effectively teachers' learning strategies facilitate vocabulary development. Preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 2 Tondano indicated that the English teacher had implemented several learning strategies aligned with Harmer's

(1991) theory, which serves as the theoretical basis for this research. During the implementation of vocabulary teaching strategies, teachers encountered various challenges that significantly affected the learning process. Students demonstrated differing levels of vocabulary mastery, making it difficult for teachers to apply a uniform approach that met all students' needs. In addition, students' low motivation and lack of self-confidence reduced their participation in vocabulary-related activities, hindering effective vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, limited learning materials and resources constrained teachers' ability to implement more diverse and interactive teaching methods. Time limitations also posed challenges, particularly when teachers were required to balance vocabulary instruction with grammar, pronunciation, and other language components. These challenges highlight that vocabulary instruction is a complex task that requires teachers to continuously adapt, refine, and improve their instructional strategies to support effective student learning.

Several previous studies have examined teachers' methods of teaching English vocabulary and reported positive effects on students' vocabulary development. Fitriani, Fitrianiingsih, and Puspananda (2023) found that the use of images, memorization, translation, and word-chain games reduced students' boredom and improved vocabulary mastery as well as classroom engagement. Similarly, Argo, Tirtanawati, and Purnama (2020) reported that strategies such as memorization, collaborative reading, translation, and vocabulary games, including word chains, Pictionary, and bingo, effectively enhanced students' motivation and supported continuous vocabulary development at the junior high school level. In addition, Garwan and Priyanti (2021) demonstrated that translation methods and vocabulary games successfully fostered interactive learning environments and encouraged active student participation in vocabulary learning. Collectively, these studies indicate that varied and dynamic teaching strategies can significantly improve students' vocabulary learning outcomes. However, most previous research has primarily focused on identifying and describing the strategies used by teachers, with limited attention given to the challenges encountered during their implementation. In contrast, the present study not only identifies vocabulary teaching strategies but also explores the obstacles faced by teachers, such as differences in students' ability levels, low motivation, and limited learning resources, and examines how teachers address these challenges through adaptive instructional practices and professional reflection. Thus, the originality of this study lies in providing a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of vocabulary instruction by highlighting both teaching strategies and the practical dynamics that influence their implementation in classroom settings.

The purpose of this research is to identify and describe teachers' strategies for improving students' vocabulary at SMP Negeri 2 Tondano, as well as to examine the obstacles teachers encounter in implementing these strategies and the ways they overcome them. This study is expected to contribute to the field of English language teaching, particularly in the area of vocabulary development. The findings are also expected to serve as a reference for English teachers in selecting and applying effective strategies to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. By understanding the challenges involved in implementing instructional strategies and the solutions adopted by teachers, educators can develop learning approaches that are more creative, adaptive, and aligned with students' needs. In addition, this research is expected to benefit students by enhancing their vocabulary knowledge and fostering better learning habits, thereby improving overall English proficiency. Furthermore, this study contributes to the body of scholarly research on English teaching strategies, particularly vocabulary instruction, and may serve as a reference or point of comparison for future studies conducted in different educational contexts, levels, or instructional settings.

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, as its purpose is to thoroughly and accurately describe the strategies used by teachers to enhance students' vocabulary in the classroom, not to generate new theories but to provide an authentic depiction of real classroom practices (Creswell, 2009). This approach enables the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the instructional methods applied by teachers throughout the teaching process. In qualitative research, the researcher functions as the primary instrument who determines the research focus, collects data, analyzes and interprets the findings, and draws conclusions (Sugiyono, 2007). Supporting instruments such as observation sheets, interview guidelines, and documentation checklists were developed to strengthen the data collection process. Sugiyono (2007) also emphasizes the importance of direct involvement in the field to ensure the authenticity and validity of the data collected. Therefore, the use of a descriptive qualitative method allows this study to produce findings that are detailed, accurate, and consistent with the actual context of vocabulary learning in educational settings.

This research was conducted over a relatively short period of two days. The preliminary observation stage took place on May 8, 2024, while the main data collection stage was carried out on May 13, 2024. The research sample consisted of two English teachers who teach Grades IX and VII, selected based on predetermined criteria. Purposive sampling was employed to determine the research participants. Saleh (2017) explains that purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on specific considerations. In other words, purposive sampling involves selecting participants according to particular characteristics or criteria relevant to the research objectives or problems. Accordingly, the researcher selected the teachers based on the following criteria: (a) holding at least a Bachelor's degree in English Education; (b) having approximately five years of teaching experience; (c) being registered as an active teacher in the field of education; and (d) holding a permanent teaching position at SMP Negeri 2 Tondano.

Data in this study were collected primarily through interviews, which served as the main data collection technique to obtain in-depth information regarding teachers' strategies in vocabulary instruction. The interviews consisted of seven open-ended questions developed by the researcher based on Harmer's (1991) theory to ensure relevance to the research focus. During the interview process, the researcher recorded the conversations using a mobile phone to ensure that no information was omitted. After the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim, and only the most relevant sections were selected to maintain conciseness and analytical focus. This procedure was intended to ensure that the data were accurate, credible, and suitable for in-depth analysis in accordance with the research context. In addition to interviews, documentation was used as a supporting data collection technique to reinforce and validate the research findings. Documentation involved collecting relevant materials, such as lesson plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* or RPP). These documents functioned as supporting evidence to confirm the interview data and to ensure consistency between the information obtained and actual classroom practices. Through the use of documentation, the research obtained a more objective and comprehensive understanding of how vocabulary teaching strategies were implemented by English teachers. Interviews were conducted to gather direct information concerning teachers' perspectives, experiences, and strategies in improving students' vocabulary.

The collected data were analyzed through three stages. First, during the data condensation stage, the researcher selected, simplified, and focused the data obtained from interviews and documentation by transcribing recorded conversations and identifying key information relevant to the research objectives. Second, in the data display stage, the organized data were presented in the form of a structured narrative to facilitate the identification of patterns, relationships, and key findings without the use of tables. The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the analyzed patterns and findings, followed by repeated verification to ensure that the conclusions were accurate, consistent, and supported by the data. This analytical process followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), enabling the researcher to interpret the data comprehensively and present the findings descriptively in accordance with actual field conditions.

FINDINGS

Teachers' Strategy in Teaching Vocabulary

The findings revealed differences in vocabulary teaching strategies between Teacher A and Teacher B, primarily influenced by grade level and curriculum. Teacher A taught ninth-grade students using the 2013 Curriculum, which emphasizes structured learning. In contrast, Teacher B taught seventh-grade students using the Merdeka Curriculum, which is known for its flexibility and student-centered approach. These differences resulted in variations in teaching strategies, classroom interactions, and the dynamics of vocabulary learning between the two teachers.

Based on the research findings, it was found that the teachers applied five main strategies to improve students' vocabulary, namely translation, *repeat after me*, drills, song strategies, and game strategies. These strategies were used to help students understand vocabulary meanings, improve pronunciation, strengthen memory through repetition, and create an enjoyable and interactive learning atmosphere. In addition, the teachers also implemented differentiated learning by adjusting instructional approaches according to students' abilities and needs. The use of this combination of strategies indicates that the teachers sought to facilitate vocabulary learning in a varied and effective manner in order to optimize students' learning outcomes.

Translation

Based on the interview results, it was found that the teacher applied five main strategies in vocabulary instruction, namely translation, *repeat after me*, drills, song strategies, and game strategies. First, the translation strategy was used to help students understand the meaning of vocabulary while simultaneously improving their pronunciation and spelling skills. Teacher A stated, *"Misalnya, dalam reading, hal-hal yang harus ditingkatkan adalah pronunciation dan spell the word. Dalam hal ini, miss akan menerapkan strategi repeat after me atau translation untuk mengasah kemampuan siswa dalam berbahasa Inggris."* (For example, in reading, the aspects that need to be improved are pronunciation and spelling. In this case, I will apply the *repeat after me* strategy or translation to sharpen students' English language skills.) The interview revealed that the teacher employed translation as a strategy to help students comprehend unfamiliar vocabulary and retain meanings by writing them down. This approach aligns with the documentation, which required students to identify vocabulary in song lyrics and interpret the meanings in Indonesian. This finding demonstrates that the use of translation was a deliberate component of the lesson plan.

Repeat After Me

The *repeat after me* strategy was implemented to train students to imitate correct pronunciation through continuous repetition. The same interview excerpt indicates the teacher's emphasis on pronunciation and spelling. Teacher A stated, *"Misalnya, dalam reading, hal-hal yang harus ditingkatkan adalah pronunciation dan spell the word. Dalam hal ini, miss akan menerapkan strategi repeat after me atau translation untuk mengasah kemampuan siswa dalam berbahasa Inggris."* (For example, in reading, the aspects that need to be improved are pronunciation and spelling. In this case, I will apply the *repeat after me* strategy or translation to sharpen students' English language skills). According to the interview, the *repeat after me* technique was used to enhance pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary recognition. This finding is consistent with the documentation activities that required students to imitate pronunciation and articulate vocabulary from song lyrics, confirming that repetition was an integral part of the lesson plan.

Drill

The teacher also implemented the drill strategy to ensure that vocabulary was embedded in students' memory through repeated practice. Teacher A stated, *"Miss juga akan menerapkan strategi drill atau pengulangan agar materi yang dipelajari tersebut tertanam baik dalam ingatan siswa."* (I will also apply the drill strategy or repetition so that the material being studied can be well embedded in students' memory.) The teacher explained that drills were used to strengthen vocabulary retention through repeated exposure and practice. This aligns with the documentation, in which students repeatedly listened to vocabulary items, read lyrics aloud, and completed vocabulary-related tasks, indicating that drilling was integrated into the instructional process.

Song Strategy

The song strategy was utilized to improve students' listening skills while creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere. Teacher A stated, *"Dan untuk keterampilan yang lainnya, miss akan selalu memerhatikan kebutuhan dan minat siswa. Miss juga terkadang memberikan audio atau lagu yang dapat membantu siswa dalam meningkatkan kemampuan mendengarkan mereka."* (And for other skills, I always pay attention to students' needs and interests. I sometimes provide audio or songs that can help students improve their listening skills). The interview revealed that songs were used to enhance student motivation, create an enjoyable learning environment, and support vocabulary retention through repeated exposure to lyrics. This strategy was clearly reflected in the documentation, in which the core learning materials were centered on songs. The learning steps included listening to lyrics, identifying vocabulary, practicing pronunciation, and interpreting the meaning of the song. This indicates that songs were systematically integrated as a strategy for vocabulary learning rather than used incidentally.

Game Strategy

Finally, the teacher applied the game strategy as a form of ice breaking to reduce learning pressure and increase students' motivation. Teacher A stated, *"Miss juga akan menyisipkan permainan dalam Bahasa Inggris dalam ice breaking agar siswa tidak merasa tertekan dalam proses pembelajaran."* (I also include English games as ice-breaking activities so that students do not feel pressured during the learning process). This finding was reinforced by Teacher B, who stated, *"Misalnya, saya sering menggunakan games dalam kegiatan belajar karena anak-anak sekarang sangat menyukai hal-hal yang bersifat permainan. Dengan games, siswa bisa belajar sambil bermain, suasana kelas jadi lebih hidup,"*

dan mereka tidak cepat merasa bosan." (For example, I often use games in learning activities because students today really like game-based activities. Through games, students can learn while playing, the classroom atmosphere becomes livelier, and they do not get bored easily). According to the interview data, games, particularly during ice-breaking activities, helped reduce boredom, refocus students' attention, and increase motivation in vocabulary learning. Although games were not formally stated in the *Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* (RPP), instructional elements such as group collaboration, presentations, and interactive questioning supported a student-centered approach, allowing game-based activities to be flexibly integrated into classroom practice.

Obstacles teachers face in implementing the strategies

The interview results showed that English teachers faced several obstacles in implementing learning strategies, namely differences in students' abilities, low student motivation and confidence, limited time for implementing predetermined strategies, and a lack of supporting facilities in schools. These obstacles affected the effectiveness of strategy implementation and required teachers to be more creative and adaptive in adjusting learning methods to students' conditions.

Differences in Students' Abilities and Motivation

Differences in students' abilities and motivation emerged as the primary obstacle in implementing learning strategies. The teacher explained that students' abilities were not evenly distributed between higher-achieving classes and regular classes, causing the same strategy to produce different learning outcomes. Teacher A stated, "*Hambatan yang paling sering saya hadapi adalah perbedaan kemampuan dan motivasi siswa. Dalam satu kelas, kemampuan siswa itu tidak sama. Kalau saya menerapkan strategi yang sama di semua kelas, hasilnya pasti tidak seimbang.*" (The obstacle I most often face is the difference in students' abilities and motivation. In one class, students do not have the same abilities. If I apply the same strategy in all classes, the results will definitely not be balanced). Teacher B also stated, "*Terutama motivasi dan kepercayaan diri. Beberapa siswa masih malu berbicara atau takut salah saat menggunakan kosakata baru. Tapi saya selalu berusaha menciptakan suasana kelas yang nyaman dan menyenangkan. Dengan begitu mereka lebih berani berbicara dan mencoba. Saya juga sering memberi pujian agar mereka percaya diri.*" (Especially motivation and self-confidence. Some students are still shy to speak or afraid of making mistakes when using new vocabulary. However, I always try to create a comfortable and enjoyable classroom atmosphere so that they are more confident to speak and try. I also often give praise to build their self-confidence).

A comparison with the lesson plan (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* or *RPP*) revealed a gap in its approach. The *RPP* outlined clear cognitive learning steps, such as analyzing lyrics, identifying vocabulary, and presenting findings, but it did not include differentiated activities or scaffolding for students with lower motivation or varying ability levels. While the strategies presented in the *RPP* were appropriate, the absence of explicit support for affective aspects such as confidence building and motivation required teachers to adapt their instructional practices beyond the written plan. This adaptation was necessary to ensure effective vocabulary learning for all students.

Limited Time in Learning

Teachers also encountered obstacles related to limited instructional time. The teachers explained that lesson duration was not always sufficient to implement all stages of the planned strategies. Teacher A stated, "*Keterbatasan waktu juga sering jadi kendala. Kadang saya sudah menyiapkan beberapa strategi, tapi waktu di kelas tidak cukup untuk melaksanakan semuanya.*" (Time limitation is also often an obstacle. Sometimes I have prepared several strategies, but the class time is not sufficient to implement them all). Teacher B similarly stated, "*Hambatan yang paling sering saya alami adalah keterbatasan fasilitas dan waktu. Karena saya menggunakan pembelajaran berbasis teknologi, kadang jaringan internet tidak stabil atau perangkat siswa tidak mendukung. Akibatnya strategi tidak bisa berjalan maksimal. Selain itu, waktu pelajaran yang terbatas juga membuat saya sulit menerapkan semua tahapan strategi yang sudah direncanakan.*" (The obstacle I most frequently experience is limited facilities and time. Because I use technology-based learning, sometimes the internet connection is unstable or students' devices do not support the activities. As a result, the strategy cannot be implemented optimally. In addition, limited lesson time makes it difficult to carry out all stages of the planned strategy).

The interview findings indicated that limited instructional time posed a challenge for teachers in executing all stages of the planned strategies. This situation aligned with the *RPP*, which outlined numerous detailed learning activities, from orientation to presentation and reflection, within an allocation

of only two sessions of 40 minutes. Consequently, teachers often had to shorten or omit certain stages to comply with time constraints. This reflected a discrepancy between the ideal procedures described in the *RPP* and the practical realities of classroom time management. As a result, limited lesson duration hindered full strategy implementation and required teachers to continuously adjust their instructional practices to maintain learning effectiveness.

Lack of Facilities

Another obstacle identified was the lack of supporting learning facilities. Teachers reported limitations in equipment such as projectors, speakers, and internet access, which made the consistent implementation of technology-based strategies difficult. Teacher A stated, *"Fasilitas juga terbatas. Tidak semua kelas punya proyektor atau speaker. Tapi saya berusaha untuk kreatif, misalnya dengan membawa speaker Bluetooth sederhana atau mengirim lagu melalui grup WhatsApp kelas."* (Facilities are also limited. Not all classes have projectors or speakers. However, I try to be creative by bringing a simple Bluetooth speaker or sending songs through the class WhatsApp group). Teacher B also stated, *"Hambatan yang paling sering saya alami adalah keterbatasan fasilitas dan waktu. Karena saya menggunakan pembelajaran berbasis teknologi, kadang jaringan internet tidak stabil atau perangkat siswa tidak mendukung. Akibatnya strategi tidak bisa berjalan maksimal. Selain itu, waktu pelajaran yang terbatas juga membuat saya sulit menerapkan semua tahapan strategi yang sudah direncanakan."* (The obstacle I most frequently experience is limited facilities and time. Because I use technology-based learning, sometimes the internet connection is unstable or students' devices are not adequate. As a result, the strategy cannot be implemented optimally).

The interview findings showed that inadequate learning facilities, such as unstable internet connections and limited access to devices, often hindered teachers from effectively implementing technology-based learning strategies. This issue became apparent when comparing actual classroom conditions with the *RPP*, which required the use of digital media and tools such as laptops, projectors, and interactive materials. While the *RPP* assumed that all technological resources were available and functioning properly, many students lacked access to or were unable to operate the required devices. Consequently, teachers frequently modified or simplified planned activities to accommodate available resources. This lack of facilities created a gap between the ideal implementation described in the *RPP* and classroom realities, thereby limiting the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies.

Lack of Students' Confidence

Finally, teachers also faced challenges related to students' low self-confidence in using new vocabulary orally. This condition reduced classroom interaction because students were afraid of making mistakes. Teacher B stated, *"Beberapa siswa masih malu berbicara atau takut salah saat menggunakan kosakata baru. Tapi saya selalu berusaha menciptakan suasana kelas yang nyaman dan menyenangkan. Saya juga sering memberi pujian agar mereka percaya diri."* (Some students are still shy or afraid of making mistakes when using new vocabulary. However, I always try to create a comfortable and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. I also frequently give praise to help them feel confident). Therefore, it can be concluded that students' low self-confidence significantly limited the effectiveness of vocabulary learning, requiring teachers to provide continuous emotional support and classroom encouragement to ensure that all students were willing to participate actively.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this research align with Harmer's (1991) theory, which suggests that various learning strategies can greatly improve students' mastery of vocabulary. Harmer indicates that methods such as translation, memorization, games, and singing are effective ways to assist learners in acquiring and retaining new vocabulary in a fun and meaningful manner. The techniques utilized by the teachers in this research directly correspond with those recommended in the theory, indicating that their teaching methods are grounded in well-established learning principles. Translation and memorization serve to enhance vocabulary retention, while games and songs boost students' motivation and reduce anxiety, making the process of learning vocabulary more engaging. This congruence validates that the strategies employed by the teachers are not arbitrary but rather reflect the incorporation of relevant theoretical concepts into classroom practice aimed at enhancing students' vocabulary development.

The findings of this study indicate that the teaching strategies used by the teacher, such as translation, drill, repeat after me, games, and song strategies, were proven to help improve students' vocabulary mastery. These findings are in line with the research conducted by Fitriani, Fitrianiingsih, and Puspananda (2023), which stated that drilling, memorization, and games can enhance students'

vocabulary, while also showing that the use of games in learning can increase students' motivation during the learning process. Furthermore, this study also found that the teacher implemented differentiated learning strategies and the use of games as varied instructional approaches tailored to students' needs. These findings are consistent with Alqahtani's (2015) view that vocabulary learning cannot be separated from meaningful communication contexts and the use of diverse teaching techniques. Thus, the implementation of game-based learning and contextual approaches in this study reinforces Alqahtani's argument that vocabulary instruction should be adapted to students' needs to be more effective and meaningful.

The findings of this study are in line with and simultaneously reinforce previous research. The findings regarding the use of game-based learning strategies in English instruction, aimed at creating an enjoyable learning environment and reducing students' pressure, show consistency with the study conducted by Kiling, Tuerah, and Posumah (2021), entitled *Students' Perception on Game for Vocabulary Mastery*. That study explained that the implementation of games in English learning can enhance students' motivation, engagement, and active participation during the learning process, as students feel more enthusiastic and less pressured when the material is presented through enjoyable activities. This aligns with the findings of the present study, where the use of games not only impacted students' vocabulary mastery but also contributed to increased interest and self-confidence in participating in learning. Therefore, these findings affirm that the use of games serves not merely as a method variation but also as an effective pedagogical strategy to create more meaningful learning that addresses students' emotional and motivational needs.

In addition, the findings of this study also support the results of the research conducted by Wongkar, Rorimpandey, and Kawalo (2022) in their study entitled *The Application of English Songs to Improve Students' Listening Comprehension*, which showed that the use of songs in learning activities can help students improve their listening skills and better understand vocabulary. Songs are considered an effective learning medium because they contain repeated lyrics, natural pronunciation, and authentic language contexts, allowing students to acquire new vocabulary more easily without feeling burdened. Additional support is found in the study by Darmawan, Palenkahu, and Rorimpandey (2022), which explained that vocabulary learning through songs can enhance students' memory because the rhythm, repetition, and enjoyment generated from listening to music help strengthen long-term memory. This aligns with the findings of the present study, where the teacher used songs as a learning medium to train listening skills while maintaining students' interest and motivation during the learning process. Therefore, the use of songs not only functions as a learning variation but also as a pedagogical strategy that simultaneously accommodates students' cognitive, affective, and linguistic aspects, thereby positively impacting vocabulary mastery.

The findings of this study also indicate that the English teacher faced several significant obstacles in implementing learning strategies, such as differences in students' abilities, low learning motivation, lack of self-confidence, and limited supporting facilities during the learning process. Differences in students' abilities required the teacher to provide additional attention and time to ensure that all students could follow the lessons at the same level, which posed a major challenge, especially in classes with a large number of students. Low motivation and self-confidence caused some students to be reluctant to participate in learning activities, particularly when asked to speak or respond in English, resulting in certain students being passive and less engaged. In addition, limitations in facilities, such as a lack of learning media, made it difficult for the teacher to implement more interactive and innovative teaching strategies. These conditions required the teacher to continuously adjust the instructional approach to ensure that learning remained effective and learning objectives were achieved. The teacher needed to be able to modify strategies according to classroom conditions, balancing simple techniques with engaging methods to accommodate students' needs. Despite facing these various obstacles, the teacher continued to seek solutions so that the vocabulary learning process could run optimally and support the overall development of students' language skills.

The findings of this study are in line with Richards and Farrell (2005), who emphasize that teachers must possess adaptive abilities to face professional and pedagogical challenges that arise during the teaching process. This indicates that teachers are not only required to master the instructional material but also to adjust strategies, methods, and classroom management according to students' needs and learning conditions. The results of this study also align with Schön's (1983) concept of reflective teaching, which highlights the importance of reflection as a step to improve teaching practice. In this study, the teacher demonstrated adaptive and reflective abilities through various efforts to overcome learning obstacles, such as changing strategies when media or technology did not function, adding ice-breaking activities when students began to lose focus, and modifying strategies in subsequent sessions

based on successes or challenges encountered previously. These actions indicate that the teacher did not apply strategies rigidly but made pedagogical decisions based on observation and reflection on classroom dynamics to ensure that learning remained effective despite obstacles. Nevertheless, certain limitations still need to be acknowledged, so the process of adaptation and reflection must continue to be developed to ensure that teaching strategies become increasingly optimal in supporting vocabulary mastery and students' learning outcomes.

This study has several limitations, primarily because it involved only two English teachers and was conducted at a single school; therefore, the findings cannot yet be generalized to a broader context. In addition, data were collected through interviews and documentation without direct classroom observation, so the actual implementation of strategies was not fully captured. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to involve more participants and schools with diverse characteristics, as well as to incorporate classroom observations or action research to comprehensively analyze the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies. Subsequent studies could also examine other factors, such as the use of digital media or students' learning styles, to enrich understanding of vocabulary development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that English teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Tondano utilize various teaching strategies, such as translation, repetition or *repeat after me*, drills, songs, and games, to enhance students' skills in pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary mastery. These strategies reflect the teachers' efforts to foster an active, communicative, and enjoyable learning environment, enabling students to use vocabulary meaningfully in alignment with the learning objectives. In practice, teachers encounter several challenges, including varying student abilities within the classroom, low motivation and self-confidence among students, and limited supporting resources. However, these obstacles can be addressed through ongoing adaptation and professional reflection by teachers, both during and after the learning process. The adjustments made, such as modifying teaching approaches, incorporating ice-breaking activities, and designing more contextualized lessons in subsequent sessions, demonstrate the teachers' capacity for pedagogical flexibility in response to different learning conditions. Therefore, this study confirms that the success of improving students' vocabulary mastery largely depends on teachers' ability to creatively and adaptively select, modify, and implement teaching strategies. This ultimately leads to optimal learning outcomes and a more meaningful learning experience for students.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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