

Correlation Between English Learning Motivation and Daily Vocabulary Mastery of Grade VIII Students at SMP Negeri 5 Palu

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ABSTRACT

Many junior high school students experience difficulty actively using English vocabulary in authentic communication, and their level of learning motivation may contribute to this difficulty. This study aimed to examine the correlation between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Palu. A quantitative correlational research design was employed. The population consisted of 131 students, and 50 students were selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire measuring intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental motivation, and a 20-item multiple-choice test assessing daily vocabulary mastery. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's rho correlation analysis due to non-normal data distribution. The results showed that students' motivation was generally high ($M = 77.04$), and their daily vocabulary mastery was at a good level ($M = 74.20$). A very strong, statistically significant positive correlation was found between the two variables ($r = 0.876$, $p < 0.01$). These findings indicate that higher motivation is strongly associated with better daily vocabulary mastery.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of English language proficiency and directly influences learners' communicative competence. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), daily vocabulary refers to words frequently used in everyday situations such as school activities, family interactions, hobbies, and routines. Mastery of daily vocabulary enables students to participate in authentic communication both inside and outside the classroom. However, many junior high school students still struggle to use simple vocabulary actively in conversations, which affects their confidence and fluency.

Vocabulary knowledge has been recognized as a central determinant of overall language achievement and communicative effectiveness [1]. This condition indicates that insufficient mastery of daily vocabulary remains a significant issue in EFL classrooms.

One possible factor contributing to this problem is students' learning motivation. Motivation determines the intensity of learners' engagement, effort, and persistence in language learning. Students with higher motivation tend to show greater involvement in vocabulary learning activities and better retention of new words [2]. Conversely, low motivation often leads students to focus solely on short-term memorization without meaningful application. From a theoretical perspective, motivation functions as an internal and external driving force that shapes learners' behavior and achievement in language acquisition. Therefore, understanding the role of motivation in vocabulary mastery is essential for improving students' communicative competence.

Several empirical studies in Indonesia have examined the relationship between English learning motivation and vocabulary mastery. Noviana and Handayani [3] reported a moderate positive correlation among junior high school students. Saswandi et al. [4] and Diana [5] reported strong correlations between motivation and vocabulary mastery across different educational contexts. Furthermore, Arif et al. [6] revealed a very strong relationship between vocabulary mastery and overall English achievement. These findings suggest that motivation plays an important role in vocabulary development. Nevertheless, Rohepta and Hakim [7] found contradictory results, reporting no significant correlation in another school context. Such inconsistencies indicate that contextual factors, including regional background and school environment, may influence the strength of the relationship.

Although prior studies have focused on general vocabulary mastery, limited research has specifically investigated daily vocabulary mastery as the ability to apply vocabulary in authentic communication. Moreover, research conducted in Central Sulawesi, particularly at the junior high school level, remains scarce. Preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 5 Palu indicate that students often possess passive vocabulary but encounter difficulties when required to use it actively in real-life interactions. This situation reveals a research gap concerning how English learning motivation relates specifically to daily vocabulary mastery in this regional context.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the correlation between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Palu. This study aims to identify students' levels of English learning motivation, determine their level of daily vocabulary mastery, and examine the correlation between the two variables. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on daily vocabulary as a distinct construct and its focus on an underrepresented regional context. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence for the role of motivation in practical vocabulary development and offer pedagogical insights for enhancing communicative English instruction.

2. METHOD

This research employed a quantitative correlational design to investigate the relationship between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery. A

correlational design was selected because the study aimed to identify the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables without administering any treatment. According to Creswell [8], correlational research is appropriate for examining naturally occurring relationships among variables in educational settings. In addition, Gay et al. [9] state that correlational studies are useful for identifying relationships among variables in educational research without implying causation. The population of this study consisted of all eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Palu, totaling 131 students in the 2025/2026 academic year. From this population, 50 students were selected using a simple random sampling technique. Selecting a representative sample is essential because it affects the accuracy and validity of the research findings, as emphasized by Timamah et al. [10].

Data were collected using two research instruments. The first instrument was an English learning motivation questionnaire consisting of 20 items measuring intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental motivation. According to Likert [11], a five-point Likert scale is used to measure respondents' attitudes and opinions by indicating the degree of agreement with a set of statements. Furthermore, Boone and Boone [12] explain that Likert-type scales are appropriate for measuring motivational constructs in educational research when analyzed using descriptive and nonparametric statistics. The second instrument was a daily vocabulary mastery test consisting of 20 multiple-choice items on daily English vocabulary. According to Heaton [13], multiple-choice tests are effective for objectively measuring students' vocabulary knowledge. Data analysis was conducted in SPSS, including descriptive statistics and a Shapiro-Wilk normality test. Since the data were not normally distributed, Spearman's rho was used to assess the significance and strength of the relationship between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Results of the Motivation Questionnaire and Daily Vocabulary Test

3.1.1 The Results of the Motivation Questionnaire

Table 1. The Result of the Motivation Questionnaire

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
50	39	95	77.04	12.879

Based on the descriptive statistics, the motivation scores ranged from 39 to 95. The mean score was 77.04, with a standard deviation of 12.879. These results showed that the students' English learning motivation was generally high. The standard deviation indicated that students' motivation levels varied, but the differences were acceptable. Overall, the results suggested that most students had a positive attitude toward learning English. Oxford and Shearin [14] state that learners' motivation is closely related to their attitudes toward language learning and academic goals, which in turn influence their persistence and effort in learning a foreign language. Although some students had lower motivation scores, many were motivated to learn English for both personal and academic purposes.

3.2 The Result of the Daily Vocabulary Test

Table 2. The Result of the Daily Vocabulary Test

No	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
50	29	95	74.20	15.097

Based on the descriptive statistics, the vocabulary scores ranged from 25 to 95. The mean score was 74.20, with a standard deviation of 15.097. These results showed that the students' daily vocabulary mastery was generally good. The standard deviation indicated that students' vocabulary mastery levels differed, and the differences were wider than those observed in the motivation scores. According to Sugiyono [15], the mean score describes the general level of students' achievement, while the standard deviation reflects the degree of variation among students' scores. Overall, the results suggested that many students understood and used daily English vocabulary effectively. However, some students still had difficulty with daily vocabulary, which led to variation in their test scores.

3.3 Normality Test

Table 3. Normality Test

Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
.210	50	.000	.864	50	.000
.161	50	.002	.916	50	.002

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The normality test is required to decide the appropriate statistical technique for correlation analysis. The normality test in this research was conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk test, as the sample size was less than 50. Shapiro and Wilk [16] state that the Shapiro-Wilk test is appropriate for small sample sizes and is effective in detecting deviations from normality. The data are considered normally distributed if the significance value (Sig.) is greater than 0.05. Based on the Shapiro-Wilk test results, the p-value for Motivation Score was 0.000, which is lower than 0.05. Similarly, the significance value for Vocabulary Score was 0.002, which is also lower than 0.05. These results indicate that both the motivation and vocabulary data were not normally distributed.

3.4 Correlation

Table 3. Correlation

			Motivasi_Score	Vocabulary_Score
Spearman's rho	Motivasi_Score	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.876**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	50	50
	Vocabulary_Score	Correlation Coefficient	.876**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	50	50

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the Spearman's rho correlation analysis, the correlation coefficient (r) between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery was 0.876. The significance value obtained was 0.000, which is lower than 0.01. This indicates that the correlation between the two variables was statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The correlation coefficient of 0.876 indicates a very strong positive relationship between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery. According to Schober et al. [17], the Spearman correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of a monotonic association between variables, where values closer to ± 1 indicate stronger relationships. This means that students with higher motivation to learn English tend to achieve higher daily vocabulary mastery. Conversely, students with lower motivation tend to have lower vocabulary scores.

Based on these findings, the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant correlation between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery, is rejected. Meanwhile, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a strong and significant correlation between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Palu.

3.2. Discussion

The objective of this research was to investigate whether there is a significant relationship between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 5 Palu. This study focused on two main variables, namely students' English learning motivation and their mastery of daily English vocabulary. Motivation was examined through four dimensions intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental motivation, while daily vocabulary mastery was measured through a vocabulary test covering words commonly used in students' daily activities.

Based on the results of descriptive analysis, students' English learning motivation was categorized as high. This indicates that most students showed positive attitudes toward learning English, including enjoying English lessons, being motivated to achieve good scores, and recognizing the importance of English for future academic and career purposes. This finding aligns with Ryan and Deci [18], who state that motivated learners tend to demonstrate greater engagement and persistence in learning activities. Similarly, students' daily vocabulary mastery was categorized as good, indicating that they were familiar with common English vocabulary used in daily contexts. According to Nation [19], frequent exposure and repeated use of vocabulary in meaningful contexts contribute significantly to vocabulary development.

The correlation analysis revealed a very strong and significant positive relationship between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery ($r = 0.876$, $p < 0.01$). This result indicates that students with higher motivation tend to achieve better vocabulary mastery. This finding supports Gardner's theory [20], which emphasizes that motivation plays a central role in second language acquisition, particularly in vocabulary learning. Motivated students are more willing to invest effort, practice vocabulary, and apply new words in daily communication, thereby achieving better vocabulary mastery.

Furthermore, the strong correlation can be explained by the characteristics of vocabulary learning, which requires continuous practice and learner involvement. Schmitt [21] argues that vocabulary acquisition is strongly influenced by learners' willingness to notice, retrieve, and use words repeatedly. In this study, students who possessed strong intrinsic and instrumental motivation were more likely to engage actively in vocabulary learning tasks, both inside and outside the classroom. This finding is also supported by Dörnyei [22], who states that motivation functions as a driving force that sustains long-term success in language learning.

Although the findings show a strong relationship between motivation and vocabulary mastery, motivation is not the only factor influencing vocabulary learning. Harmer [23] states that teaching methods, classroom environment, and students' exposure to English both inside and outside the classroom also play an important role in developing vocabulary mastery. Nevertheless, this study's results highlight that enhancing students' motivation is an essential factor in improving vocabulary learning outcomes. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to design instructional activities that foster students' motivation and provide meaningful opportunities to practice daily vocabulary.

In this regard, the strong relationship observed in this study can also be explained by the role of motivated engagement in meaningful language exposure. Recent studies emphasize that motivated learners tend to seek more opportunities to interact with English vocabulary beyond formal instruction. Teng and Zhang [24] explain that motivation encourages learners to regulate their own vocabulary learning by repeatedly noticing, reviewing, and applying words in authentic contexts. This self-regulated behavior strengthens vocabulary retention and active use. Similarly, Baldwin Oga et al. [25] argue that motivation is closely linked to sustained engagement in language-learning activities, which is essential for developing practical vocabulary skills. In this study, students with higher motivation were more likely to engage with daily English vocabulary both in and out of the classroom, enabling them to transform passive vocabulary knowledge into active mastery. This finding reinforces the idea that motivation not only influences learning outcomes directly but also shapes students' learning behaviors that support continuous vocabulary development.

4. CONCLUSION

This research examined the relationship between English learning motivation and daily vocabulary mastery among eighth grade students. The findings support the main idea presented in the Introduction, more motivated students tend to understand and use daily English vocabulary more effectively in real communication. The results show that motivation helps students stay engaged, practice more consistently, and feel more confident when using vocabulary in everyday situations. By focusing on daily vocabulary, this study highlights the importance of helping students not only recognize words but also use them meaningfully in real-life contexts.

These findings have clear implications for teaching practice. Teachers should not rely solely on memorization activities; instead, they should create learning environments that encourage active vocabulary use and maintain students' interest in learning. At the same

time, this study was limited to one school and used a correlational design, so the results cannot be generalized to all contexts and do not establish causation. Future studies could involve students from different regions or use experimental methods to examine how specific motivational strategies improve vocabulary mastery over time. Overall, this research offers useful insights for improving vocabulary instruction and supporting students' communicative competence in EFL classrooms.

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