

Improving Vocabulary Mastery Through the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS): A Case of Junior High School Students

Nispa Ramadani¹, Nadrin², Moh Abraham Akbar Eisenring³, Abd. Kamaruddin⁴
^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Tadulako, Palu, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate whether the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) could improve the vocabulary mastery of the eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Palu. A quasi-experimental design involving pre-test and post-test control groups was employed. The population consisted of all eighth-grade students, with two classes selected through purposive sampling: class VIII APEL, serving as the experimental group, was taught using VSS (n = 32), and class VIII RAMBUTAN, serving as the control group, employed the conventional method (n = 30). The study focused on students' understanding of word meanings and their use of two high-frequency lexical categories: common nouns and action verbs. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and an independent sample t-test, employing a 0.05 significance level. The results showed an improvement in the experimental group, whose mean score increased from 51.8 in the pre-test to 80 in the post-test, while the control group improved only from 54.8 to 63.3. The t-test result, t-count (9.81), exceeded the t-table (1.671), indicating a significant difference between the two groups. These results demonstrate that VSS, when applied to specific vocabulary categories and competency levels, could improve students' vocabulary mastery. Overall, integrating VSS effectively improved students' vocabulary mastery by encouraging active participation and recommending its integration into instruction.

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Corresponding Author:

Nispa Ramadani

Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, English Education Study Program, Tadulako University

Email: pajjunispa@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that plays an essential role in communication, education, science, and technology. In Indonesia, it is taught as a foreign language and a compulsory subject in junior and senior high schools, aiming to equip students with the ability to use the language both orally and in writing. To achieve this, students must master the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as several

components that support those skills, of which one the most crucial is vocabulary since it is the foundation of all language skills and the key to understand and express ideas more easily [1], [2], [3].

Vocabulary is fundamental for language acquisition. Bao and Peng [4] state that second language learning depends heavily on vocabulary knowledge; insufficient vocabulary can hinder learners' comprehension and reduce their effectiveness in both academic tasks and communication. With a limited vocabulary, it can be challenging for students to grasp the meaning of words, use them correctly, and participate in class, which impacts their ability to express ideas and follow lessons [5], [6]. Therefore, vocabulary development plays a crucial role in achieving overall language proficiency. Additionally, vocabulary mastery involves more than merely knowing individual words; it requires an understanding of their functions, forms, and contextual usage.

Alqahtani [7] argues that vocabulary mastery entails comprehensive control over lexical items along with insight into their meanings and function in language. It means vocabulary mastery determines how successfully students can communicate and construct meaning. This condition is frequently observed among junior high school students, particularly those who are in the initial phase of learning English as a foreign language. Consequently, enhancing students' vocabulary mastery has become a fundamental objective in English language instruction, as it significantly influences their ability to achieve communicative competence and academic success.

Learning vocabulary mastery means understanding its function in a sentence. It is not only about knowing the meaning of a word but also about how the functions in a sentence are based on word classes [8], [9], [10]. Such mastery enables students to recognise grammatical roles and apply the appropriate form in context. Students' understanding of word classes strongly influences vocabulary mastery because these categories determine how words behave syntactically to contribute to sentence meaning [11], [12]. This suggests that vocabulary mastery, particularly of basic word classes, is essential for improving students' language skills.

Despite its importance, many junior high school students still face challenges in mastering English vocabulary. Based on the preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 4 Palu, most students have limited vocabulary. They often struggle to remember the meanings of words and identify sentences, especially basic word classes such as nouns and verbs, despite encountering these types in daily communication. The students also feel less confident when they speak English because they are afraid of making mistakes due to their limited vocabulary knowledge. This aligns with a study conducted by Hasman [13], which found that students' vocabulary knowledge is associated with low classroom participation.

Among various teaching strategies, the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) effectively fosters active involvement in learning vocabulary. Introduced by Haggard [14], VSS provides students the opportunity to choose interesting or new words from the text and discuss them with their classmates. Through this activity, students learn vocabulary in context and actively participate in their own learning. It can also make the class more interactive because students are not only receiving words from the teacher but also contributing their own findings [15], [16], [17].

The VSS has been recognised as a proven strategy for improving students' vocabulary mastery and learner engagement. Sainuddin [18] emphasised that students who learned vocabulary through VSS showed higher levels of motivation and active participation. Damanik, Nasution, and Ginting [19] found that the use of VSS significantly improved students' reading comprehension. Similarly, Nafisa [20] reported that students taught through VSS achieved higher scores in vocabulary mastery compared to those taught using conventional methods.

Prior studies have reported the effectiveness of VSS for general vocabulary or reading comprehension. Limited research examines its impact on specific word classes, such as common nouns and action verbs, which are essential for constructing meaningful sentences at the junior high school level. These word classes play a crucial role because nouns and verbs form the core of sentence structure and serve as basic elements in conveying meaning [21]. Furthermore, few studies have investigated how students' active involvement in selecting and analysing vocabulary items through VSS supports their accurate recognition and use of these word types.

Addressing this limitation, the present study focuses on how the VSS facilitates students' mastery, particularly in recognising and using common nouns and action verbs, with an emphasis on their ability to remember, understand, and apply these word types in context. In addition, this study aimed to investigate how students' active participation in selecting and analysing new or interesting vocabulary items can enhance their ability to comprehend word meanings and apply them in meaningful contexts.

The findings aim to provide pedagogical insights for English teachers and educators in junior high schools on the practical application of student-centred strategies in vocabulary teaching. Furthermore, the findings provide a practical reference for integrating interactive learning strategies into vocabulary instruction, thereby enhancing students' motivation and retention.

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative design, utilising a quasi-experimental method approach with a pre-test and post-test control group design. The use of two classes aligns with the characteristics of a quasi-experimental design, with purposive sampling as the research sample based on the relevance of the study [22]. The independent variable was the VSS, and the dependent variable was students' vocabulary mastery. The design of the research proposed by Cohen et al. [23] is as follows:

Experimental Group : $O_1 X O_2$
Control Group : $O_3 O_4$

Where:

$O_1 O_3$ = Pre-test

X = Treatment (Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy)

$O_2 O_4$ = Post-test

The population consisted of all eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Palu during the 2025/2026 academic year, totalling 318 students across ten classes. From this

population, two classes were selected, aligning with a quasi-experimental design, which employs an experimental and control group without random subject assignment [22].

Class VIII APEL, with 32 students, was designated as the experimental group and taught by the researcher using VSS, whereas Class VIII RAMBUTAN, consisting of 30 students, served as the control group and was taught by the English teacher through conventional methods. The study employed a test as its primary instrument. Arikunto [24] states that a research instrument is a tool selected and used to collect data. This study used a pre-test and post-test to measure vocabulary proficiency before the treatment (pre-test) and after the treatment (post-test), with the following scoring system:

Table 1. Scoring System for the Tests

No	Type of Item	Number of Items	Score per Item	Total Score	Scoring Criteria
1	Multiple Choice	10	1	10	Correct = 1, Incorrect = 0
2	Matching Test	10	1	10	Correct = 1, Incorrect = 0
3	Fill in the Blank	10	1	10	Correct = 1, Incorrect = 0
Total Score				30	

In Table 1, it can be seen that both groups received pre-tests and post-tests, each consisting of 30 items: 10 multiple-choice questions, 10 matching questions, and 10 fill-in-the-blank questions, focusing on common nouns and action verbs. These tests were developed based on the indicator vocabulary material used in the school. Each item was scored using a simple dichotomous criterion, in which correct responses were assigned 1 point and incorrect responses received 0 points.

To ensure objective comparison, the post-test followed the same structure as the pre-test. The instrument was validated by three English lecturers and one English teacher to ensure its content validity. In addition, the reliability test demonstrated that the test items were consistent and appropriate for measuring vocabulary mastery.

The research procedure consisted of three stages: administering the pre-test to both groups to assess students' initial knowledge, conducting four treatment sessions using VSS in the experimental group, and administering the post-test to both groups after all treatment sessions were completed to measure students' outcomes. Throughout these stages, the researcher secured approval from the school to implement the activities in the classroom.

The data were analysed using quantitative statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to obtain the standardised scores, including the mean and standard deviation. An independent t-test was then conducted to compare the mean scores and evaluate the significant improvement between the experimental groups, following the analytical guidelines proposed by Arikunto [24]. The testing criterion was established at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

The decision was based on a comparison between the calculated t-value (t-count) and the critical t-value from the t-distribution table (t-table). If the t-count is higher than the t-table value, it means the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted, indicating a significant improvement in the students' vocabulary mastery. However, if the t-count was

smaller than the t-table value, meaning the null hypothesis (H0) was accepted, the strategy did not significantly affect vocabulary mastery.

In addition to significance testing, the effect size was calculated using Cohen’s *d* to determine the magnitude of the treatment’s impact. Cohen’s *d* was obtained by dividing the mean difference between the two groups by the pooled standard deviation. The interpretation followed Cohen’s [25] guidelines, in which 0.20 indicates a small effect, 0.50 a medium effect, and values equal to or higher than 0.80 represent a large effect.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data in this study were collected through the administration of pre-tests and post-tests to assess students’ vocabulary mastery. The test consisted of three types of items: multiple-choice, matching, and fill-in-the-blank. Each criterion had a score of 1 point, so the total score for the whole test was 30. The same scoring system was used in both the pre-test and post-test to ensure that the results accurately reflected students’ progress.

3.1. Results

3.1.1 Results of Pre-test and Post-test

The findings of the pre-test and post-test reveal a notable improvement in students’ vocabulary mastery.

Table 2. Total Score of Pre-test and Post-test

Groups	N	Total Score of Pre-Test		Total Score of Post-test	
		Pre-test	Mean	Post-test	Mean
Experimental	32	1657	51.8	2560	80
Control	30	1643	54.8	1900	63.3

In the pre-test, the experimental group obtained a total score of 1656.7, with a mean score of 51.8, while the control group achieved a total score of 1643.3, with a mean score of 54.8. This indicates that both groups initially demonstrated a low level of vocabulary mastery.

After the treatment, results from the post-test showed that the experimental group’s total score increased to 2560 with a mean of 80, whereas the control group’s total score reached 1900 with a mean score of 63.3. The evidence shows that although both groups experienced improvement, the experimental group showed a considerably higher gain.

3.1.2 Results of Score Deviation

The score deviation was calculated to identify the difference between students’ pre-test and post-test results in both the experimental and control groups.

Table 3. Total Deviation, Mean Deviation, Square Deviation, Sum of Squared Deviation

Groups	N	Total Score of Deviation			
		d	Mean	d2	Sum d2
Experimental	32	903.6	28.24	29764.94	4,924.53
Control	30	276	9.2	3598.38	1,059.18

In the experiment, the total deviation reached 903.6 with a mean deviation of 28.24, while the total square deviation was 29,764.94. In contrast, the control group achieved a total deviation of 276 with a mean deviation of 9.2 and a total square deviation of 3,598.38.

The computation of the total squared deviation from the mean revealed that the experimental group achieved a value of 4,249.53, whereas the control group reached 1,059.18. These results indicate that the increase in scores among students in the experimental group was notably higher compared to the control group.

After obtaining the sum of squared deviations from both groups, the researcher proceeded to calculate whether the difference between the two groups was significant. The computation was carried out using Arikunto [26] as follows:

$$t = \frac{M_x - M_y}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{\Sigma x^2 + \Sigma y^2}{N_x + N_y - 2}\right) \left(\frac{1}{N_x} + \frac{1}{N_y}\right)}} \quad (1)$$

$$t = \frac{28.24 - 9.2}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{4,249.53 + 1,059.18}{32 + 30 - 2}\right) \left(\frac{1}{32} + \frac{1}{30}\right)}} \quad (2)$$

$$t = \frac{19.04}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{3,235.35}{60}\right) \left(\frac{62}{960}\right)}} \quad (3)$$

$$t = \frac{19.04}{\sqrt{(53.92)(0.07)}} \quad (4)$$

$$t = \frac{19.04}{\sqrt{(3.7744)}} \quad (5)$$

$$t = \frac{19.04}{1.94} \quad (6)$$

$$t = 9.81 \quad (7)$$

By examining the computation above, the value of the t-count is 9.81, which exceeds the t-table value at a significance level of 0.05.

3.1.3 Testing Hypothesis

To determine the value of the t-table, the researcher first calculated the degrees of freedom (df) using the formula $df = N_x + N_y - 2$. Based on the data, the experimental group consisted of 32 students, and the control group consisted of 30 students. Therefore, the degree of freedom was calculated as follows:

$$df = 32 + 30 - 2 = 60 \quad (8)$$

At the 0.05 level of significance. The critical value of the t-table is obtained by referring to the t-distribution table. Since the df (60) is directly listed in the t-table, the researcher did not need to apply the interpolation formula that is usually used when the df value is not available in the table. Hence, the t-table value was directly taken from the table, which is 1.671 for a 0.05 level of significance (one-tailed test). It means that the t-count value (9.81) was higher than the t-table value (1.671). Thus, the alternative hypothesis (H0) was rejected, indicating that the use of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery.

In addition to the significance test, the effect size was computed by dividing the difference between the mean deviations of the two groups by the pooled standard deviation. Based on the deviation data, the resulting value was $d = 1.91$, which far exceeds Cohen's [25] threshold for a large effect (0.80). So, the impact of the VSS was not only statistically significant but also substantial in practical terms.

3.2. Discussions

The results showed that the application of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) had a significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery. Students who were taught using VSS attained higher scores compared to those who were taught conventional methods. The improvement in the experimental group occurred because of the application of VSS during the learning process.

In the early meetings of the treatment, students experienced difficulty distinguishing between common nouns and action verbs, as reflected in their initial worksheets. The issue arose because they were accustomed to recognising simple words without understanding their contextual use. During the implementation of VSS, students selected unfamiliar words from texts, discussed their meanings in groups, recorded them in a chart, and applied them in sentences. This process increased their engagement and sense of responsibility in learning, while the teacher acted as a facilitator. After several sessions, students demonstrated noticeable improvement in identifying and using words accurately in context and showed greater enthusiasm during reading activities.

These results are consistent with Sainuddin [18], who indicated that most students gave positive responses toward the use of VSS because it helped them learn new words more easily and made them more active. Likewise, Damanik, Nasution, and Ginting [19] discovered that applying VSS in the classroom increased students' participation and improved their reading scores.

Meanwhile, the control group, which was taught using the conventional method, showed only a slight improvement. The teacher-centred approach limited students' opportunities to explore new vocabulary or engage in peer discussions, leading them to memorise rather than gain a contextual understanding. This contrast suggests that VSS provided a more interactive and student-centred environment, enabling students to develop a deeper understanding of vocabulary and apply it in a meaningful way. This finding aligns with Nafisa [20], who reported that students taught through VSS achieved better results and demonstrated higher learning motivation than those taught using conventional methods.

The effectiveness of VSS can also be explained theoretically. According to the Involvement Load Hypothesis by Laufer and Hulstijn [27], vocabulary retention increases when learners perform cognitive operations such as need, search, and evaluation. These processes naturally occur in VSS, as students identify important words, seek meanings, and evaluate appropriate usage when constructing sentences. This processing contributes to more durable vocabulary learning.

Although the implementation of the VSS was effective, several challenges emerged during the process. The strategy required more time due to its multiple stages: selecting,

discussing, and presenting words, which demanded effective time management. Maintaining students' focus on text comprehension was also challenging, as the activity centred on vocabulary selection. This aligns with Sainuddin [18], who noted that some students tend to lose concentration during discussions. To address these issues, the researcher provided guided explanations and facilitated discussions to maintain students' understanding. Additionally, the sample size was limited to two classes, and the focus was restricted to common nouns and action verbs; therefore, the findings cannot yet be generalised to other vocabulary types.

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) is effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery, encouraging active learning that is more meaningful and enjoyable. It aligns with Haggard [14], who first introduced this strategy. Haggard [14] explains that the VSS helps students connect new words with their meanings and increases their interest in learning vocabulary. Hence, VSS can be regarded as an effective and practical approach for teaching vocabulary at the junior high school level.

4. CONCLUSION

The use of the Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy (VSS) improved the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Palu, particularly in understanding and using common nouns and action verbs in context. Students who learned through VSS gained higher scores than those taught using conventional methods. The strategy also created a more engaging, student-centred atmosphere, where students took an active role in finding, discussing, and applying new words in sentences. This finding demonstrates that VSS not only supports vocabulary retention but also fosters language use and learner autonomy in junior high school.

The findings have practical implications for teaching, curriculum, and assessment. For teachers, VSS promotes active learning, critical thinking, and the meaningful use of vocabulary, giving students greater responsibility for their own learning. For curriculum developers, integrating VSS into vocabulary strategy can enhance interaction and make learning more meaningful. In assessment, students' ability to apply words correctly in context should be emphasised, not just memorisation, but also to use words appropriately, reflecting authentic language competence.

Based on these implications, the study's limitations should be noted. Although this study was limited to one school with a specific focus on vocabulary mastery, future studies could expand the scope to other language skills, such as writing or reading, explore its application across different grade levels, or combine it with different educational levels to see its broader impact on English learning. Additionally, the study measured vocabulary mastery only in the short term, without assessing long-term retention or application. These factors suggest the need for further research with larger samples, multiple schools, broader vocabulary categories, and long-term evaluation to strengthen the evidence of VSS effectiveness.

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