Understanding EFL Learners' Experiences with Interactive Exercises for Building Vocabulary Skills

Nor Azizah Riana [1*], Diah Puji Siliwangi [2], Aghnia Assifa Nadia [3]
[1-3] Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palangka Raya, Indonesia

Alamat: Kompleks Islamic Centre, Jl. G.Obos, Menteng, Kec. Jekan Raya, Kota Palangka Raya, Kalimantan Tengah 73112
Korespondensi penulis: norazizahriana@gmail.com *

Abstract: *This study explores the experiences of English language learners engaging in interactive exercises for the purpose of building vocabulary skills. Understanding learners' experiences with interactive exercises for building vocabulary skills is crucial to inform and enhance teaching methodologies in language education. A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study, wherein interviews were conducted with university students enrolled in English programs. The results show that interactive exercises, such as digital games and group activities, significantly increase the motivation and engagement of students in learning. Participant pointed out that not only did such activities make learning fun, but they also helped them understand acquire more vocabulary. This study pinpoints the importance of incorporating interactive elements into language curricula in order to make the process of learning more dynamic. Emphasizing students' experiences can create an inclusive environment where the students' diverse learning needs are catered for, and this contributes to the improved language proficiency.*

Keywords: *EFL Learners, Interactive Exercises, Vocabulary Skills*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman para pelajar bahasa Inggris yang terlibat dalam latihan interaktif untuk membangun keterampilan kosakata. Memahami pengalaman pelajar dengan latihan interaktif untuk membangun kemampuan kosakata sangat penting untuk menginformasikan dan meningkatkan metodologi pengajaran dalam pendidikan bahasa. Pendekatan penelitian kualitatif diadopsi untuk penelitian ini, di mana wawancara dilakukan dengan mahasiswa yang terdaftar dalam program bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa latihan interaktif, seperti permainan digital dan kegiatan kelompok, secara signifikan meningkatkan motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa dalam pembelajaran. Para peserta menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan-kegiatan tersebut tidak hanya membuat pembelajaran menjadi menyenangkan, tetapi juga membantu mereka memahami dan menguasai lebih banyak kosakata. Studi ini menunjukkan pentingnya memasukkan elemen interaktif ke dalam kurikulum bahasa untuk membuat proses pembelajaran lebih dinamis. Menekankan pada pengalaman siswa dapat menciptakan lingkungan yang inklusif di mana kebutuhan belajar siswa yang beragam dapat terpenuhi, dan hal ini berkontribusi pada peningkatan kemampuan bahasa.*

Kata kunci: *Pembelajar EFL, Latihan Interaktif, Keterampilan Kosakata*

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is a crucial element of language learning, particularly for students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Given the global prominence of English, strong vocabulary skills are essential for EFL learners to achieve academic excellence, enhance career prospects, and communicate effectively. Historically, vocabulary instruction in EFL contexts has relied on traditional methods such as rote learning and repetitive practice. While these teacher-centered techniques have been widely used, they often fail to engage learners or cater to their individual needs, resulting in challenges with retention and practical application of

vocabulary (Rahimi & Allahyari, 2019; Alharbi, 2019). With the advancement of digital tools and interactive learning technologies, educators are now turning to innovative approaches to make vocabulary learning more effective and learner-centered.

Research highlights the effectiveness of interactive and gamified learning methods in improving vocabulary instruction. For instance, Rahimi & Allahyari, (2019) found that integrating multimedia tools with strategy-based teaching significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition and promotes the use of effective learning strategies. Similarly, Alharbi (2019) stressed the importance of structured approaches for learning new words, noting that such methods lead to better outcomes. Studies by Castillo-Cuesta (2020); Hashim et al., (2019) also revealed that gamified and digital learning activities not only make vocabulary learning more engaging but also yield superior results, especially in higher education. Moreover, Lin et al. (2020) demonstrated that contextual gaming approaches can boost vocabulary proficiency while fostering learner motivation and positive learning behaviors.

Despite these promising findings, there are still significant gaps in the literature. Most research has focused on individual tools, such as games or multimedia, without examining how integrated interactive exercises can simultaneously enhance vocabulary retention, motivation, and learner engagement (Ramzan et al., 2023; Refat et al., 2019). Additionally, the role of collaborative and communicative strategies in interactive environments remains underexplored, particularly in the context of vocabulary learning (Omar et al., 2020; Yaccob & Yunus, 2019). While previous studies on grammar learning have provided insights into managing cognitive load (Refat et al., 2019), little attention has been given to cognitive demands in vocabulary-focused activities. Furthermore, there is limited research examining EFL learners' perceptions and experiences with these innovative tools, a perspective critical for developing learner-centered instructional strategies (Yudha & Mandasari, 2021).

To address these gaps, this study explores EFL learners' experiences with interactive exercises aimed at building vocabulary skills. It evaluates how these activities influence learner motivation, engagement, and long-term retention of vocabulary. By investigating learners' perceptions and assessing the effectiveness of interactive tools, the study seeks to contribute to the existing body of research on innovative language teaching methods. Additionally, it aims to provide practical insights for educators and curriculum developers on how to integrate digital tools effectively into vocabulary instruction, aligning with the broader digital transformation in education. This research aspires to bridge current gaps in the literature and offer actionable recommendations for implementing effective, engaging, and learner-centered vocabulary

learning activities. Ultimately, it underscores the need to adapt teaching methods to the evolving demands of modern EFL learners, ensuring vocabulary acquisition remains engaging, meaningful, and accessible in the digital age.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in the English as a Foreign Language classroom, as it enables learners to effectively communicate in the target language (Castillo-Cuesta, 2020) . Teaching vocabulary, however, can be a significant challenge for EFL instructors, particularly in developing effective strategies to engage students and foster meaningful learning (Ahsan et al., 2021). One such approach that has gained attention is the use of interactive exercises to build vocabulary skills. Research has highlighted the importance of moving beyond traditional rote memorization techniques and instead employing more interactive and engaging methods (Purwanto & Despita, 2022). Psychometric studies have found that vocabulary size is a key indicator of reading ability, and that vocabulary knowledge is essential for developing overall language proficiency (Soepriyatna & Pangaribuan, 2022). Further, observations suggest that while EFL learners may be able to memorize word lists, they often struggle to apply that knowledge in real-life communication(Chen et al., 2018). Recognizing these challenges, some studies have explored the potential benefits of using games and other interactive activities to enhance vocabulary acquisition (Thompson & Gillern, 2020). Findings suggest that such approaches can be effective in increasing vocabulary mastery and engagement.

Interactive exercises, such as games, role-playing, and problem-solving activities, have been shown to create a more dynamic and enjoyable learning environment for students(Kotkovets & Nikitina, 2023). These methods foster active participation, allowing learners to engage with vocabulary in context rather than through passive repetition. Research by (Zakian et al., 2022) indicates that games, particularly those involving competition or collaboration, can help reinforce vocabulary retention and increase motivation, making learning more enjoyable and less intimidating for EFL students. In addition to enhancing engagement, these activities encourage students to use vocabulary in realistic, communicative scenarios, which promotes deeper learning. Interactive vocabulary learning provides students the opportunity to receive immediate feedback, which is crucial for reinforcing and applying their vocabulary knowledge(Wu et al., 2020). Through activities such as peer discussions or teacher-led quizzes, learners can assess their understanding of new words and correct any misconceptions in real-time(Aull, 2020). As suggested by (Schamroth Abrams & Walsh, 2023)

, the use of feedback within interactive contexts helps consolidate vocabulary acquisition, as students are more likely to internalize words when they can see how they function within the broader linguistic system.

Research has demonstrated that integrating technology into vocabulary instruction can further enhance interactive learning experiences (Ibragimovna, 2019). Digital tools such as language learning applications, online games, and virtual flashcards have proven effective in providing learners with interactive and on-demand opportunities for vocabulary practice. As noted by Godwin-Jones, technology enables personalized learning experiences, allowing students to progress at their own pace while engaging with vocabulary in diverse contexts. This adaptability makes technology a valuable asset in vocabulary instruction, particularly in diverse EFL classrooms where students may exhibit varied learning styles and paces. Specifically, technology-based vocabulary learning offers several advantages. It grants learners access to a wide range of digital resources, from interactive games and quizzes to multimedia-enhanced vocabulary lessons. This variety caters to different learning preferences, enabling students to choose activities that best suit their needs and interests.

Furthermore, the self-paced nature of technology-assisted vocabulary practice empowers learners to have more control over their learning, allowing them to review and reinforce words at their own convenience (Ober et al., 2023). This flexibility is especially beneficial in EFL contexts where students may require varying amounts of time and repetition to master new vocabulary. Additionally, the immediate feedback and scoring mechanisms often incorporated in digital vocabulary tools provide learners with timely insights into their progress, fostering a sense of accomplishment and motivation to continue learning. By seamlessly integrating technology into vocabulary instruction, educators can harness the power of interactive, personalized, and adaptive learning experiences to enhance EFL students' vocabulary acquisition (Alharbi, 2022).

While interactive methods have shown promise, challenges remain in their implementation. EFL teachers must carefully design these activities to ensure they align with the learners' proficiency levels and are cognitively appropriate (AlSaleem, 2018). Overly complex or poorly structured interactive tasks can lead to confusion rather than reinforcement, undermining the effectiveness of the approach. Additionally, while games and technology offer engaging ways to learn, they must be integrated thoughtfully into the curriculum to avoid overshadowing other critical aspects of language learning, such as grammar and syntax. Specifically, instructors must strike a balance between the use of interactive exercises and the

development of fundamental language skills. If interactive tasks are not properly scaffolded or integrated with other learning components, they may distract students from mastering essential elements like grammar and sentence structure. Furthermore, the design of these interactive activities must account for the diverse learning styles and proficiency levels within the EFL classroom(Aldrich et al., 2023). Failing to differentiate the tasks based on student needs can result in frustration and disengagement, rather than the intended benefits of enhanced vocabulary acquisition. Careful planning and ongoing assessment are crucial to ensuring that interactive methods complement, rather than detract from, the overall language learning.

Interactive exercises have proven to be an effective strategy for enhancing vocabulary acquisition in EFL learners (Khezrlou et al., 2023). By moving away from traditional rote memorization and incorporating engaging, context-driven activities, instructors can foster a deeper understanding of vocabulary and promote its practical application. Further research and development of best practices for integrating these methods into EFL classrooms will continue to be essential in ensuring that learners not only expand their vocabulary but also gain the skills necessary to communicate fluently in English. Integrating interactive exercises into vocabulary instruction can provide numerous benefits for EFL learners (Attya et al., 2019). These activities create a more dynamic and enjoyable learning environment, fostering active participation and engagement with vocabulary in realistic, communicative scenarios. Additionally, the immediate feedback and personalized learning experiences offered by interactive exercises, particularly through the use of technology, can reinforce vocabulary retention and promote a sense of accomplishment and motivation among students. By striking a careful balance between interactive tasks and the development of fundamental language skills, EFL instructors can maximize the potential of these methods to enhance their students' overall language proficiency and prepare them for effective communication in English.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners with interactive vocabulary-building tasks using a qualitative methodology. Three university students enrolled in English language classes were interviewed in order to gather data. Purposively, the individuals were chosen because they had participated in interactive, exercise-based learning activities. The interviews were done online using the WhatsApp app to provide for time and location flexibility. Three questions intended to probe each participant's experience with interactive exercises as a component of vocabulary learning were answered.

To find trends in the participants' experiences, thematic analysis was used to examine the interview data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the interviews showed that interactive activities significantly affect the vocabulary learning of EFL students. Three main elements of the respondents' experience were emphasized: the usefulness of interactive activities, their contribution to the accomplishment of learning objectives, and their impact on engagement and motivation.

1. Effectiveness of Interactive Exercises

In terms of promoting vocabulary learning, all respondents agreed that interactive activities are preferable to traditional approaches. They were seen to be useful, interesting, and able to make terminology easier to learn. For instance, Respondent 1 highlighted that interactive exercises offered a compelling substitute for conventional book-based instruction, enhancing the enjoyment and relatability of vocabulary acquisition to everyday situations. Respondent 3 provided more details on how interactive exercises improved their vocabulary application and comprehension by enabling them to incorporate recently learned words into everyday conversations.

2. Achievement of Learning Goals

Interactive exercises were found to be essential for helping students meet their learning goals in English, particularly when it came to vocabulary mastery. Because learning materials and active peer engagement provided possibilities for direct application of new terms and meaningful practice, Respondent 2 reported great success in vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, these activities promoted contextualized learning, enabling participants to successfully master and use language in a variety of communicative contexts.

3. Impact on Motivation and Engagement

It was believed that using interactive methods would boost students' motivation. Active participation in the learning process was emphasized by Respondent 2 as a crucial motivating component, and Respondent 3 conveyed pride and enjoyment in learning new words. Inspiring inspiration and maintaining learner engagement through interactive methods was a common subject throughout the interviews. Respondent 3 credited the dynamic and interactive character of interactive activities for motivating them to explore and learn new language, expressing a sense of pride and delight in the

process. The interactive aspect of the exercises reduced boredom and boosted their motivation to participate in the learning process, according to Respondent 2, who also emphasized the importance of gamified features and group activities in sustaining their interest.

The results are consistent with previous research, highlighting how interactive exercises can revolutionize vocabulary learning. These techniques have been repeatedly demonstrated to increase learner engagement and retention (Erkinovna, 2022; Medynska et al., 2022). In order to promote deeper comprehension and long-term retention, interactive exercises' practical character enables students to apply terminology in authentic settings (Wu et al., 2020). Mou et al., (2023) found that interactive video-based learning increases learners' intrinsic motivation, which is consistent with the motivational elements that respondents emphasized. Similarly, with adaptive and tailored features, Gulomova, (2024) showed how interactive apps can effectively sustain learners' attention. Wu et al., (2020) have observed that the use of gamified components enhances engagement by incorporating elements of competition and collaboration. Additionally, the respondents' focus on active engagement is consistent with Udbhasa et al., (2023), who emphasized the use of visual and interactive aids in developing immersive learning environments. According to Moharana, (2024), these strategies accommodate a range of learning preferences while maintaining students' active participation in the educational process. But the results also show that careful thought is needed to deploy interactive approaches effectively. Medynska et al., (2022) recommend that in order to avoid cognitive overload, the difficulty of exercises should be appropriate for the degree of skill of the learners. Furthermore, incorporating these activities into more comprehensive curriculum shouldn't take precedence over fundamental language abilities (Triyogo & Hamdan, 2024).

According to the study, teachers should give interactive exercises top priority when developing their lesson plans in order to improve vocabulary acquisition. Digital resources like smartphone apps (Misses, 2023) and podcasts (Prawoto, 2023) can be used to enhance the educational process. Furthermore, as shown by Wu et al., (2020); Erkinovna, (2022), language memory can be strengthened by fostering teamwork and offering prompt feedback.

5. CONCLUSION

The importance of interactive exercises in improving the vocabulary acquisition of EFL learners is demonstrated by this study. The results show how successful these kinds of activities are in enhancing language comprehension, accomplishing learning objectives, and encouraging

motivation and involvement. A dynamic and useful method of learning vocabulary is offered by interactive exercises, especially those that use digital tools and gamified features. This enables students to use new terms in real-world situations. In order to optimize the impact of these exercises, the study also emphasizes how crucial it is to match them with learners' competence levels. Interactive approaches are useful, but their incorporation into the curriculum needs to be carefully calibrated to avoid ignoring basic language abilities. Teachers are urged to use digital and interactive resources, such podcasts and smartphone applications, to create environments that are both interesting and learner-centered. Language teachers can help students improve their vocabulary and general language skills by implementing these strategies, which will make language learning more efficient and pleasurable.

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