

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Vocabulary mastery has become a never-ending topic for researchers to investigate. Vocabulary plays a fundamental role in learning languages, especially English. It is essential while learning a language (Santi et al., 2021). On the other hand, Ghazal in Tran (2020) stated that vocabulary is a significant challenge student face while learning language. Therefore, teachers must be able to present effective learning strategies that help students face the challenges of vocabulary mastery.

Based on the author's observations during internship programs, it was found that most junior high school students faced significant challenges in mastering English vocabulary. Students needed help understanding the meaning of new words, recall previously learned vocabulary, and used words effectively in context. This difficulty poses a significant barrier to their overall language development. For instance, students often needed help to answer simple questions or recall essential words related to classroom topics, even when teachers provided simplified explanations. These challenges can be attributed to several factors, such as insufficient exposure to English, a lack of effective teaching strategies, and limited opportunities to practice vocabulary in a meaningful context. Consequently, students often need clarification and support, which hinders their language development and overall academic progress. Recognizing the importance of vocabulary as a foundation for language proficiency, this research aimed to address the challenges by exploring strategies that could enhance students' vocabulary mastery in EFL classrooms.

Some vocabulary teaching techniques, such as flashcards, word puzzles, and memorizing word meanings, had been implemented but could

have been more effective. Despite this, many teachers in Indonesia continue to rely on these traditional methods for teaching vocabulary. Typically, teachers ask students to memorize extensive word lists along with their meanings without teaching the use and forms of words in real-life contexts. As a result, the English teaching-learning process often fails to enhance students' vocabulary mastery or overall language skills effectively. Furthermore, most teachers adhere to the same classroom methods and techniques, avoiding alternative approaches due to unfamiliarity. This lack of variety in teaching methods has contributed to low vocabulary mastery among EFL students in Indonesia. Grabe & Stoller (2018) emphasize that vocabulary acquisition only comes through the memorization of numerous words. Instead, teachers should focus on a targeted set of keywords from texts that students are actively reading to provide meaningful learning opportunities.

Reading has proven to be a more significant source for vocabulary acquisition (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006), it is one of the primary sources of new vocabulary for EFL students and plays a fundamental role in increasing learners' vocabulary (Altalhab, 2016). There are several kinds of reading activities, such as extensive, intensive, and narrow reading. Nonetheless, in most everyday classrooms, teachers use extensive and intensive reading to provide material for learners to acquire new vocabulary. Meanwhile, based on the author's mini-survey of her project, which was done by interviewing some teachers and college students, narrow reading is still unfamiliar to them, and they never use narrow reading in the process of teaching English. This mini-survey asked them about classroom activities and strategies they used to teach or learn English vocabulary.

Research by Kang (2015) on 61 high school Korean students found that a narrow reading strategy helped students perform better on L2 learning vocabulary for receptive and productive vocabulary tests than others involved in random reading. Additionally, experimental research by Outamgharte et al.

(2024) that investigated the impact of narrow reading on Moroccan EFL students' receptive vocabulary at 10th-grade senior high school found that groups that read texts on the same theme and by the same author had better performance than other groups. Some studies (Ballance, 2021; Bryan, 2011; Chang, 2019; Chang & Renandya, 2020, 2021; Kilickaya, 2017; Renandya et al., 2018; Schmitt & Carter, 2001) also have proved narrow reading has a positive impact on students' vocabulary mastery. However, almost all of those studies primarily adopted a quantitative approach and focused on measuring the impact of narrow reading on vocabulary mastery. Nevertheless, they often need to pay more attention to the practical application of NR strategy, especially how to implement it in the classroom to improve vocabulary acquisition effectively. This study will explore the pedagogical application of the NR strategy in the classroom for EFL junior high school students' vocabulary mastery.

1.2. Formulation of the Problem

As mentioned before, even though many studies have investigated the influences of narrow reading on students' reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery. Nonetheless, in Indonesia, minimal studies still investigate how to use narrow reading in the classroom and its influences on EFL students' English skills. This can be proven by the limited relevant information related to the topic in Indonesia. Very limited literature talks about how to apply narrow reading strategies in a classroom. Apart from that fact, this research is trying to explore the pedagogical application of narrow reading on EFL junior high school students in Indonesia and how to optimize it in the classroom activities led by the research question, “How does narrow reading strategy increase junior high school students' English vocabulary in the EFL classroom?”

1.3. Operational Definitions

- Narrow Reading : In this research, narrow reading is a reading strategy that asked students to read several texts which focus on one topic or one author based on a student's interests. It is a sustainable reading that will be done until the students move into the other topic and author that they are interested in.
- Vocabulary Mastery : Vocabulary mastery is students' ability to spell words and use and understand the meaning of each word they have learned during the reading activity.

1.4. Aims of the Study

The main purpose of this research is to explore the pedagogical application of the narrow reading strategy in the classroom to increase EFL junior high school student's vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, its aim is also to introduce narrow reading to EFL teachers and students in Indonesia to help the vocabulary learning process become more effective. The research aims to find a new way to teach English vocabulary to EFL students, especially in Indonesia, and to improve their vocabulary mastery to the maximum.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study aims to discover how and to what extent narrow reading helps EFL students improve their English vocabulary mastery. Theoretically, this study will enrich the literature review of using narrow reading to increase EFL students' English vocabulary mastery. Practically, this study can be a reference for English teachers to use narrow reading in their classroom activities.