CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical framework

1. Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary mastery is crucial to language acquisition, especially for junior high school students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). According to Thornbury (2002), vocabulary knowledge is foundational for language proficiency as it directly affects learners' listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. Thornbury emphasizes the importance of both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. Breadth refers to the number of words learners know, while depth relates to how well learners understand the meaning, use, and connotations of word. For junior high school EFL students, achieving this balance is essential because their language abilities are still developing, and their exposure to English may be limited to classroom settings.

Therefore, effective vocabulary learning efforts and measures are needed to maximize students' acceptance. Thornbury (2002) theorizes that six principles of effective vocabulary learning offer a basic framework for understanding how students acquire and retain new vocabulary effectively as follows:

1. Repetition and Retrieval

Thornbury emphasizes that vocabulary retention relies heavily on frequent and deliberate repetition. Learners require extensive exposure to new words to transfer them from short-term to long-term memory. However, repetition alone is not enough, recall practice is equally important. Actively recalling words (for example, in a quiz, storytelling, or conversation.) will strengthen memory traces more effectively than passive review. According to Thornbury, spaced repetition (repeating words at increasingly longer intervals) further enhances retention.

2. Exposure in Context

Vocabulary will be more effectively learned if it is found in meaningful contexts, rather than in isolation. Exposure through stories, dialogs or authentic texts helps students understand how words function grammatically, semantically

and pragmatically. Contextual exposure allows students to infer meaning and usage naturally, reinforcing form and function.

3. Affective Engagement (Emotionally Rich Input)

Thornbury highlights the importance of emotional engagement in vocabulary learning. When students are emotionally engaged, for example, through humor, personal stories, or interesting narratives, they are more likely to remember new words. Emotional arousal increases attention and improves memory encoding.

4. Noticing (Conscious Attention to Form and Meaning)

Learning new vocabulary requires conscious attention-learners must pay attention to the form (spelling, pronunciation, grammar) and meaning of words. This is often referred to as the "attention hypothesis", which suggests that students must attend to language features in the input to acquire it. Teachers can help students to pay attention to vocabulary through highlighting, glossing or discussion.

5. Use (Productive Practice and Recycling)

Thornbury argues that actively using vocabulary through speaking, writing, or other productive tasks greatly improves memory. Learners should be encouraged to reuse vocabulary in a various of contexts to reinforce its use. This helps move words from passive to active vocabulary knowledge and promotes automation.

6. Cognitive Depth (Meaningful Use and Association)

This principle refers to the extent to which a learner comprehends new words. The greater the mental effort required to learn a word, such as connecting it to prior knowledge, analyzing its features, or using it in creative ways, the more likely it is to be remembered. Tasks that encourage semantic association, grouping, or visualization stimulate deeper cognitive processing.

In conclusion, these six principles encourage a holistic and learner-centered approach to vocabulary instruction. Rather than memorizing lists, learners benefit most from encountering new words in rich, meaningful, and engaging contexts, with multiple opportunities to notice, use, and reflect on them.

Teachers can apply these principles to create more effective and enjoyable vocabulary learning experiences.

2. Teaching Vocabulary

Vocabulary learning is an essential aspect of language acquisition. It provides the foundation for effective communication and comprehension (Alqahtani, 2015). Thornbury (2002) highlights that vocabulary knowledge extends beyond mere word recognition to encompass understanding word meanings, contexts, and appropriate usage. In the teaching of vocabulary, using authentic materials and engaging methods, such as storytelling, has been proven to be highly effective. Storytelling not only introduces new languange in a meaningful and memorable context but also fosters connections between words and their real-world applications. This contextualized approach aligns with Thornbury's emphasis on deepening both the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, which are critical for learners to achieve language proficiency.

Incorporating vocabulary learning into reading and writing tasks further enhances students' understanding and retention of word meanings. Nation (2001) supports this by emphasizing that vocabulary acquisition is strengthened through repeated exposure to words in varied and meaningful contexts. For example, reading narrative texts allows learners to encounter vocabulary in context, while writing tasks enable them to practice using new words in their own sentences. These activities not only enhance students' reading comprehension but also encourage them to think critically about how words function grammatically and semantically within a text. For junior high school EFL learners, these practices are particularly important, as they help bridge the gap between vocabulary knowledge and practical language use, preparing students to communicate more effectively in academic and social settings.

Thornbury emphasizes the importance of active engagement in vocabulary learning, where students analyze a word's form, meaning, and usage to internalize it fully internalize it. Effective teaching strategies should, learners with opportunities learners to interact with new vocabulary through various tasks, such

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as storytelling, role-playing, or collaborative discussions , thereby enhancing their understanding and retention.. Schmitt (2010) notes that active engagement not only aids in memorization but also develops students' ability to recall and use words appropriately in communication. Additionally, storytelling as a teaching method connects language learning with emotion and imagination, making vocabulary acquisition a more enjoyable and impactful process. By integrating these strategies into the classroom, teachers can enhance students' vocabulary mastery, enabling them to communicate confidently across all language domains and fostering long-term language development.

3. Storytelling Technique in Vocabulary Learning

One of the most effective teaching techniques for improving students' vocabulary mastery is storytelling. As one of the oldest and most intuitive forms of knowledge-sharing, storytelling serves as a powerful tool for making sense of experiences, connecting with others, and fostering imagination and creativity (Gere et al., 2002). In educational contexts, storytelling holds a prominent place in literacy development and plays a crucial role in helping students articulate their thoughts and feelings clearly. By placing vocabulary in meaningful and engaging contexts, storytelling helps students encounter new words in ways that are memorable and relevant, thus promoting deeper comprehension and retention (Marwanto, 2018). Its integration into vocabulary instruction is particularly beneficial for EFL learners, as it provides a dynamic approach to language acquisition that goes beyond rote memorization.

The effectiveness of storytelling in teaching vocabulary is further enhanced when combined with visual aids and props, which help bridge the gap between abstract words and their meanings. Using props, such as puppets or objects, allows teachers to create concrete associations between vocabulary and real-world references. For example, holding up a sheep puppet while introducing the word "sheep" not only aids comprehension but also engages multiple senses, making the learning process more interactive and enjoyable (Fitri et al., 2023). This aligns with Nation's (2001) principles of vocabulary learning, which emphasize the

importance of providing learners with multiple exposures to words in varied contexts to strengthen their understanding of form, meaning, and use.

The creative use of storytelling in vocabulary instruction also empowers teachers to develop customized and culturally relevant materials, thereby enriching the learning experience for students. Rokhman and Yuliati (2010) emphasize the importance of teacher creativity in designing teaching materials that align with students' needs and interests. Storytelling provides an excellent platform for such innovation, as it allows educators to craft narratives that incorporate target vocabulary while addressing themes that resonate with students. Additionally, as Satriani (2019) notes, storytelling enhances learning by combining visual, auditory, and emotional elements, making it easier for students to retain information and view language learning as an enjoyable activity. By integrating storytelling into vocabulary instruction, teachers can create a lively and interactive classroom environment where students not only improve their vocabulary but also develop a deeper appreciation for language and its expressive potential.

4. The Benefits of Storytelling in Vocabulary Learning

Storytelling learning offers numerous benefits across various educational settings. Some of the experts have found benefits. Miller and Pennycuff (2008) claimed that storytelling is an effective strategy for keeping students interested. Comprehensively, when viewed through the lens of Thornbury's (2002), there are three key aspects as the follows:

1. Pronunciation

Storytelling supports students in developing accurate pronunciation by exposing them to words in natural, meaningful contexts. During storytelling, students hear new words spoken aloud, often accompanied by the teacher's emphasis on correct pronunciation and intonation. This auditory exposure helps learners internalize the sounds and rhythms of the language. Repeated exposure to words within the narrative reinforces their pronunciation, allowing students to mimic the teacher's articulation. For example, hearing a storyteller emphasize specific words or phrases, such as "Once upon a time,"

helps students grasp the phonetic patterns and stress placement. Additionally, storytelling can include interactive elements, such as asking students to repeat words or phrases, further embedding correct pronunciation into their learning process.

2. Spelling

Storytelling indirectly enhances spelling skills by associating spoken words with their written forms. When storytelling is supplemented with visual aids, such as storybooks, flashcards, or on-screen text, students can see how the words are spelled while hearing them used in context. This multimodal approach strengthens the connection between phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (letters), aiding in spelling accuracy. For instance, a story that introduces the word "castle" accompanied by a picture and written text allows students to visually process its spelling while associating it with the sound and meaning. Thornbury's emphasis on recognizing word forms highlights the value of storytelling in reinforcing the orthographic patterns of vocabulary, especially for junior high school EFL learners who are still building their foundational language skills.

3. Meaning Understanding

Understanding the meaning of words is one of the core benefits of storytelling, as it places vocabulary in rich, contextualized settings. Stories provide concrete examples of how words are used, enabling students to deduce their meanings from the narrative and surrounding text. For instance, in a story about animals, students can learn the word "sheep" not only through direct explanation but also by observing how it is described, used in sentences, and associated with visual props or illustrations. Thornbury emphasizes the importance of both direct and indirect vocabulary learning, and storytelling effectively combines these methods. It allows students to encounter words multiple times in meaningful ways, deepening their comprehension and retention. Moreover, storytelling often engages emotions and imagination, making the meaning of words more memorable and easier to recall.

Moreover, an additional benefit of storytelling is that it allows students to expand their vocabulary as they decode the meaning of words, focusing on the context of the story they hear or read (Choo et al., 2020). Huang et al. (2020) also found that in terms of vocabulary learning, storytelling serves as a stepping-stone to learning syntax as it demonstrates grammatical and syntactic features in a meaningful context. It was stated that storytelling enhances the classroom environment and atmosphere. A good story can relax learners and reduce their fears because it entertaining and humorous. A well told story can foster a sense of community and belonging in learning communities more effectively than most traditional teaching methods. Storytelling engages students on a level that many teaching methods do not. Learners hear the information and are immersed in the content on a deeper and richer level through emotional and personal connections as well as visual imagery. The fact that stories evoke emotions adds to their learning effectiveness because learning experiences associated with emotions are more easily stored and recalled. Storytelling offers many of the benefits of experiential learning due to the level of active engagement it create. The vivid images stimulated by storytelling promote character identification, thus engaging the student as an active participant in the learning process. When learners are involve in this way, research reveals improved understanding and ability to apply what they have learned in the work setting.

B. Study of Relevant Research

Some relevant research has been conducted on the relationship between storytelling and vocabulary learning. Waris et al. (2021) conducted a classroom action study at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) Model 1 Manado to examine the effectiveness of storytelling in improving students' vocabulary mastery. Their analysis revealed a substantial increase in student achievement, with vocabulary mastery rising from 60.9% to 84.3% after two cycles of storytelling-based instruction. The results highlight storytelling as an effective pedagogical approach that not only facilitates vocabulary acquisition but also creates a relaxed and engaging classroom environment. By maintaining students' interest in the narrative, storytelling fosters a supportive and enjoyable atmosphere that

encourages active participation. This engaging context helps students relate new vocabulary to real-life situations, thereby enhancing both the retention and meaningful use of words.

Moreover, Bhakti and Marwanto (2018) conducted a study at SMP Negeri 3 Lasalimu using local storytelling as a strategy to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. The findings indicated that incorporating of culturally relevant stories not only increased students' motivation but also led to a significant improvement in their vocabulary achievement. After six sessions, the students' vocabulary mastery increased markedly, rising 50% to 93.7%. This suggests that integrating local narratives into English language instruction can effectively engage learners and facilitate meaningful vocabulary development through familiar and contextually rich content.

Another related research was conducted by Hanafinah et al. (2020). The study presented a pre-experimental design at X Grade MAN 2 Padang Lawas, utilizing storytelling to enhance students' vocabulary mastery. The study found that students' vocabulary mastery improved from 39.6% to 75.2% after two storytelling cycles. Halimah (2018) also studied the same issue at Diploma III Architecture of Samarinda State Polytechnic and found that storytelling improved students' vocabulary mastery. The study employed a pre-test and a post-test to measure vocabulary mastery, revealing significant improvement.

Although the use of storytelling as a medium for English language instruction has gained increasing attention in recent years, most existing studies have primarily focused on its effectiveness in enhancing specific language skills, such as reading, speaking, or listening through quantitative approaches. However, limited research has examined how storytelling influences students' vocabulary mastery from the perspective of their personal engagement and perceptions. In particular, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative insights into how learners interact with and respond to vocabulary learning within storytelling-based instruction. To address this gap, the present study aims to explore students' vocabulary mastery through the use of storytelling, emphasizing their reflective experiences and perceived learning outcomes in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.