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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Problem

Proficiency in the English language involves the attainment of four different, but related, competencies in communication, which include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This is because these competencies work as an integral system where improvement in one helps improve others as well. Thus, according to Hidayad & Purwanto (2022: 179), the same importance needs to be accorded to all these competencies in the process of learning. Mastering the four core skills of English requires proficiency in certain areas, including vocabulary, which is one of the key components as stated by Rahmawati et al. (2023: 10).

In addition, Vocabulary also part of fundamental aspect of language acquisition. Andriani and Sriwahyuningsih (2019: 170) stated that one of the keys to studying English is vocabulary and without it, learners cannot speak, write, listen, or even read. A language system derives its communicative function from the collection of meaningful lexical items it contains, which is commonly referred to as vocabulary. When arranged into coherent units, these words produce meaningful sentences that serve as tools for communication.

Language proficiency entails vocabulary knowledge to a large extent because vocabulary knowledge forms the basis for developing other language skills. Vocabulary knowledge goes beyond the mere identification and understanding of vocabulary items but entails the use of such vocabulary items appropriately in communication. The above view holds true because vocabulary

knowledge does not entail individual words but is part of an extensive lexical network. Rahmah et al. (2023:36) observed that the meaning of a lexical item arises from its use and its relationship with other words. This is also explained by Arrasul et al. (2023: 58).

In the study from Afidah and Machfudi (2022: 2) also explain that vocabulary comprehension constitutes a crucial aspect of English learning. Students with strong vocabulary mastery are able to develop effective writing skills. Furthermore, in terms of speaking, they can convey information clearly, and in listening, they are better equipped to receive and process input. In addition, these skills enable learners to communicate proficiently in English.

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the key aspects in the acquisition of language that helps in obtaining proficiency in English. However, even with its significance, building a robust vocabulary is a tough task for many learners. The interpretation of the context of an English sentence becomes a major problem to many students during their learning process. According to Komalasari (2022:275), the lack of understanding of the context impacts different areas of language ability.

As pointed by Susanto (2021: 49), Students encounter several obstacles in acquiring English vocabulary, such as the differences between spoken and written forms, The huge number of words that must be mastered, and the limited availability of reliable learning materials, often hinder progress. Moreover, vocabulary knowledge requires not only understanding dictionary definitions but also grasping grammatical aspects and correct usage.

As found out by the observations done by the researcher in the Teaching Practicum Program (PPL), the learners at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu often faced problems in recognizing and remembering the basic English vocabulary. The constraints in the learning process came with pronunciation errors due to the great difference in the phonology of English and the learners' native language. Many of them still unfamiliar with the English alphabet and demonstrated limitations in recognizing basic vocabulary. These challenges are believed to be related to their educational background in elementary school, where English was not formally taught due to curriculum policy. It is not uncommon for students to struggle in understanding the teacher's explanations.

The researcher selected eighth grade students as participants because they are at a stage of language development where they are no longer at the basic introductory level (such as in 7th grade), but also have not yet experienced the pressure of final exams (such as in 9th grade). Considering the significance of enhancing vocabulary acquisition skills of junior high school learners, the current research was conducted ²² to explore the difficulties experienced by students in acquiring English vocabulary. This research is called “A Descriptive ¹ Study on Students' Difficulties in Mastering English Vocabulary at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu Academic Year 2026/2027.” The objective of this research is to gather empirical data which could help promote further development in the field of English language teaching through providing better ways of teaching vocabulary. Being young learners, who are forming their vocabulary in English, these students are suitable for research.

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B. Identification of the Problem

Based on this research background, the problems addressed in this study are identified as follows:

1. Difficulty in recognizing basic vocabulary, students face challenges in identifying simple English words.
2. Problems in reading and pronunciation, students struggle to read and articulate English vocabulary correctly, which hinders their comprehension and communication.
3. Low comprehension of basic words, even the simplest vocabulary items are not understood.

C. Limitation of the Program

In order to make sure that the investigation is kept on track, the study limits its scope to the difficulties the eighth graders faced in learning vocabulary at SMP Negeri 3 Tembilahan Hulu in academic year 2026/2027.

D. Research Question

With regard to the scope as outlined above, the research aims at addressing the following research question: “What are the difficulties faced by eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 3 Tembilahan Hulu in learning English vocabulary for the academic year 2026/2027?”

E. Purpose of the Research

Main purpose of this research is to investigate and understand the challenges faced by the students of class VIII of SMP Negeri 3 Tembilahan Hulu during the year 2026/2027 related to vocabulary proficiency.

F. Significance of the Research

The findings of this study are expected to be able to give benefits to the teacher, the student, the reader.

1. For students

It is expected that the findings will make the students aware of those issues that prevent them from acquiring vocabulary and that will enable them to identify the difficulties they encounter in the course of learning.

2. For teacher

This research may give teachers some empirical data about students' difficulties in learning vocabulary, thus allowing them to develop more effective approaches to vocabulary teaching.

3. For future researchers

The findings of the above study will act as literature support for future studies, and at the same time add to knowledge and research experience on English language teaching, especially vocabulary instruction.

G. Definition of the Key Terms

1. Difficulty

In terms of education, learning difficulties involve situations where students face hurdles which inhibit the learning process. As defined by the Longman Dictionary, as quoted by Irvani (2020, p. 8), difficulty entails a problem or situation which causes obstacles. On a broader scope,

Hartatiningsih (2022, p. 304) elaborated on this term by defining difficulties as problems faced by the students in mastering vocabulary, which include inaccurate spelling, pronunciations, and inappropriate word choice.

2. Vocabulary

²⁰ Vocabulary is an important aspect of English language learning, as it enables learners to develop language abilities. The vocabulary is not regarded as just a set of words; rather, it consists of lexical items that can be used ²⁴ in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In this respect, Rahmah et al. (2023:35) argued that the vocabulary is an important aspect that needs to be acquired by learners to enable English language proficiency development.

3. Vocabulary Mastery

In their study, Milawati et al. (2025: 243) stated that Vocabulary mastery involves a complex process requiring deep knowledge of the meaning and structure of words. However, the present study limits its scope to meaning and usage, as preliminary evidence showed that students struggled particularly with these components.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Review of the Related Teories

1. Definition of Vocabulary

It is evident that vocabulary is among the key elements in language acquisition due to ²³ the fact that it provides the learners with an opportunity to communicate effectively. Having enough vocabulary allows the learners to develop skills in reading, listening, ⁵ speaking, and writing. Vocabulary can be described as the foundation of language learning, as Rahmah et al. (2023: 35) suggest, because all the skills of language learning depend on vocabulary knowledge to ensure successful communication and understanding. Likewise, according to Rosyada and Apoko (2023: 489), vocabulary can be defined as the fundamental requirement for language learning; therefore, the lack of vocabulary knowledge hinders the acquisition of the target language.

Apart from language learning, vocabulary knowledge is vital for communication. Tolaganova and Panabayeya (2022: 221) suggest that good vocabulary helps in interacting in the second language, while bad vocabulary knowledge impedes communication and prevents the learners from communicating their thoughts properly. Rama et al. (2023: 17081) agree with this viewpoint by stating that vocabulary should be learned before developing other language skills because vocabulary is the base for understanding the language.

Conceptually, vocabulary is the set of words that are at the disposal of the language users according to Hatch and Brown (1995: 1). Moreover,

vocabulary is defined as a lexicon system arranged alphabetically. It differs from other language systems. In light of the above perspectives, it could be concluded that vocabulary entails a set of words that convey meanings and act as the main building block in the use of language. The importance of mastering vocabulary cannot be overlooked since it acts as the basis for language use and development.

2. The Importance of Vocabulary Mastery

Language acquisition and use of vocabulary are some of the key aspects in acquiring language proficiency. This is because vocabulary skills are measured based on an individual's understanding of the meanings of lexical items, as well as proper usage of words in context. This is supported by the statement by Mukhtar et al. (2023: 682), which states that vocabulary skills are among the most complicated parts of language because vocabulary forms the foundation for any language. Insufficient vocabulary mastery may lead to communication problems. Moreover, limited knowledge of words, word structure (morphology), reading and writing skills, grammar, and meaning (semantics) can affect overall language performance, since these components are interdependent.

Milawati et al. (2025: 243) state that vocabulary mastery is a complex process requiring a deep understanding of both meaning and word structure. Nevertheless, the present study focuses only on meaning and usage, as preliminary evidence indicated that students particularly struggled with these

aspects. The effectiveness of the expression of the ideas of learners is determined mainly by the extent of the knowledge of the vocabulary of the learners. The vocabulary is thus considered the key aspect of language proficiency since the lack of lexical items constrains the learners' ability to express their thoughts effectively. The above view is held by Andriani and Sriwahyuningsih (2019: 170). Based on the theoretical viewpoints discussed above, it could be said that vocabulary proficiency has many advantages for learners which include the following:

- 1) This improves communication skills, enabling students to express ideas clearly and effectively.
- 2) This improves reading comprehension, when someone has a good vocabulary, they can understand written words well.
- 3) Listening skills are also improved, while supporting the development of writing skills through more accurate and creative sentence construction.
- 4) Vocabulary mastery strengthens grammar and linguistic structure, as vocabulary is closely related to morphology, syntax, and semantics.
- 5) Finally, vocabulary mastery can improve learners' confidence in using language, allowing them to actively participate in various learning and speaking activities.

3. Definition of Difficulty

Based on Longman Dictionary in Irvani (2020: 8), difficulty refers to a problem or something that causes trouble. In the context of learning, students' difficulties are conditions where they face such problems, often

reflected in their mistakes and errors. In addition, Reskiawan et al. (2020: 35) also explain In the learning process, there will certainly be difficulties and problems to face, and everyone has their own obstacles, such as in communication, grammar, and one of the most common is vocabulary mastery. When there are obstacles in vocabulary mastery, a student will have difficulty in mastering the four skills of English. These problems are more pronounced when it comes to ¹⁵ English as a foreign language (EFL). This is because in this situation, the students need to learn vocabulary in a language that is not commonly used on a day-to-day basis. As per Afidah & Machfudi (2022: 3), difficulties in mastering vocabulary skills mean the problems that the students face in mastering lexical competence. These can be seen in many areas such as spelling, word meanings, pronunciation, and usage. These difficulties slow down the process of mastering vocabulary.

4. Indicators of Difficulty Vocabulary Mastery

The errors that learners make while learning may be used as an indicator of ¹⁸ the difficulties faced by students while learning English vocabulary. Some of the common difficulties include those related to pronunciation, spelling, and translation of words, which indicate the inadequacy of knowledge of students regarding vocabulary. According to Lynne Cameron as cited in Gushendra (2017: 54-55), word knowledge involves aspects such as pronunciation, spelling, meaning and grammar .The explanation of the aspects:

a. Pronunciation

The differences in the phonology between the English language and the Indonesian language pose a significant problem for learners trying to master proper English pronunciation skills. As Komalasari (2022: 272) puts it, these differences in the phonologies of the languages are among the main reasons why learners have problems with their pronunciation. Therefore, vocabulary words with difficult pronunciations are much harder to learn than easier ones, which makes pronunciation a frequent problem when learning English vocabulary. In English, one example word can be pronounced differently than another, and different sounds can also have different meanings. This is because Indonesian words are pronounced as they are written, whereas English words are not. Therefore, this can also make it difficult for someone who is just learning English.

b. Spelling

Another problem faced by many students in learning vocabulary is correct spelling. As explained by Komalasari (2022: 273), spelling mistakes may occur since the students get confused about the link between the pronunciation of the English words and their spelling, especially when they do not understand the context of the sentence containing those words. The study also found that many students have

difficulty with spelling, which ends up interfering with other aspects of English. Therefore, spelling is also an important aspect.

c. Grammar

Grammar related to certain words can be challenging, particularly when it differs from the learner's first language. Students often struggle to recall. This was explained by Afidah (2021: 25).

d. Meaning

Learners tend to experience confusion when two words overlap in meaning. Vocabulary items with more than one meaning can be problematic as well, since students may resist acknowledging a second meaning after mastering the first. Research from Salam and Nurnisa (2021: 49) shows that students have difficulty identifying the meaning and implications of new vocabulary. They explain that unfamiliar words hinder their ability to translate and understand accurately.

B. Review of Related Findings

This study will use several previous studies to compare their results with those of this study. The following are some of the research results that will be analyzed in this study:

The study done by Diah Ayu Komalasari in the Journal of Griya Cendikia in 2022 under the title "An Analysis of Student Difficulties in Mastering Vocabulary in Eight Grade at SMPN 06 Kotabumi in 2021/2022" utilized qualitative research methodology through a case study approach in studying the

difficulties faced by students in mastering vocabulary. This study was conducted with eighth grade students, using interviews and observations as data collection techniques. This research involved a case study method of data collection where the gathered data were subjected to ¹² three levels of qualitative data analysis; data reduction, data display and concluding/verifying. From this analysis, the research found out that the students faced different challenges in vocabulary learning which included wrong pronunciations, inability to differentiate between words having a similar spelling and pronunciation, lack of understanding of grammar and lack of understanding on how to use English language in context. Out of all the problems that the students faced, lack of understanding of sentence context was identified to be the most prominent challenge as it affected their pronunciation, spelling and grammar.

Yet another related research paper titled Students' Difficulties in Vocabulary Mastery authored by ⁷ Anissa'ul Afidah and Moch. Imam Machfudi and published in the Critical Review of English-Arabic World Journal in 2022 focused on determining the difficulties that the students face when trying to master English vocabulary. In this research, the authors used qualitative methods of data collection employing a phenomenological approach. Data collection involved interviews and documentation with triangulation technique being applied to improve the reliability and validity of the data. The study showed that the participants had problems in the following areas of vocabulary acquisition: translation from English to Indonesian language, understanding of the word meaning, pronunciation, spelling of the word, and memorizing vocabulary.

Contributing factors include reluctance to use dictionaries, low interest in learning English, limited opportunities for practice, inadequate facilities, and negative peer influences, all of which hinder vocabulary acquisition.

There is another study carried out by Laura Monica Lumbanraja and Nazli Fahada which is featured in the English Language Teaching Prima Journal in 2024 in an article entitled 'Analyzing Students' Difficulties in Mastering Vocabulary at SMP Pangeran Antasari.' In their research, the authors analyzed the problems faced by junior high school students in learning English vocabulary with consideration of the fact that low lexicon knowledge limits learners' capability to communicate well in foreign languages. In order to conduct their study, the researchers utilized a descriptive qualitative approach for collecting data from eighth graders through observation, interviews, and document analysis. As a result, it turned out that the learners have had many problems with remembering vocabulary within proper context since their average level of achievement equaled 57.5% where grades varied from 40 to 71. Besides, there have been discovered several reasons for the mentioned problem which include pronunciation issues because of difference between English and the learners' native language, low level of grammar knowledge owing to disparity between oral and written English, lack of participation in English learning exercises, lack of vocabulary extension attempts, small access to learning sources, and tendency to forget learned words.

In contrast to the current study, the following features of similarity and difference can be noticed in relation to the previous studies. First of all, Analysis of Student Difficulties in Mastering Vocabulary in Eighth Grade at

SMPN 06 Kotabumi in the Academic Year of 2021/2022 is similar to the current one because they share the common research problem which is related to investigating students' problems with vocabulary mastery. However, while both studies are focused on junior high school students, they have been conducted on different research groups in different educational environments. Secondly, the research titled Students' Difficulties in Vocabulary Mastery shares the similar research issue with the current study but differs from it with respect to the participants of the investigation since it concerns senior high school students instead of the eighth-grade students. Finally, ¹ Analyzing Students' Difficulties in Mastering Vocabulary at SMP Pangeran Antasari is the most similar to the current study as it investigates the identical topic and uses eighth-grade students as the participants.

Generally speaking, all three of the earlier research works highlight the problem of students struggling to learn English vocabulary. At the same time, the studies differ from the current one in terms of research tools, methodology, participants, and factors that cause problems in acquiring vocabulary knowledge. Such a difference allows the current study to contribute more empirical evidence concerning the problem of vocabulary mastery challenges. The first study by Komalasari (2022), this research use case study design, using interview and observation, and focused in specific pronunciation errors, confusion with similar spelling words, grammar difficulties, lack of contextual understanding. In contrast, with the second study Afidah and Machfudi (2022), this research use phenomenological design, and focused in specific translation problems, word

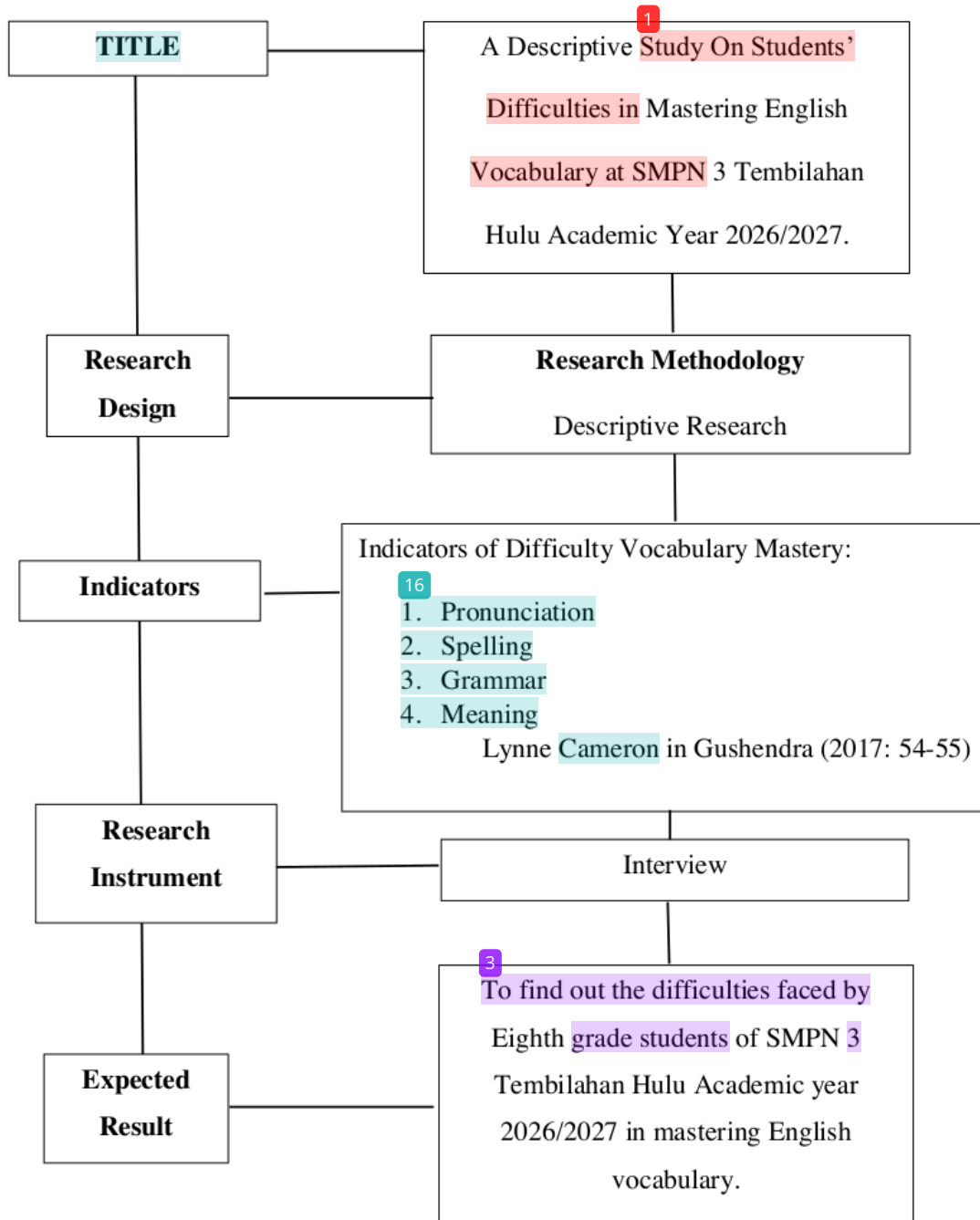
meaning, and memorization. The third study by Lumbanraja and Fahada (2024), this research use vocabulary tests, interview and document analysis, and focused in low average scores (57,5%).

Despite differences in subject and method, the three studies show that vocabulary mastery is a complex aspect and a major obstacle in English language learning. Comparing the results of the three earlier conducted researches, one can observe the common pattern of problems which students face when acquiring vocabulary. In particular, in all researches, there were reported problems with pronunciation, spelling, grammar and proper usage of vocabulary depending on the context. Besides, the researches prove that poor vocabulary knowledge has a negative impact on students' oral and written communication skills. Thus, based on these results, one can clearly see that there is solid evidence proving the fact ²¹ that vocabulary learning is an important part of English language acquisition.

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C. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research can be seen below:



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**A. Research Design**

The use of qualitative research methodology was adopted in this study to acquire a more profound knowledge about the phenomenon under study. Qualitative research methodology differs from quantitative one in that it places emphasis not on the statistical nature of research but rather on meaning-making based on the interpretation of naturally occurring phenomena. Sugiyono (2013: 8–9) explains that qualitative research is conducted in the natural setting where the researcher is the main instrument in collecting data. The information is collected using various methods of data collection and analyzed through induction. Therefore, results are presented in descriptive form or visualization. The main focus is on understanding processes, such as human interactions or the development of a phenomenon, rather than simply highlighting the end result. The analysis is conducted inductively, where findings and themes emerge through repeated processing of field data, emphasizing the deeper meaning and essential significance of the phenomenon being studied.

In addition Cresswell (2024: 196) In qualitative research, the descriptive method is an analytical strategy where the researcher focuses directly on the data, employs limited interpretation, and arranges the information into themes for clearer understanding.

Based on both points above, this approach provides a richer understanding of complex social realities and offers insights that are often overlooked by quantitative methods. By examining contexts in depth and analyzing data

inductively, qualitative research is able to reveal patterns, motivations, and hidden meanings, thereby strengthening understanding of the topic under study.

Furthermore, the researcher used this method analysis. Comprehension of the phenomenon being studied can be acquired by means of a method whereby empirical findings are explained systematically in theory. Such a method makes it possible for researchers to present the reality situation in an elaborate way and discover new meanings and facts not previously known. As stated by Reskiawan et al. (2020: 38), the main goal of such a method is to give a systematic theoretical explanation of the data gathered.

B. Location and Time

This section has two parts, location and time. For location, the researcher was conducted the research at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu, in the first semester of 2026/2027 academic year, which is located at Jl.pelita Jaya No. 02, Tembilahan, Riau, Indonesia. The study took place in July 2026.

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C. Population and Sample

1. Population

The research population for this research was identified as those students attending the 2026/2027 academic year at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu, which made it mandatory for them to have English language lessons. Therefore, each student who had English lessons as a mandatory course was considered the research population. However, to ensure a more focused study, the population was operationally narrowed to eighth grade. Eighth-grade students were selected as participants since they are past the basic stage of language

learning but have not yet encountered the demands of final examinations, making them an active group in vocabulary acquisition.

The main characteristics of this population include: (1) active students who regularly attend English classes, (2) have experience learning vocabulary through the same curriculum, and (3) are in a learning environment that is relatively homogeneous in terms of teaching methods, materials, and facilities. The inclusion of this population was intended to ensure that the study accurately represented the actual challenges encountered by students in acquiring English vocabulary within authentic classroom learning environments.

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Table III. 1 Population of the Research

NO	CLASS	TOTAL
1.	8.1	31
2.	8.2	32
3.	8.3	32
4.	8.4	31
5.	8.5	32
TOTAL		158

2. Sample

In order to get those participants who could best provide rich data, this study utilized ¹³purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling is one of the non-probability sampling approaches, unlike the probability sampling approaches, where participants are intentionally selected based on some set of

features that fit with the objectives of the study. As pointed out by John W. Creswell, the selection of participants in qualitative research should focus on those who can provide rich data. This aligns with the concept of purposive sampling, which selects individuals based on their relevance to the phenomenon under study.

Conceptually, purposive sampling is a technique in which the sample is selected “deliberately” because it possesses specific characteristics required for the study. Therefore, participation was not expected to include all members of the research community, rather participants had to have the ability to offer a detailed insight on the problems related to learning English vocabulary. In line with this consideration, the following criteria were used for the selection of participants in this study:

- 1) students who are active and less active in learning,
- 2) students who experience challenges in comprehending, retaining, or using the English vocabulary appropriately.

To increase the validity of the classification of students' vocabulary proficiency, data source triangulation was used as a means of validating the data. This validation strategy does not make use of one source of information only to determine the proficiency levels but rather makes use of the comparison of evidence from various sources of data. According to Sugiyono (2019: 369), data credibility in terms of source triangulation entails comparing information from various sources. In this study, the researcher combined data from classroom observations, interviews with the eighth

grade students, and documentation. These sources were cross-checked to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the students' difficulties in mastering English vocabulary.

Unlike quantitative research, there is no standard formula for determining sample size in qualitative research. Therefore, this study does not use formulas such as Slovin's or Lemeshow's. The determination of sample size is based on the principle of data saturation that is, the condition in which the data obtained becomes repetitive and no longer provides new information. Typically, in qualitative educational research, the sample size ranges from 10 to 15 participants, depending on the complexity of the data required.

The use of purposive sampling contributes to qualitative research in terms of methodology through increasing the reliability and validity of the study. Credibility of the study findings is ensured through the careful selection of respondents whose features match with the aims of the research. On the other hand, reliable outcomes will be obtained due to the consistency in conducting the process of data gathering and data analysis. Also, triangulation, such as conducting interviews, observations, and documenting, can be used as a means of improving credibility of the research findings.

It was deemed as the most suitable approach in relation to the nature of the research since qualitative research focuses more on making interpretations and having a deep understanding of social phenomenon instead of generating statistics. Accordingly, Sugiyono describes that the people who participate in qualitative research are called as informants not respondents as they are

chosen based on purposive considerations regarding the aims of the study. This underscores that data quality is more important than sample size.

Further empirical support has been provided for the justification of the use of purposive sampling in qualitative research. The extensive use of the method can be attributed to the fact that the method allows the researcher to recruit participants that possess traits that fit well the purpose of that specific research. Indeed, in line with the above reasoning, Ahmad and Wilkins (2024: 2) indicate that purposive sampling continues to be the commonest method used in participant selection in qualitative research. Furthermore, other studies confirm that this technique helps researchers ¹⁰ gain an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena through the selection of information-rich cases.

Taking into consideration the aims of this particular research, purposive sampling emerged to be the most appropriate technique for selecting participants since it allows gathering in-depth information. Using purposive sampling allows gathering information from people who have firsthand knowledge about the studied. In such a way, this technique will help in exploring problems encountered by students in learning vocabulary in English.

² **Table III. 2 Sample of the Research**

NO	CLASSES	SAMPLE
1.	8.1	3
2.	8.2	3

3.	8.3	3
4.	8.4	3
5.	8.5	3
TOTAL		15

D. Research Procedure

This research procedure was conducted in several stages:

1. Determine the sample of 15 eighth grade students at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu using purposive sampling.
2. In order to get a thorough insight into the problems that students encounter when acquiring English vocabulary, interviews were conducted among participants who were chosen purposively.
3. During the interviewing sessions, the conversation revolved around four main problems associated with vocabulary acquisition, which include pronunciation, spelling, grammar use, and meaning of the words.
4. In order to maintain the validity of the collected data, the participants' answers were recorded in the researcher's field notes.
5. After the collection phase, the collected information was subjected to the process of data reduction. ¹⁴ The reduced data were then organized and presented descriptively to show repeated patterns concerning vocabulary learning problems.
6. The findings were analyzed inductively, categorizing the difficulties into the four indicators mentioned above.

7. Lastly, conclusions were drawn to answer the research question and provide recommendations for improving vocabulary teaching strategies.

E. Research Instrument

In order to conduct research on ²the problems faced by Grade 8 in learning English vocabulary, interviews were used as the main method for collecting data. As noted by Sugiyono, as quoted by Abubakar (2021: 67-68), an interview is a structured conversation between the researcher and the respondent using a question and answer technique to obtain complete information, perspectives and ideas relating to the objectives of the study. Interviews are divided into two types, unstructured interviews which are conducted freely by the researcher without using a systematically arranged guide, and structured interviews, which are conducted using written questions and alternative answers determined by the researcher. However, in this study, the researcher choose to conduct semi-structured interviews with using Indonesian language entirely to make it easier for students, which combine both types with the aim of exploring information in greater depth and variety.

The following is an outline of the guidelines for the upcoming interview.

Table III. 3 Interview guide

Research Focus	Sub Focus	Aspect Asked
The difficulties faced by Eighth grade students of SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu Academic year 2026/2027 in mastering	1) Pronunciation	1) The amount of difficulty in pronouncing English words.

English vocabulary.	2) vocabulary that appears difficult to read.
2) Spelling	1) The difficulty of writing down English vocabulary during a dictation. 2) The difficulty of spelling English vocabulary.
3) Grammar	1) The difficulty of creating English sentences. 2) The difficulties in choosing the right word.
4) Meaning	1) The difficulty of understanding English vocabulary. 2) Ability to recall the meanings of English vocabulary words

F. Data Collection Techniques

For data collection, the researcher used interviews as the instrument method. The researcher gave 8 questions to the students to answer, using a semi-structured interview system. In gathering data, the researcher used the following procedures:

1) Observation

In this research, the observation technique applied was direct participant observation. During the Teaching Practicum Program (PPL), the researcher actively engaged in the teaching process while simultaneously observing the students' learning behavior. By taking part in classroom activities, the researcher was able to identify the students' difficulties in mastering English vocabulary more closely, such as problems in pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and meanings.

2) Interview

In this research, interview conducted in semi-structured interview at Eighth grade of SMP Negeri 3 Tembilahan Hulu with combining closed questions (Yes or No type) and open-ended questions to obtain both short responses and deeper explanations. The interview was conducted only with

students, without involving teachers, in order to directly explore learners' experiences and difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. A total of 15 eighth- grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Tembilahan Hulu were selected purposively as participants. The interview guide focused on four main indicators of vocabulary mastery difficulties, namely pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and meaning. Through this interview, the researcher obtained detailed information about students' vocabulary learning difficulties and how these aspects influenced their overall English learning process.

3) Documentation

The documentation technique in this study was conducted by collecting photographs and audio recordings as supporting data. As stated by Sugiyono (: 314) Documents are records of past events, documents can take the form of writings, images, or a person's monumental works, Document analysis complements the use of observation and interviews in qualitative research. In this research, documentation consisted of photographs taken during classroom activities and interview sessions, as well as audio recordings of the student interviews. These materials provided concrete evidence of the research process and participants' responses, complementing the interview results and ensuring the validity and reliability of the data.

G. Data Analysis Techniques

Findings that are significant and communicable can be obtained only after the qualitative data have been properly organized and analyzed. In this case, Miles et al. (2014: 31-32) have explained qualitative data analysis as a systematic method

of analyzing and managing information gathered through interviews, observations, and other sources of data. The stages of the research are presented below:

1. Data Condensation

In order to ensure that the results obtained have a clear analytical focus, the qualitative data will require being subjected to a process of condensation where the gathered data is refined to extract the most pertinent data. This step strengthens the data by making it clearer and more meaningful, ensuring that findings can be easily understood and communicated to others. The term “condensation” is preferred over “reduction” because it highlights the enrichment of data rather than the loss of important information.

2. Data Display

For a proper understanding and decision making, qualitative data needs to be displayed in a structured manner. Therefore, data display is regarded as the second key element of the analysis process, where information is displayed in an organized and summarized way in order to help the researcher in detecting patterns and drawing conclusions about what should happen next. Similar to data condensation, the construction and utilization of displays are integral to the analytical process rather than separate from it. Qualitative analysis consists of many different activities that are meant to help organize data in order to make sense of it. These activities may involve the creation of matrices, the ordering of rows and columns, and

the choice of information that will go into each cell of the matrix. Moreover, the design of displays inherently involves elements of data condensation, as it requires structuring and simplifying information to enhance clarity and facilitate interpretation.

3. Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

As qualitative data analysis progresses, emerging interpretations are continuously examined and refined until they develop into well-substantiated conclusions. This final analytical phase, known as conclusion drawing and verification, begins during the initial stages of data collection, when the researcher systematically interprets the evidence by recognizing recurring patterns, constructing explanations, identifying causal linkages, and formulating propositions. Although these interpretations are initially provisional, they become increasingly credible and firmly supported through the ongoing process of verification and analysis. Final conclusions may only emerge after all data have been collected, depending on the volume of field notes, the methods of coding and data management, the researcher's analytical skills, and the time constraints of the study.

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. Data Presentation

In this section, the researcher presents results that address the research questions regarding the difficulties faced by eighth-grade students at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu in mastering English vocabulary during the 2026/2027 school year. Following the data collection process, which involved interviews, observations, and documentation, the obtained information was transcribed and systematically analyzed. The data presented in this study focus on the real difficulties experienced by students in the classroom, in line with the research objectives set at the beginning. In the field, the researcher found that the difficulties students in learning vocabularies. In this research, the researcher divided factor students difficulties in learning vocabularies. There were students difficult in grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and meaning.

a. Pronunciation

Researchers found that eighth grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Tembilahan Hulu had difficulty in pronouncing English vocabulary. Pronunciation is an important part of communication. Pronunciation errors can prevent understanding and make interactions less effective.

During the learning process, many students find it difficult to pronounce new vocabulary words. They are often confused because they do not yet understand how to spell the words correctly, resulting in incorrect pronunciation. This was further confirmed by interviews with several students.

The researcher asked the students: *“Do you often have trouble pronouncing English words correctly? Explain why”*. The researcher then asked the students: *“Do you often come across English words that confuse you when you read them?”*. Several students responded with different explanations.

Student 1 said that:

“Sering, Terlihat susah saja untuk diucapin. Pernah ada, di kamus kadang atau di buku lainya.”

“It’s often just hard to say. It’s sometimes found in dictionaries or other books.”

And then followed by the second answer,

“Ingat, susah kayak kata ‘selalu’ jadi always gitu.”

“Yes, I remember. It was difficult, like the word ‘always’.”

From the Student 1’s answer, this indicates that students face difficulties in pronouncing vocabulary. The problem arises because they are not familiar with the correct spelling and articulation of words, which leads to confusion when trying to say them aloud. The example of the word “always” illustrates how students struggle to with accurate pronunciation.

Student 2 said that:

“Iya, sulit kayak gabungan huruf - hurufnya itu.”

“Yeah, it is hard, like putting the letters together.”

And then followed by the second answer,

“Kadang kadang, contohnya kayak karena jarang buka buku jadi tak ingat kata katanya.”

“Sometimes, for example, because I rarely open a book, I cannot remember the words.”

Based the answer, Student 2 struggles with combining letters when forming words and also experiences difficulties in remembering vocabulary due to infrequent study habits.

Student 3 said that:

“Sering, karena sulit diucapkan, kata katanya sulit.”

“Often, because they’re hard to pronounce, the words are difficult.”

And then followed by the second answer,

“Ada, tidak ingat.”

“There are some, but I don’t remember them.”

This shows that Student 3 face difficulties in pronouncing vocabulary. They often find words hard to say, and even when they recognize that certain words are difficult, they cannot recall them. This reflects both pronunciation problems and vocabulary mastery, which hinder their mastery of English.

Student 4 said:

“Iya, tapi kadang tidak karena kayak susah aja.”

“Yeah, but sometimes I don’t because it’s just kind of hard.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Pernah, sering, karena tulisannya itu tidak bacanya itu.”

“I have, often because the way it is written is not the same as the way it is read.”

Based on interviewed above, it shows that Student 4 simply feels “confused,” especially when it comes to words that are spelled and

pronounced differently.

Student 7 said:

“kayak gimana ya ada yang mudah tapi juga ada yang susah, sering bisa karena kayak, memang latihan ngomong sama abang sih.”

“It is kind of hard to explain, some things are easy, but others are hard. I can often do it because, well, I have been practicing speaking with my older brother.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Ada, lumayan, bisa tapi kek ada juga tu kata yang susah untuk dibaca, tapi kalau sudah diajarin sama ma’amnya bisa.”

“There are some, quite okay, I can do it but there are also words that are hard to read, though if the teacher explains them I can.”

Based on the interview, This indicates that Students 7 face mixed experiences in vocabulary learning. While some words are easy, others are difficult to pronounce and read. Practicing with family members helps improve speaking skills, and teacher guidance plays a crucial role in overcoming reading difficulties.

Student 13 said:

“Iya kayak ada huruf double gitu miss, kayak nyebutnya tu susah kalau double, kalau tidak double kek mudah gitu”

“Yes, like when there are double letters, Miss, it is hard to pronounce if it is double, but if it is not double it is easier.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Terkadang kadang, kayak bedakan itu miss, kayak sama kata katanya, tapi artinya beda”

“Sometimes, Miss, it is like distinguishing words that look the same but have different meanings.”

Based on the statement, This indicates that Students 13 face pronunciation difficulties when dealing with words containing double letters, as they find them harder to pronounce. In addition, they struggle with meaning difficulties, as they cannot easily distinguish between words that look similar but have different meanings. For example, the word “can” may mean ‘to be able to’ or ‘a container (*kaleng*),’ which confuses students in vocabulary learning.

Student 14 said:

“Iya, kata katanya tu susah dibilang gitu, saya ini ngomong kayak belibet gitu jadi susah mau ngomongnya”

“Yes, the words are hard to say, I get tongue tied so it’s difficult to speak.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Iya, kayak kata yang pake r juga”

“Yes, like words that have the letter ‘r’.”

Based on the interview above, that students 14 struggle with pronunciation because certain sounds, such as the letter ‘r,’ make them feel tongue-tied and unable to speak fluently. For example, words like “umbrella” are perceived as difficult to pronounce, which reflects phonetic-specific challenges in vocabulary learning.

Based on interviews with all of 15 students, the main difficulty they experienced with the “Pronunciation” indicator was confusion in pronouncing English words due to the difference between spelling and sound. This caused difficulties when learning new vocabulary. Many

students also found that pronouncing English words was inherently difficult. External factors, such as classroom noise, also served as barriers to the learning process. The students' responses revealed a variety of situations: some were able to read the words but did not understand their meanings, others knew the meanings but had difficulty pronouncing them; and still others knew neither.

b. Spelling

Spelling is the ability to arrange letters correctly to form words, and it plays an essential role in vocabulary learning. However, many learners still find spelling to be a major challenge in mastering English vocabulary. In this study, the researcher identified that eighth grade students at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu experienced difficulties when spelling words. The students often did not know how to spell vocabulary items, felt confused, and struggled to memorize the alphabet, which led to frequent mistakes in spelling. Furthermore, interviews with the students themselves supported the conclusion that spelling continues to be a significant obstacle in their vocabulary learning process.

The researcher asked the students: *"Do you often make mistakes when writing English words? Yes or no? Explain why"*, and the second question that asked is *"In your opinion, is spelling English words harder than spelling Indonesian words? Explain"*. Several students responded with different explanations.

Student 1:

“Pernah, kadang ketulisannya salah satu huruf atau lupa sama kata katanya.”

“Sometimes, I wrote one letter wrong or forgot the word.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Lebih susah, karena bahasa inggris jarang digunakan jadi lebih susah.”

“It is harder, because English is rarely used, so it becomes more difficult.”

Based on the statement above, the Student 1’s problem are related to spelling errors and forgetting words, as well as the limited use of English in daily life, which makes vocabulary mastery more difficult.

Student 3:

“Bisa, contohnya book bisa ditulis bok, “o”-nya tetinggal satu.”

“For example, the word book could be written as bok, with one ‘o’ missing.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Susah, kata katanya susah untuk diucapkan.”

“It’s difficult, the words are hard to pronounce.”

Based on interview above, from this response, it can be seen that Student 3 sometimes makes mistakes in spelling, such as missing letters, and also finds pronunciation challenging.

Student 4:

“Sering, kalau tulisannya teacher itu kan, dibaca sama tulisannya beda.”

“Often, for example the word teacher, the way it is written and the way it is pronounced are different.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Tidak susah, tidak mudah.”

“It’s not too difficult, but not easy either.”

From this response, It can be concluded that Student 4 often notices the difference between English spelling and pronunciation. However, they perceives the level of difficulty as moderate, neither too easy nor too hard. which means they are able to manage these challenges.

Student 5:

“Iya, karena ditulisannya itu sangat susah terkadang.”

“Yes, because the spelling is sometimes very difficult.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Lebih susah karena bahasa inggris tidak sama dengan bahasa indonesia.”

“It is harder because English is not the same as Indonesian.”

Based on the interview above, it can be seen that Student 5 finds English spelling difficult, especially because the writing system feels different from Indonesian. This difference makes learning vocabulary more challenging for them.

Student 6:

“Iya, karena agak susah huruf nya.”

“Yes, because the letters are rather difficult.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Susah, karena bahasa indonesia itu mudah disebutnya, sedangkan bahasa inggris susah, payah buat bicara”

“It is difficult, because Indonesian is easy to pronounce, while English is hard and troublesome to speak.”

From the interview above, Student 6’s response indicates that they finds English spelling challenging due to the complexity of the letters and the differences in pronunciation compared to Indonesian. These differences make English vocabulary harder for him to learn and use.

Student 7:

“Kadang kami ada yang tau tulisannya, ada juga yang ngga, terkadang merasa yakin juga, ada juga tidak, lebih sering yakin.”

“Sometimes we know the spelling, sometimes not, sometimes we feel confident, sometimes not, but more often confident.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Bahasa indonsia, karena kan kita indonesia, jarang.”

“Indonesian, because we are Indonesian, we rarely spell English words.”

From statement above, it can be seen that Student 7 sometimes feels confident in spelling but admits that English is rarely practiced compared to Indonesian, which makes spelling harder.

Student 8:

“Kurang, ga yakin dengan tulisannya, takut salah, apa yang diucapkan dengan apa yang ditulis tu berbeda.”

“Not much, not confident with the spelling, afraid of mistakes, what is spoken and what is written are different.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Bahasa indo lebih mudah aja dieja daripada bahasa inggris, karena Yang disebut dengan tulisan beda.”

“Indonesian is easier to spell than English, because pronunciation and writing are different.”

Based on the interview, Student 8's response indicates that they lacks confidence in spelling English words, mainly due to differences between pronunciation and writing.

In this interview, Student 9 did not provide a verbal answer to the first question. Instead, they responded with body language that clearly showed refusal. When asked the second question, he only replied briefly with:

“Tidak”

“No ”

While shaking their head. The body language suggested hesitation and lack of confidence, indicating that they were unwilling or unable to engage with the spelling task in English.

Student 10:

“Bisa miss. Ngga terlalu yakin miss, karena bahasa inggris tulisannya kayak lain miss.”

“I can, miss. I am not sure miss, because English spelling looks different.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Lebih susah bahasa inggris, karena bahasanya kurang dipahami, karena ada yang juga susah yang diucapkan miss.”

“English is harder, because the language is less understood, and some words are difficult to pronounce.”

According to the answer above, the student’s response indicates that while Student 10 is able to spell certain words, they lacks confidence and feels uncertain. Although they sometimes perceives spelling as easy, overall they finds English more difficult due to limited understanding and pronunciation challenges.

Student 11:

“Dikit dikit bisa, ngga yakin.”

“A little bit, I can, but not sure.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Ngga bisa, kalau mengeja lumayan lah miss, tapi kalau kayak kek yang mengeja yang susah, bacaan yang susah jadi kek susah mengeja itu. Lebih susah bahasa inggris keknya daripada bahasa indonesia, kayak nengoknya tu susah aja gitu miss.”

“Not really, spelling is okay for simple words Miss, but for difficult texts it is hard. English seems harder than Indonesian, especially in pronunciation.”

Based on interview above, Student 11 is able to spell simple words but struggles with more complex ones. They perceives English spelling as more difficult than Indonesian, particularly because of pronunciation challenges, which reduce their confidence in spelling English vocabulary.

Similar to the interview session for Student 9, Student 12 did not give a verbal answer at first. Instead, he responded with gestures, showing

hesitation and lack of confidence, and indicated that he did not understand.

Later, he simply said:

“Gabisa”

“Cannot”

Without further explanation. Similar to Student 9, their reliance on body language rather than spoken words reflects reluctance to engage. This difficulty is also connected to weakness in reading, as previously explained in the interview with Teacher 3. their inability to read makes spelling English words particularly challenging for them.

Student 13:

“Kalau sambil lihat buku bisa, tapi kalau di dikte agak susah, kayak takut aja gitu nulisnya, misalnya huruf double gitu.”

“If I look at the book I can, but with dictation it is harder, I feel nervous, for example with double letters.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Iya, karena kayak kita kan terbiasa memakai bahasa indonesia gitu, kami kalau saya juga jarang pakai bahasa inggris, jarang juga mengobrol, jadi mungkin susah kayak terbelit-belit.”

“Yes, because we are used to Indonesian, we rarely use English or speak it, so it feels complicated.”

Based on interview above, Student 13 can manage spelling with visual support but struggles in dictation tasks. Their nervousness about spelling details, such as double letters, and limited practice with English compared to Indonesian contribute to their perception that English spelling is complicated and difficult.

Student 14:

“Sering, ya susah aja.”

“Often, it’s just difficult.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Iya, karena bahasa inggris itu susah dibilang gitu, sedangkan bahasa indonesia lebih mudah.”

“Yes, because English is difficult, while Indonesian is easier.”

Based on the interview above, it can be concluded that he often has difficulty spelling English words. He considers English to be inherently more difficult than Indonesian, which he finds easier and more familiar.

Student 15:

“Iya, ketika menulis bahasa inggris, tidak tau apa yang mau ditulis, tidak tau juga cara bacanya.”

“Yes, when writing English, I do not know what to write, nor how to read it.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Lebih susah bahasa inggris, tulisannya berbeda dengan bahasa indo, kalau bahasa indonesia sudah sering dijumpai di sehari hari, sedangkan bahasa inggris ngga, tidak bisa”

“English is harder, its spelling is different from Indonesian. Indonesian is familiar in daily life, but English is not, so I cannot.”

Based on the student’s response indicates that Student 15 face difficulties not only in spelling but also in reading English words. Their challenge start from the unfamiliarity of English compared to Indonesian, which they encounters daily and finds easier. This unfamiliarity makes English vocabulary harder for them to master.

Based on interviews with all of 15 students in the “Spelling” indicator, students often make mistakes when spelling English words. They consider spelling in English to be more difficult than in Indonesian, mainly due to double letters or inconsistent spelling patterns. In addition, some students admitted that they did not know what to write during dictation, indicating weak listening skills and an inability to transcribe words correctly. There are also students who explain that English feels more difficult because they do not encounter it in their daily lives, so they are less familiar with correct spelling.

c. Grammar

Grammar is a fundamental aspect of language learning because it provides the rules that organize how words are combined into meaningful sentences. In this study, the researcher found that eighth grade students at SMPN 3 Tembilahan Hulu still struggled with grammar when learning English vocabulary. Many students were unable to construct sentences correctly. The following are the results of interviews with the students.

The researcher asked the students: *“Do you often feel confused when constructing an English sentence? Can you describe the kinds of sentences that often confuse you or cause you difficulty?”*, and the second question that asked is *“Have you ever had trouble choosing the right word, such as the correct verb?”* (For example, “go” or “went”). Several students responded with different explanations.

Student 1:

“Bingung kadang, karena-kadang blm bisa lancar bahasa inggrisnya, karena baru-baru belajar.”

“Confused sometimes, because I am not yet fluent in English, since I just started learning.”

Based on an interview above, because the student had just begun learning English, the student still appeared unsure and found it difficult to distinguish verb forms, such as the difference between go and went. When asked about constructing sentences in tenses like future or past, the student responded:

“Iya kalau kalimat panjang susah, tapi kalau 2–3 kata bisa, contohnya kayak ‘saya menyukai pelajaran bahasa inggris’ ‘I like English’.”

“Yes, long sentences are difficult, but 2–3 words are manageable, for example ‘I like English’.”

This shows that the student is more comfortable with short, simple sentences, while longer structures and tense variations remain challenging.

Student 7:

“Ada juga bingung, ada juga tidak, kalau kalimat memperkenalkan diri itu kami sudah lancar”

“Sometimes confused, sometimes not. For self introduction sentences I am fluent.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Masih, masih sering, ya masih bingung aja, sering ketukar gitu”

“Still often confused, often mixed up.”

From the interview results, it is evident that the student is already able to create short texts such as self-introduction sentences fluently. However, the student still feels confused when making longer sentences,

especially in using verbs, which are often mixed up (for example, *go* and *went*). During the interview, the researcher asked a short question:

“For example, there’s something a bit tricky like the present tense or past tense, could you make sentences with that?”

Student 7 answered:

“Itu kan sudah dipelajari tu, bisa. Sudah bisa lah kalau sudah dipelajari.”

“That has been studied, so i can. I can be able if already studied.”

Student 15:

“Sering bingung, bingung juga menjelaskan bagaimana”

“Often confused, also confused about how to explain.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Iya, kejadiannya jika mendengar penjelasan dari guru seperti mencari apa yang guru baca, saya tidak tau dibagian mana, saya juga tidak tau bagaimana cara mencari kata di dalam buku atau kamus.”

“Yes, it happens when listening to the teacher’s explanation, like trying to find what the teacher reads. I do not know which part, and I also do not know how to look up words in a book or dictionary.”

In the Grammar indicator, students demonstrated difficulty in constructing English sentences correctly. They often struggled to choose the appropriate verb form for example, distinguishing between the present and past tenses. This difficulty reflects a weak understanding of basic grammar, resulting in sentences that often do not conform to grammatical rules. Some students also admitted to feeling unsure about the sentence structures they created.

d. Meaning

Translation plays an important role in helping learners understand the meaning of words. The activity of translating English words into Indonesian, or vice versa, is part of the vocabulary learning process. In this study, the researcher found that students encountered difficulties in translating word meanings. Interviews with the students confirmed that they continued to struggle with translation, particularly in understanding vocabulary.

The researcher asked the students: *“Do you often feel confused when trying to understand the meaning of an English sentence or vocabulary word? How do you usually look up the meaning of new words you don’t know?”*, and the second question that asked is *“In your opinion, are the meanings of English words easy or difficult to remember? Why?”* (For example, “go” or “went”). Several students responded with different explanations.

Student 6:

“Ga jarang, walau bingung sedikit, saya ada kamus.”

“Not rarely, although a little confused, I have a dictionary.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Susah, karena beda penyebutnya.”

“Difficult, because the pronunciation is different.”

From the interview, it shows that Student 6 feels confused when interpreting vocabulary and relies on the dictionary. The second answer indicates that differences in pronunciation make it harder to connect spoken

forms with meanings, showing difficulty in associating sound with word meaning.

Student 8:

“Susah aja buat ngartikan bahasa inggris, tanya ma’am, teman, kadang ketinggalan kamus, lebih sering bertanya langsung ke org.”

“It is just difficult to interpret English, I ask Ma’am, friends, sometimes I forget my dictionary, so I often ask directly.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Ngga, susah aja buat di ingat. Kalau ma’am yang ngejelasin kurang masuk ke telinga aja.”

“No, it’s just hard to remember. When Ma’am explains, it doesn’t really stick.”

From the interview, it shows that Student 8 struggles to interpret vocabulary and often asks teachers or peers for help. they finds it hard to retain meanings, even when explained, suggesting the need for multimodal teaching strategies to reinforce memory.

Student 10:

“Sering miss, karena kami dibahasa inggris itu ketemu kata yang sama gitu miss kebahasa indonesianya, ada yang tidak paham juga dalam bahasa inggris gitu miss, jadi tidak tau cara mengartikannya, kadang memakai kamus miss, pake google translate, selain itu tidak ada”

“Often, because in English we encounter words that look the same as in Indonesian, but I don’t understand them, so I don not know how to understand them. Sometimes I use the dictionary or Google Translate, nothing else.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Ada yang mudah ada yang ngga miss, kayak kata kata sehari hari bisalah di ingat miss, kayak kata kata yang jarang terucap disehari hari”

“Some are easy, some are not, Miss. Everyday words are easier to remember, but words rarely spoken are harder.”

From the interview, it shows that Student 10 struggles with multiple meanings and relies on Google Translate. they finds everyday words easier to remember, while rarely used words are harder, showing that frequency of exposure affects retention.

Student 11:

“Bingung,, kadang gabisa,kalau pake kamus lumayan, tapi kalau dirumah kadang gitu memakai translate, pake translate google gitu”

“Confused, sometimes I cannot, using the dictionary helps a little, but at home I use Google Translate.”

Followed by the second answer,

“Kadang ingat, kadang tidak juga, tapi kalau teman teman nyebutin gitu jadi kami ingat, tergantung lumayan kadang mudah ingat, kadang ngga, yang mudah aja gitu, yang sering dibilang, karna yang dbilang ni kan jadi mudah ingat, yang susah itu yang jarang diomongkan.”

“Sometimes I remember, sometimes not. But if my friends say it, I can remember. It depends easy words are those often spoken, difficult ones are those rarely used.”

From the interview, it appears that Student 11 has difficulty understanding the meanings of vocabulary words but benefits from the support of classmates. Memory retention depends on the frequency of exposure, which confirms the importance of repeated practice and social learning.

The “Meaning” indicator emerged as the most dominant difficulty. Nearly all students admitted to being confused about the meanings of vocabulary words and having trouble remembering them. They rely heavily on dictionaries, Google Translate, or help from teachers and classmates. Everyday vocabulary is easier to remember, while rarely used words are quickly forgotten. Some students even showed low motivation, for example, by cheating or being too lazy to look up word meanings. Others felt that the teacher’s explanations did not “click,” so the meanings of the words did not stay in their memory for long.

B. Research Findings

Based on the results of interviews and observations conducted with eighth grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Tembilahan Hulu during the 2026/2027 academic year, the researcher found that students experienced various difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. These difficulties can be categorized into four main indicators, namely pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and meaning, as proposed by Lynne Cameron in Gushendra (2017: 54-55). This finding is also consistent with the study conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah Waipare Maumere, in which meaning, pronunciation, spelling, and grammar were identified as the four indicators of students' difficulties in learning vocabulary, with meaning and grammar emerging as the most dominant aspects (AG, 2024). Each of these indicators is discussed further below.

1. Pronunciation

The first difficulty found among eighth grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Tembilahan Hulu was related to pronunciation. Since pronunciation plays an important role in communication, errors in this aspect can prevent understanding and make interactions less effective. During interviews, several students admitted that they often found it difficult to pronounce English vocabulary, particularly because they were not yet familiar with the correct spelling and articulation of the words. For instance, one student stated that the word “always” was difficult to pronounce, while another explained that combining letters into words was often confusing. Meanwhile, another student mentioned that infrequent reading habits made it harder to remember how certain words should be pronounced, which shows that the problem is not only linguistic but also related to limited practice outside the classroom. This indicates that students' pronunciation difficulties are closely related to their limited vocabulary mastery and their infrequent exposure to reading practice.

This finding is in line with Tashpulatovna (2024: 59–61), who explains that pronunciation difficulties among EFL students generally stem from differences in phonetic systems, limited exposure to native speakers, and the influence of the students' first language on their pronunciation. Supporting this view, Aoghala and Ali (2024: 169) conducted a study among secondary school students in Ghat, Libya and found that EFL learners commonly struggled with vowel sound confusion, consonant sound confusion, and inflectional morpheme errors, which suggests that

pronunciation difficulties at the secondary school level tend to follow similar patterns across different EFL contexts. In the Indonesian context, Rosyada-AS and Apoko (2023: 489–501) found that lower secondary school students also struggled to pronounce unfamiliar words accurately, which reflects difficulties in mastering the phonetic aspects of English. Furthermore, Dhuli and Guduru (2025: 61–62) found that students frequently had difficulty differentiating word meanings and identifying similar-sounding words with different spellings, which strengthens the argument that pronunciation and meaning difficulties tend to occur simultaneously among secondary school learners. Taken together, these studies confirm that pronunciation difficulties experienced by the students in this research are not an isolated case, but rather a common challenge faced by EFL learners at the secondary school level, both in Indonesia and in other countries

2. Spelling

The second difficulty identified was spelling. Spelling is the ability to arrange letters correctly to form words, and the results of interviews showed that many students still found this to be a major challenge. Several students admitted that they often did not know how to arrange the alphabet correctly, which led to frequent mistakes when spelling English words. Some students further explained that they sometimes remembered the spelling of simple words but felt confused whenever they encountered longer or unfamiliar vocabulary, which shows that their difficulty tends to increase along with the complexity of the words being learned.

This condition is supported by Sultani and Himat (2021: 31–32), who found that the complexity of the English spelling system, along with the mismatch between sounds and letters, was one of the main causes of spelling errors among EFL learners at Kandahar University. In a similar vein, Ali (2022: 101) revealed that EFL learners who relied heavily on spelling correction tools tended to face greater difficulties in spelling accurately once such tools were unavailable, which implies that limited independent spelling practice can worsen students' spelling ability over time. Furthermore, a study conducted at Universitas Muria Kudus explained that particular spelling patterns often confuse students in pronouncing words correctly, since the differences between Indonesian and English spelling systems frequently create difficulties for Indonesian learners (Lutfiyah, Nuraeningsih, & Rusiana, 2022: 119). These findings confirm that spelling difficulties are not only caused by internal factors, such as lack of practice, but also by the structural differences between the students' first language and English, as well as by their level of dependence on external learning aids.

3. Grammar

The third difficulty found in this study was grammar. Grammar is a fundamental aspect of language learning because it provides the rules that organize how words are combined into meaningful sentences. Based on the interviews, many students admitted that they were still confused when constructing English sentences, particularly because they had only recently begun learning the language and often found it difficult to distinguish words

that share similar meanings but are used differently in context. Some students also mentioned that their limited fluency in English made them hesitant to form complete sentences, which indicates that grammar difficulties are often intertwined with a lack of confidence in using the language actively.

This result corresponds with the findings of Jayasudha et al. (2026: 441–454) in the context of Ethiopian EFL learners, who reported that undergraduate students continued to face significant challenges in learning English grammar, particularly with grammatical features such as tenses, determiners, and conjunctions, which were often linked to limited practice and unsuitable teaching methods. Similarly, Daskan (2023: 367–380) found that the majority of EFL students at Tishk International University regarded grammar as one of the most challenging components of learning English, and that face-to-face interviews revealed deeper difficulties beyond what quantitative data alone could capture. Moreover, Sadewi, Mahardika, and Mahendra (2024: 152) explained that students' difficulties in grammar were often caused by low literacy skills, which subsequently affected their ability to identify and apply correct grammatical structures. Taken together, these findings suggest that grammar difficulties experienced by the students in this study are part of a broader challenge commonly faced by EFL learners at various educational levels, ranging from junior high school to university.

4. Meaning

The fourth difficulty concerned the meaning of vocabulary. Translation plays an important role in helping learners understand the

meaning of words, since translating English words into Indonesian, or vice versa, is part of the vocabulary learning process. The results of the interviews showed that students continued to struggle with translating word meanings, particularly because they rarely studied English outside of the classroom, which made it difficult for them to memorize new vocabulary and its meaning. Several students also mentioned that they still relied heavily on dictionaries whenever they encountered unfamiliar words, yet they still felt confused when trying to remember the meaning of previously learned vocabulary.

This finding is strengthened by Machfudi and Afidah (2022: 1), who identified translating words from English to Indonesian and vice versa as one of the main challenges faced by students in mastering vocabulary. In addition, Dhuli and Guduru (2025: 61–62) found that students frequently experienced difficulty differentiating word meanings, which often led to confusion when encountering words that were similar in form but different in meaning, and that this difficulty was closely related to their limited vocabulary retention strategies. Consequently, it can be concluded that difficulties in understanding vocabulary meaning are closely related to limited exposure to English outside the classroom as well as insufficient vocabulary retention strategies, both of which were also reflected in the students' reliance on dictionaries rather than active recall.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusions

Based on the results of the study conducted with eighth- grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Tembilahan Hulu during the 2026/2027 academic year, it can be concluded that students still face considerable difficulties in mastering English vocabulary. These difficulties appear in four main areas. In terms of pronunciation, the differences between English and Indonesian phonological systems cause frequent mispronunciations, especially when students encounter vocabulary that is difficult to read. For spelling, students are confused by double letters, silent letters, and inconsistencies between sounds and spellings, which often lead to errors in dictation and affect both writing and reading skills. Regarding grammar, students struggle to identify correct verb forms and construct simple sentences. Finally, in terms of meaning, students find it difficult to understand and retain the meaning of words, particularly those that are rarely used, and often rely on dictionaries, Google Translate, or assistance from teachers and peers. Overall, these findings show that vocabulary mastery remains a major challenge for students, requiring more effective strategies to help them improve pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and comprehension of word meanings.

B. Suggestion

The findings of the research expected to be useful for English teachers and the further researchers.

1. For English Teacher

It was expected that teachers analyze the students' difficulties in learning vocabulary. By identifying the difficulties, English teachers can determine appropriate solutions. This will make it easier for students to understand and memorize vocabulary effectively.

2. For the Students

Students are encouraged to actively practice vocabulary through reading, writing, and speaking. They should also use dictionaries or record new words regularly, so that understanding and memorization of vocabulary becomes easier and more effective.

3. For Other Researchers

This study is expected to assist other researchers in identifying the problems faced by students in learning vocabulary. By using these findings as a reference, future researchers can explore related issues more deeply and propose effective solutions.

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