

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research's background, questions, purposes, significance, theoretical framework, hypothesis, and previous studies.

A. Research Background

This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of utilizing realia as contextual learning media to develop young learners' English vocabulary within the framework of Differentiated Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*), assess the efficacy of realia-based instruction in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among young learners, and understand how the use of realia supports the principles of differentiated instruction by catering to diverse styles. Ultimately, this research strives to contribute to designing more effective and inclusive language learning strategies for young learners in diverse educational settings.

Learning English has grown widespread in Indonesia. Almost all Indonesian students have taken English since their first year of elementary school. Many countries have introduced English at the primary level, hoping that early exposure may help kids improve their English skills. (Jin & Cortazzi, 2018). Vocabulary is important for learners of English to acquire a language (Cameron, 2001). It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, reading, listening, and writing all together. Vocabulary is one of the language competencies. It is an essential aspect of learning English. As Nation (2015) noted in his paper on vocabulary learning: "Vocabulary is not an end in itself. A rich vocabulary makes performing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills easier." It can be seen that vocabulary is very important for students. Vocabulary is required to understand the language properly, speak it well, or write well. It is predicted that learners are required to add roughly 100 terms to their vocabulary each year.

According to the researcher's observations at SDN Cikawung, the school uses Differentiated Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*), which is the new curriculum in Indonesia. In implementing this new curriculum, teachers may find challenges as they are unfamiliar with the new policy. The teacher finds challenges regarding time, the discrepancies between the materials to be taught and the time allocation, the lack of supported facilities, and the complicated assessment administration (Khasanah & Widyantoro, 2013). This curriculum focuses on material essentials, character development, and the student's competence. It can be used at all levels, such as elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, vocational school, and college. In elementary school, English learning allows students to gain insight about themselves, social relationships, culture, and global job opportunities.

The researcher then found that students in fourth grade at SDN Cikawung had many problems mastering English words, making them too lazy to study English. They had limited vocabulary to comprehend a text's meaning, did not know the context of word use in text, and had difficulties stating some sentences in English. Those problems caused them to have difficulty communicating in English.

Therefore, the teacher should find the best or the most effective technique to teach English vocabulary that is appropriate to the curriculum. Concerning the characteristics of young learners, they can quickly get bored, need physical movements and actual activities to stimulate their thinking, and are very egocentric (Clark,1990). Creating a class situation that can motivate the students to study is essential. Media as teaching aids are needed to help the students understand vocabulary. One of them is Realia; by Realia, it means authentic materials (Guariento & Morley, 2001:32) or objects from the target language's culture that are used in the classroom to provide a meaningful context for language learning.

Realia, as contextual learning media, can help students learn vocabulary by following the principles of teaching English to young learners. Contextual learning involves adapting the learning materials and methods to the learners' age, abilities, and interests and the social and cultural context in which they live. Contextual learning is a concept that can motivate teachers to connect between the material that has been taught and the situation in the students' real lives (Ghonivita et al., 2021). Johnson (2004) argued that contextual learning is an educational process that has the purpose of helping students see the meaning of the academic material they learn by connecting the academic subjects with the contexts of their daily lives.

Since particular young learners have trouble retaining words, it is essential to use accompanying realia as contextual learning media to help them. Realia is a real object that supports the teaching-learning process. Herrell (2000) said that Realia is a term for any real, concrete objects used in the classroom to create connections with vocabulary words, stimulate conversation, and build background knowledge. When utilizing supporting media, it is crucial to integrate them into meaningful learning activities and provide opportunities for active engagement and practice. By combining these realia as media with interactive exercises, games, and real-life language use, teachers can create a dynamic and immersive learning environment that helps young learners memorize vocabulary more effectively.

Previous studies have demonstrated that students have difficulty learning new words. Several research in this topic have been conducted. Amumpuni and Rahmasari (2019), *Enhancing Students' English Ability by Using Realia*, and the result discovered that Realia creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Muzatha and Riyath (2019) *The Effectiveness of Using Realia in Teaching English Vocabulary to Elementary School Students in Sammanthurai Zone*. The results of this research showed that realia significantly improved students' performance in learning English vocabulary. Moku (2022) *The Use of Realia to Improve Young Learners' Vocabulary*. The result of this research showed

that the usage of realia in the classroom is regarded to be beneficial in the learning process.

Despite the valuable insight from previous studies on the positives of using realia in language education, the researcher found differences with the earlier studies. Most of the studies focus on short-term gains, and there seems to be limited exploration into the potential challenges or limitations of consistently incorporating realia in language classrooms. This research examines whether realia, as contextual learning media, promotes longer-term vocabulary retention and uses specific material in the context of Differentiated Curriculum from the book “My Next Words Grade 4 Student’s Book for Elementary School”.

B. Research Questions

The research is divided into three following questions:

1. What is the students’ vocabulary mastery before using realia as contextual learning media for teaching English in the context of Differentiated Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*)?
2. What is the students’ vocabulary mastery after using realia as contextual learning media for teaching English in the context of Differentiated Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*)?
3. How significant is the difference of the students’ vocabulary mastery before and after using realia as contextual learning media for teaching English in the context of Differentiated Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*)?

C. Research Purposes

Based on the research questions mentioned above, the purposes of this research are:

1. To find out the students' vocabulary mastery before using realia as contextual learning media for teaching English in the context of Differentiated Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*).
2. To find out the students' vocabulary mastery after using realia as contextual learning media for teaching English in the context of Differentiated Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*).
3. To find out the students' vocabulary mastery before and after using realia as contextual learning media for teaching English in the context of Differentiated Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*).

D. Research Scope

This research focuses on fourth-grade students' vocabulary mastery at SDN Cikawung, utilizing realia as a contextual learning media. The research uses specific material from the book "My Next Words Grade 4 Student's Book for Elementary School" and imitative realia with transportation toys to develop students' vocabulary mastery. The participants of this research are 20 fourth-grade students at SDN Cikawung.

E. Research Significances

The research would be useful theoretically and practically.

1. This research is helpful to students and English teachers by providing research-based methods for using media in vocabulary training, resulting in more interesting and effective sessions. For the students, this research is expected to enhance their learning of vocabulary mastery through realia.
2. Future researchers expect this research to make a useful contribution to education, especially for developing vocabulary mastery using realia, and it may support or verify previous research.

F. Conceptual Framework

Vocabulary is an essential part of learning English. Vocabulary plays a vital role in mastering language. Linse (2005:121) stated that vocabulary is the collection of words an individual knows. It is one element that links the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing together (Huyen & Nga, 2003). When students acquire many terms, it becomes easier to understand English language abilities. If students have an excellent command of vocabulary, they can easily express themselves both orally and in writing and understand what others are saying. Therefore, a lack of vocabulary raises many challenges for students learning English. Students are unable to convey their intended message when they lack vocabulary.

In addition, teaching young learners is more complex than teaching adult students because they get distracted easily. Teachers should find suitable media to get learners' attention and deliver the materials effectively. Harmer (2004) states that young learners need to spend plenty of time examining and understanding how their learners think and operate. Teaching young learners requires more effort and good strategies. In this case, the teacher must be able to make learning English fun and exciting for students. To introduce the principles of teaching English young learners, the teacher must have a strategy appropriate to the teaching conditions. The way to improve vocabulary is to use realia with contextual learning.

Realia (in language teaching) are real objects and items that are brought into the classroom as examples or as tools to be discussed in writing and used in teaching or concrete objects and equipment of everyday life (Platt & Platt, 1992:2). Richard (2002) stated that "Realia is an actual object or item which is brought into the classroom as an example or as an aid to be talked or written about and used in teaching". Realia gives language learners a multi-sensory impression of language, which Rivers (1983) noted "Is learned at least in part through seeing, hearing, touching, and manipulating items." Using realia helps to make English lessons memorable by creating the link between the objects

and the word or phrase they represent. Observing real things could help students to connect their eyes to their vocabulary building.

Interaction with authentic materials aids in contextually grounded instruction by bringing students into contact with the language as it is used in the target culture to meet actual communication needs. Realia exposes students to diverse vocabulary and provides context and relevance that traditional instructional materials may lack. This is related to the concept of Differentiated Curriculum with diverse intra-curricular learning where the content is more optimal for students to have sufficient time to explore concepts and strengthen competencies. Teachers have the freedom to choose various teaching tools so that learning can be adapted to learning needs and student interests. Differentiated Curriculum is an educational framework that caters to students' diverse learning needs, interests, and abilities. This approach emphasizes personalized learning experiences, allowing educators to tailor instruction and assessment methods to individual learners. Differentiated Curriculum fosters a more inclusive and equitable learning environment by providing multiple pathways for students to engage with content and demonstrate their understanding. It encourages using varied teaching strategies, such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, and technology integration, to create meaningful and relevant educational experiences.

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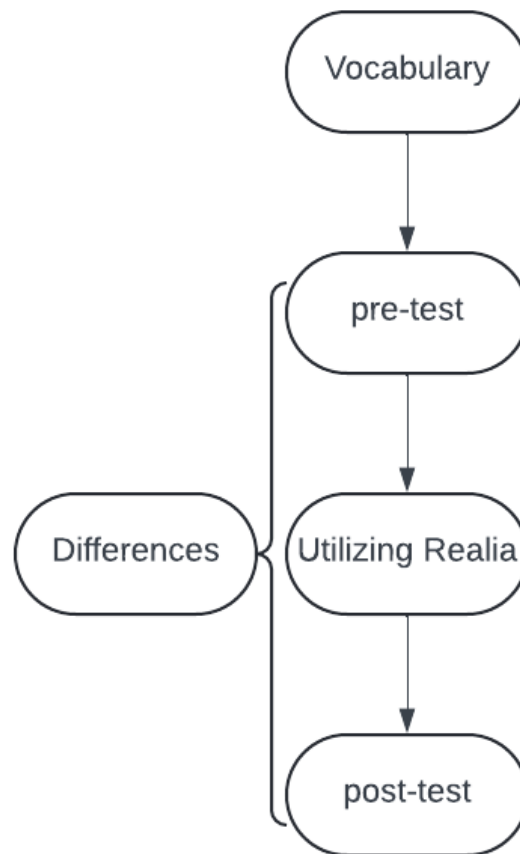


Figure 1. 1 Research Framework

G. Hypothesis

This research has two variables: Realia as the independent variable and students' vocabulary mastery as the dependent variable. There are two forms of hypothesis in this research: null (Ho) and alternative (Ha) (Creswell, 2012). If the hypothesis is written in a specific formula, it will appear as follows:

1. Null Hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant difference in students' English vocabulary mastery after being exposed to realia as contextual learning media in Differentiated Curriculum.

2. Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): There is a significant difference in students' English vocabulary mastery after being exposed to realia as contextual learning media in Differentiated Curriculum.

H. Previous Studies

The researcher has selected some previous studies related to this study. The first research was conducted by Amumpuni and Rahmasari in 2019, who seek to enhance students' English ability using realia. The research aims to discover the benefits and drawbacks of employing realia. The research used classroom action research and was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of four steps: planning, acting, observation, and reflecting. After realia was incorporated into the teaching and learning process, the research implementations demonstrated that students' speaking abilities improved, and they achieved tremendous success in speaking. The researcher discovered that Realia creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom.

The second is using realia to improve students' vocabulary mastery at first grade by Andini, Sutarsyah, and Sudirman (2020). This research used a quantitative method. The population is the students of SMPN 26 Bandar Lampung. Vocabulary tests and questionnaires were used as the instruments. The goals are to assess the students' challenges in acquiring vocabulary and determine whether there is a change in their vocabulary mastery after being taught through realia. The findings demonstrate that there is a difference in the students' understanding of vocabulary after realia-based instruction. Incorporating realia in the teaching process increased student attention and made the material easier to understand, making it an effective teaching tool for enhancing vocabulary knowledge.

The third is improving learners' English language vocabulary performance using realia in primary schools in Ogun State, Ayelaagbe (2019). This research used a case study design and a qualitative approach. Open-ended questions were utilized to elicit participant responses, and construction was chosen as the research's theory. Interpretivism served as the paradigm for developing themes

that were generated from data gathered using the research instrument. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the resulting themes. The investigation concluded that instructors employed realia in their lessons, improvising for those unavailable. The research suggested, among other things, that teachers consider how much new vocabulary and grammar structures are in the realia and that the realia utilized should match the terms to be explained.

The fourth is realia-mediated instruction: an effective tool for improving young learners' vocabulary skills by Bhatti, Habibie, Noreen, Hussain, and Bajwa in 2021. It was an experimental research with only a post-test design; the research participants were forty students. The current research looks into how real-world activities can help students learn vocabulary in the English language and how realia can help students do better in vocabulary learning. The findings showed that the most critical activities were effectively building vocabulary, menu selection, game recognition, picture identification, activity identification, magazine ads understanding, city identification, and map reading. According to the research, increasing students' vocabulary can help them focus, pique their interest, have a genuine impact, raise awareness, and update their language learning.

The last is using realia to improve English vocabulary at the primary level by Irfan, Awan, Tayyaba Bashir, and Ahmed in 2021. This experimental research was carried out in fourth grade at one of the private schools. The goals of this study are to accomplish and discover the answers to the research questions. The data was gathered and analyzed using the Kempis and McTaggart research model. Realia was used to motivate the kids. They listened intently to the teacher's explanations and desired to pick up new words. Ultimately, this research's findings demonstrate that their proficiency increased when students were taught using realia. They learned vocabulary more effectively.

According to the research mentioned above, the effect of using realia can help the students' ability on vocabulary mastery. Despite this, this research is different from the previous research in that it emphasizes realia as contextual learning media to develop young learners' English vocabulary, promotes longer-term vocabulary retention, in the context of Differentiated Curriculum with specific material from the book "My Next Words Grade 4 Students Book for Elementary School".

