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Article

## Vocabulary and Grammar Mastery on Students' Reading Skill

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### A B S T R A C T

Students' lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge can influence their reading skills. This research is aimed at finding the effects of vocabulary and grammar mastery on students' reading skill. The fourth semester of UNINDRA students in Jakarta were the research participants. The sample was selected through simple random sampling. There were three variables; vocabulary and grammar mastery and English reading skill. Objective tests were administered to the students for the data. Correlation technique and multiple regressions were used for data analysis. The research findings reveal first significant effects of vocabulary and grammar mastery both partially and collectively on the students' English reading skill, proved by Sig.0.000 < 0.05 and  $F_{0.184.710}$ , with correlation coefficient 0.90 and determination coefficient is 0.809 or 80.9%. The regression equation is:  $Y = 2.071 + 0.529X_1 + 0.414X_2$ . It means that the students' English reading skill is strongly influenced by their vocabulary and grammar mastery. Secondly, there is a significant effect of vocabulary mastery on the reading skill of the fourth semester of UNINDRA students Jakarta, proved with the score of  $t_{observed} = 5.263 > t_{table} = 1.987$  and Sig. 0.000 < 0.05. Thirdly, there is a significant effect of grammar mastery on the reading skill of the fourth semester of UNINDRA students Jakarta proved with the score of  $t_{observed} = 4.514 > t_{table} = 1.987$  and Sig. 0.000 < 0.05. The conclusion is that there are significant effects of the students' vocabulary and grammar mastery both partially and collectively on their reading skill.

### INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has become an important international language. As an international language, English is used in many fields such as trade, education and communication. Most people in the world use English to communicate with other people from other countries, in particular those from English speaking countries and also to compete in the global arena. Hence, it is necessary for people to be competent in English for their effective international communication and competition purposes. Thus, due to its importance as an

international language, people need to master English. As such, English is taught in many countries, including in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, English has been taught as a foreign language subject at formal educational institutions, from junior high school level up to university level. Further, English has also been included in the national curriculum. However, students in Indonesia still find it difficult to understand English. They have problems learning English whether in listening, speaking, reading or writing skills. Finally, they are not interested in learning English even

though they know about the importance of the language. In learning English, not only do students have to have the mastery of the knowledge of the language, but they also have to have the mastery of its skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. As one of the four language skills, reading is an important skill to students in learning English. Reading is a process in which interaction between a reader and a text is involved. Therefore, readers should understand the text. Further, the text should also provide them with the necessary information so that the readers can understand it.

Many people like reading because they believe that they have a lot of benefits of doing so. Reading can give readers information, knowledge, skills, etc. Further, when someone is fond of reading, he or she will obtain benefits, among others, be free from having Alzheimer's disease and slash stress since fondness of reading can protect his or her brain from such health problems and encourage positive thinking, and fortify friendships. However, without comprehension, reading will not give the above benefits to readers. It means that to understand a reading text, readers should have reading comprehension skills. Learning to read is a serial process. It means that each new skill is developed after the mastery of the previously learned skills. In the beginning, for example, children learn to divide words into their most basic sounds in a process called decoding. After that, they start to understand the meaning of words, sentences and, ultimately, entire passages of text. To understand a text, learners need reading comprehension skills. Good readers can understand the individual sentences and the organizational structure of a piece of writing. They can understand ideas, follow arguments, and detect implications. They already know most of the words in the text, but they can also determine the meaning of a lot of the unknown words from the context. If they fail to do so, they can look up the unfamiliar words in their dictionary. As such, good readers can extract from the writing what is important for the particular task they are employed in. As a skill, reading can be learned. However, it is not easy for learners to understand a text since they should have their reading skills to comprehend the text. There are many factors which affect learners' reading mastery.

Having lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge can be factors which influence student's reading mastery. Having lack of vocabulary knowledge can make the students have difficulty understanding a text, for instance an English reading text and also answering the questions of the text, or they can possibly answer them, but their answers are not relevant to the questions (Iwan, 2016). They neither understand the questions nor find the answers from the passage because there are a lot of unfamiliar words. Reading failure happens because it is not that they cannot understand the meaning of the words

in the passage, but they have less vocabulary knowledge to comprehend a text, especially the one with difficult words. Without comprehending the meaning of difficult words, students often fail to acquire new and difficult words, and thus fail to improve their vocabularies. It will also give rise to the failure in reading comprehension. Another factor which influences students' mastery of reading skill is having lack of grammar mastery.

Grammar of a language is the foundation for communication – the better the grammar, the clearer the message, the more likelihood of understanding the message's intent and meaning. That is what communication is all about. In comprehending a reading text in English, for instance, having good sentence-structure knowledge helps a reader to see relations between ideas, including relationships between main ideas and details and also relations among each part of the components of a sentence in order to have a better analysis of the text and sentences, and hence a better understanding of them. In this regard, Murcia (2001) confirms that both grammar and vocabulary have been viewed as competing elements in language teaching. Thus, both grammar and vocabulary have a great influence to the students' language skills, in this case reading comprehension. What's more, Graham (2007) emphasizes the importance of mastering the language components, such as: phonology grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to support the four skills of English. It short, that to increase the skill in reading comprehension, students should master the language components such as; grammar, and vocabulary.

The first factor linked to reading comprehension difficulties in the EFL context in Indonesian secondary students is students' lack of motivation. The students are mostly not interested in reading and analyzing the English texts because they do not get used to doing the related activity in their daily routines. Moreover, Cahyono and Widiati (2006) claim that the declining interest of Indonesian students in comprehending English passages occur due to their learning habits. The students only read English texts if their teachers give an assignment (Cahyono and Widiati, 2006). Consequently, they lose their interest to do further reading comprehension activities. In line with the related opinion, Guthrie (2008, as cited in Sanford, 2015) notes that reading comprehension issue happens when students lose their interests and disengage from reading.

In addition, low prior knowledge has been considered as another cause of reading difficulties among Indonesian secondary students. Based on the students' responses conducted in one of the senior high schools in Indonesia, Zuhra (2015) finds that the students faced difficulties to

comprehend English texts because they did not have sufficient prior knowledge to understand the given texts. The related phenomenon occurred since the lessons had not been appropriately learned and they had never read similar reading passages previously (Zuhra, 2015). Hence, Indonesian learners will always find problems toward reading comprehension if they do not have enough prior knowledge.

Ultimately, the third contribution of the reading comprehension issue in Indonesian secondary students is poor vocabulary. Having limited vocabulary has been identified as an impairment of reading comprehension among Indonesian students (Floris and Divina, 2009; Garcia-Castro, 2020; Sutarsyah, 2008). Moreover, the Indonesian Government emphasizes that students must master between 2,500 to 3,000 English words to comprehend English academic texts; however, several studies show that Indonesian learners were predicted to have only mastered 1,000 words (Sutarsyah, 2008). Consequently, the related circumstances lead to a low level of reading comprehension among Indonesian secondary students. From these findings, it is necessary to find out how strong is the influence of vocabulary and grammar mastery towards students' reading skills and suggest the solution to improve these skills

## METHOD

This research was utilized by survey method. Fraenkel and Wallen in Syamsuddin and Damaianti (2011) who stated that survey research is one of the most common forms of research engaged in by educational researchers. It involved researchers asking a large group of people questions about a particular topic or issue. It was done to get the data and fact based on the examination of observation of variables. This research was conducted by using descriptive correlation method, a method designed to determine if two or more variables are associated with each other. Application of this method was performed through tested instruments to the students by using multiple choice tests for the vocabulary mastery, grammar mastery and the reading skill. After that, the data gained from the test was analyzed to see whether vocabulary and grammar mastery related to the ability of reading skill or not. Then, the researchers used quantitative method to analyze the result or research. The used of this method was to find the correlation between students' vocabulary and grammar mastery and their ability in reading skills. A constellation among variable in this research can be figured as follows:

### Research Design

<b>X1</b>	
	<b>Y</b>
<b>X2</b>	

Note:

<b>X1</b>	= Independent variable of vocabulary	mastery
<b>X2</b>	= Independent variable of grammar	mastery
<b>Y</b>	= Dependent variable of reading skill	

In this research there were three variables that were dependent and independent variables. The dependent variable was reading skill (Y) and the independent variable was vocabulary and grammar mastery (X). The score showed a data about students' achievement in grammar mastery and their ability in reading comprehension which can be used to identify the correlation between students' grammar mastery and their ability in reading comprehension. On this research, the researchers took the population was all the students' strata-1 of the fourth semester of UNINDRA PGRI Jakarta. And the researcher chose 41 students as the sample from total population by random sampling system. This research, hypothesis testing was to measure the correlation between vocabulary and grammar mastery and ability in reading skills. To find out that two variables had a correlation, the researcher used Pearson's Product Moments coefficient of correlation in Sugiyono (2010). In testing the significance, the researchers used significance of coefficient correlation formula which was determined by Sugiyono (2010). The criterion of hypothesis was in the following, if the t-counted was higher than t-table, it meant that the hypothesis of the research was accepted. It meant that there was a positive correlation between the two variables. But if the t-counted was lower than t-table, it meant that hypothesis of the research was rejected. Definitely, there was a negative correlation

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the valid and reliable tests of vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension administered to the 90 students of the above three state senior high schools in Tangerang, Banten, the data collected from the tests are analyzed. The purpose of the analysis is to find out the research findings to answer the formulated problems on the effects of vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery (the independent variables) on the students' reading skill (Dependent variable), for which the necessary hypothesis test is conducted. The research focuses on the effect of the two independent variables on the dependent variable both partially and collectively. In this regard, all the data are processed and computed with the assistance of *Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0 for Window*. From the recapitulation of the test results (the research findings) either correlation or regression, it could be interpreted that there are significant effects of vocabulary mastery (X1) and grammar mastery (X2) altogether on the students' reading skill (Y). Further, Reference the same calculation, it can be seen that vocabulary mastery is as influential as grammar mastery towards the student's reading skill since the *Sig* value of

of both of the independent variables is the same (0.000). Indeed, vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery have an important role to help students understand the meaning of the words throughout their reading skill. Hence, both the students' vocabulary and grammar knowledge must be improved by enriching activities so that they could comprehend the reading materials as well. Further, from the regression analysis, we may obtain the linear regression equation as follows:  $Y = 2.071 + 0.529X_1 + 0.414X_2$ . The regression equation could be interpreted that the constant number stated with 2.071, it shows that at the lowest level of vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery, it will be difficult for a student to achieve the good reading ability. While the scores of the regression coefficient stated consecutively with 0.529 and 0.414, they reveal that the positive correlation of the independent variables  $X_1$  (vocabulary mastery) and  $X_2$  (grammar mastery) altogether with the dependent variable  $Y$  (student's reading skill). In addition, they also reveal that each score increment for vocabulary mastery level will affect the level of reading skill as much as 0.529, and each score increment for grammar mastery level will affect the level of reading skill as much as 0.414. The testing of hypothesis of the effect of vocabulary mastery on the students' reading skill is formulated both statistically and verbally as follows:

#### **The Effect of Vocabulary Mastery ( $X_1$ ) on the Students' Reading Skill ( $Y$ )**

$H_0: \beta_1 = 0$

$H_1: \beta_1 \neq 0$

Explanation:

$H_0$ : There is no significant effect of vocabulary mastery on the students' reading skill.

$H_1$ : There is a significant effect of vocabulary mastery on the students' reading skill.

To test the hypothesis above, we can simply see from the numbers which are stated in  $t$  column or *Sig* column in the row of vocabulary mastery in Table 3 above. In accordance with the general assumption, the significance of regression is if  $t$  observed (to) is higher than  $t$  table or *Sig value* is less than 0.05, it brings the consequence that  $H_0$  is rejected, and  $H_1$  is automatically accepted. It means that there is a significant effect of the independent variable  $X_1$  on the dependent variable  $Y$ . *Sig value* is the number which is stated in *Sig* column for the row of vocabulary mastery (Variable  $X_1$ ) in Table 3. Meanwhile,  $t$  value is the number which is stated in  $t$  column for vocabulary mastery (Variable  $X_1$ ) on Table 3 as well. For the value of  $t$  table for 5% real degree and degree of freedom ( $df = n - 2$ ) is 88, where  $n$  is the total number of respondents.

Further, above also shows that the *Sig value* is stated with 0.000 and  $t$  observed is stated with 5.263, while  $t$  table is

stated with 1.988. Since *Sig* value is less than 0.05 and  $t$  observed is higher than  $t$  table, it brings the consequence that  $H_0$  is rejected, and automatically  $H_1$  is accepted. It means that there is a significant effect of the independent variable  $X_1$  (vocabulary mastery) on the dependent variable  $Y$  (the students' reading skill). From the tabulation of correlation test, regression test and linear model above, it can be seen that there is a significant effect of the independent variable  $X_1$  (vocabulary mastery) on the dependent variable  $Y$  (the students' reading skill). As such, it could be interpreted that the higher the level of vocabulary mastery possessed by the students especially correlated to reading domain, the higher the possibility to achieve the reading skill. It may happen because vocabulary is also important in language learning which has to be mastered by the students to develop the language skills, particularly reading. In other words, the students should have adequate vocabulary if they would like to convey the meaning of reading materials as well.

The testing of hypothesis of the effect of grammar mastery on the students' reading skill is formulated both statistically and verbally as follows:

#### **The Effect of Grammar Mastery ( $X_2$ ) on the Students' Reading Skill ( $Y$ )**

$H_0: \beta_2 = 0$

$H_1: \beta_2 \neq 0$

Explanation:

$H_0$ : There is no significant effect of grammar mastery on the students' reading skill.

$H_1$ : There is a significant effect of grammar mastery on the students' reading skill.

To test the hypothesis above, we can simply see from the numbers which are stated in  $t$  column or *Sig* column in the row of vocabulary mastery in Table 3 above. Based on the general assumption, the significance of regression is if  $t$  observed is higher than  $t$  table or *Sig value* is less than 0.05, it brings the consequence that  $H_0$  is rejected, and  $H_1$  is automatically accepted. It means that there is a significant effect of the independent variable  $X_2$  on the dependent variable  $Y$ . *Sig value* is the number which is stated in *Sig* column for the row of grammar mastery (Variable  $X_2$ ) in Table 3. Meanwhile  $t$  observed value is the number which is stated in  $t$  column for the grammar mastery (Variable  $X_1$ ) on Table 3 as well. For the value of  $t$  table for 5% real degree and degree of freedom ( $df = n - 2$ ) is 88, where  $n$  is the total number of respondents.

It also reveals that the *Sig. value* is stated with 0.000 and  $t$  observed is stated with 4.514, while  $t$  table is stated with 1.988. Since *Sig value* is less than 0.05 and  $t$  observed is higher than  $t$  table, it brings the consequence that  $H_0$  is rejected, and automatically  $H_1$  is accepted. It means that

there is a significant effect of the independent variable X2 (grammar mastery) on the dependent variable Y (the students' reading skill). From the tabulation of correlation test, regression test and linear model above, it can be seen that there is a significant effect of the independent variable X1 (grammar mastery) on the dependent variable Y (the students' reading skill). As such, it could be interpreted that the higher the level of grammar mastery of the student especially correlated to reading aspect, the higher the possibility for him or her to achieve the ability in reading domain.

Based on the analyzed data, some issues arise as follows:

1. There are significant effects of vocabulary and grammar mastery altogether towards the reading skill of fourth semester UNINDRA students Jakarta. It is proved by the score of  $F$  observed = 184.710 >  $F$  table = 3.950 and  $Sig.$  0.000 < 0.05. It means that the higher the students' vocabulary and grammar mastery, the higher the student's reading skill, or vice versa. This reveals that the vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery are two critical variables to be considered in explaining about the improvement of the student's reading skill. Muharni (2017) supports this result by stating that vocabulary, grammar and reading have a close relationship. In reading, students need vocabulary and grammar to help them in understanding the idea, and in learning vocabulary, students need a lot of practice of reading because reading is the active way in learning vocabulary. So, if the students know a lot about vocabulary and grammar, they can easily comprehend the reading. In line with this, Graham in Muharni (2017) mentioned that to increase the skill in reading comprehension, students should master the language components such as; grammar, and vocabulary. In addition, to motivate students to read and increase their reading fluency, they should have knowledge of grammar and master number of vocabularies. Thus, if students have good grammar and vocabulary mastery, they can read and comprehend the text correctly. Grammar and vocabulary have also been viewed as competing elements in language teaching. It means that grammar and vocabulary have a great influence to the students' language skills, in this case reading comprehension. Mastering reading comprehension, people must learn about grammar and vocabulary, how they put into a sentence and use it to express their thought and feeling. So, students who want to get a text message have to know about how the text is form or they will not able to have a complete understanding about what the writer means (Murcia in Nurfaiqoh, Sutiyono and Alfiawati 2019).
2. There is a significant effect of vocabulary mastery towards the reading skill of fourth semester

UNINDRA students Jakarta. It is proved by the score of  $t$  observed = 5.263 >  $t$  table = 1.988 and  $Sig.$  0.000 < 0.05. This means that the higher the student's vocabulary mastery, the higher the student's reading skill. Conversely, the lower the student's vocabulary mastery, the lower the student's reading skill. Therefore, the student's vocabulary mastery is an important variable to consider in predicting the student's reading skill. This result is supported by Negara (2016) who states that when vocabulary mastery improves, comprehending will be deeper. Since comprehension is ultimate goal of reading, the reader cannot overestimate the importance of vocabulary development. Iwan (2016) also shows that having lack of vocabulary knowledge can make the students have difficulty understanding a text, for instance an English reading text and also answering the questions of the text, or they can possibly answer them, but their answers are not relevant to the questions. Reading failure happens because it is not that they cannot understand the meaning of the words in the passage, but they have less vocabulary knowledge to comprehend a text, especially the one with difficult words. Without comprehending the meaning of difficult words, students often fail to acquire new and difficult words, and thus fail to improve their vocabularies. It will also give rise to the failure in reading comprehension. In line with this, Thornbury in Muharni (2017) mentioned that vocabulary is the important factor in reading. He also says that the larger vocabulary the easier it is to make the sense of text. Without mastering vocabulary, it is difficult for students to obtain any kind of news and information that stated in any printed material. By having number of vocabularies, this kind of difficulty can be solved.

3. There is a significant effect of grammar mastery on the reading skill of fourth semester UNINDRA students Jakarta. It is proved by the score of  $t$  observed = 4.514 >  $t$  table = 1.988 and  $Sig.$  0.000 < 0.05. This means that the higher the student's grammar mastery, the higher the student's reading skill. Conversely, the lower the student's grammar mastery, the lower the student's reading skill. Therefore, the student's grammar mastery is an important variable to consider in predicting their reading skill. This result is supported by Iwan (2016) who mentioned that grammar of a language is the foundation for communication – the better the grammar, the clearer the message, the more likelihood of understanding the message's intent and meaning. In comprehending a reading text in English, for instance, having good sentence-structure knowledge helps a reader to see relations between ideas, including relationships between main ideas and

details and also relations among each part of the components of a sentence in order to have a better analysis of the text and sentences, and hence a better understanding of them. Baldwin in Negara (2016) also states reading a text is an interactive process of the grammar competence owned by the reader. It is also to say that grammar gives high contribution to students reading comprehension as well. By mastering grammar, the students won't only capable of making sentences structurally but also they will also be able to analyze the sentences accurately and correctly (Chomksy in Karyadi, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

As it was stated previously in introduction, the objective of the research is to analyze the effects of vocabulary and grammar mastery on students' reading skills. Concerning to the research results, the researchers draw some conclusions as follows:

1. The research reveals that the vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery are two critical variables to be considered in explaining about the improvement of the student's reading skill. Grammar and vocabulary have been viewed as competing elements in language teaching. It means that in order to have good reading skill, students should master adequate vocabulary and grammar. It is true that by having adequate vocabulary, students will not find great difficulties in comprehending reading texts. However, by mastering adequate grammar they will be able to comprehend reading texts more comprehensively.
2. A limited vocabulary size, as well as a lack of sufficient knowledge of word meanings, often hinders learners from understanding the meaning of the text. To be successful in comprehending the text they have to be recognized a high proportion of the vocabulary. Without vocabulary, it is difficult for the students to obtain any kind of news and information that is stated in any printed materials like newspaper, magazine, novel, book, and so on. By having the number of vocabularies, the kind of difficulty will be solved.
3. Grammar of a language is the foundation for communication – the better the grammar, the clearer the message, the more likelihood of understanding the message's intent and meaning. In comprehending a reading text in English, for instance, having good sentence-structure knowledge helps a reader to see relations between ideas, including relationships between main ideas and details and also relations among each part of the components of a sentence in order to have a better analysis of the text and sentences, and hence a better understanding of them.

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