Research Article

Promoting Students' English Vocabulary through Explicit Morphological Instructions and Exploring Students' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to enhance students' English vocabulary mastery through explicit morphological instructions as well as to investigate students' perceptions of its usage during online learning. This research was a classroom action research consisting of two cycles. The researchers employed a test, observation sheet, and questionnaire to obtain the data. Furthermore, the data gathered was analysed using simple statistical analysis such as average score, percentage, and percentage enhancement. After implementing explicit morphological instructions, there was an enhancement in students' vocabulary mastery. In cycle 1, the enhancement of the average score from pre-test to post-test was 7.9%. Therefore, the team concurred to conduct cycle 2. In cycle 2, the improvement of students' vocabulary mastery achieved 27%. This percentage surpassed the success criteria of this action research (15%). Therefore, the team ended the action research. In addition, the students also responded to the usage of explicit morphological instructions positively. Most of the students agreed or strongly agreed with each item in the questionnaire. These results indicate positive responses. In short, explicit morphological instructions could promote students' vocabulary mastery, and this strategy receives positive feedback from the students.

INTRODUCTION

Since the spread of Coronavirus in March 2020, the teaching and learning process has changed from face-to-face to online teaching and learning process. This new situation may create several current issues in the teaching and learning process in EFL teaching context. According to Aniuranti (2021), online learning has caused several obstacles in teaching English. Nartiningrum and Nugroho (2021) also state that in screen-to-screen learning process, there are some types of challenges commonly confronted by the teachers, such as the struggle of material delivery, poor internet connection, and slow response from the students, and problems in adapting the lesson plans. Efriana (2021) also argues that teachers generally have dilemma in employing IT and supervising their students. Furthermore, the students meet some obstacles such as passiveness during the teaching and learning process, internet service, and limited access to the supporting equipment. Furthermore, the student's parents have hardship in supervising their children during online classes.

These challenges can impede the achievement of teaching objectives in English classes notably for teaching essential elements like vocabulary. Vocabulary is a significant component in every language as English language. Vocabulary has an essential role for every English learner and the language learning process (Bian and He, 2017; Rabadi, 2019; Sa'D and Rajabi, 2018; Susanto, 2017; Yasin and Jawad, 2015). Limited vocabulary may hinder the communication process or become the source of an unsuccessful process of communication (Alqahtani, 2015; Sparks and Deacon, 2015). In short, vocabulary is a crucial element of English, and the limitation of vocabulary may hamper the communication process.

Although English vocabulary has a crucial role, vocabulary frequently becomes a problematic element for most English learners. The enormous number of English vocabulary, the limitation of learning time, and the differences between the English and Indonesian language system commonly become the causes of this struggle. The vocabulary system often leads to learners' struggle (Alqahtani, 2015; Simanjuntak, 2021). Alqahtani (2015) also argues that vocabulary is not like syntax and phonology. English vocabularies do not have any specific rules that can be learned to enrich students' vocabulary knowledge. This situation leads to many studies about approaches, methods, techniques, or media to teach vocabulary.

One of the recommended strategies for teaching vocabulary is the usage of explicit morphological instructions or explicit discussion of morphological elements. This strategy may improve students' morphological awareness which can boost students' vocabulary proficiency. Morphological awareness is explicit comprehension of the smallest meaningful units in a language including the markers of inflectional and derivational morphemes (Oz, 2014). Morphological awareness leads someone to add or delete prefixes or suffixes of a word to change its meaning, for example, act, action, active, activity, and others (Giyatmi, 2019). Thus, explicit discussion of morphological elements enhances students' morphological awareness, and this awareness assists to gain better vocabulary knowledge.

Several previous studies examine the possibility of explicit morphological instructions as a learning strategy for vocabulary. Explaining morphological elements explicitly is an practical way to encourage the learners to understand complex word meanings (Yasin and Jawad, 2015). According to Oz (2014), English morphology includes the knowledge of inflectional and derivational morphemes. Students' awareness of inflectional morphemes develops the accuracy of grammar. Moreover, the awareness of derivational morphemes has a significant role in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery. A student who knows how

English words are constructed through the combination of prefixes, suffixes, or roots tends to get a better chance to master vocabulary, understand texts, and write fluently. To sum up, the previous researches recommend explicit morphological instructions as a teaching strategy for English vocabulary.

Based on the preceding explanations, English learners commonly confront the problem in learning vocabulary which is significant in the communication process. Many students frequently complain about the struggle of mastering English vocabulary. This phenomenon also appeared in English Education Department, Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto, especially Batch 2021. The learning problem could be overcome by conducting action research. The strategy employed was explicit morphological instructions. Therefore, this study aimed to boost students' vocabulary mastery through the implementation of explicit morphological instructions and investigate students' perceptions on the strategy used. Students' perception study is always crucial in the TEFL context.

Furthermore, the researchers also found out that explicit morphological instructions had been examined with some different methodologies. There is a literature study conducted by Anwar and Rosa (2020). This research discusses morphological awareness and explicit morphological instructions in the TEFL context. There are several experimental studies about morphological instructions. For example, there are some studies conducted by (Alsaeedi, 2017; Bian and He, 2017). Furthermore, the study of morphological awareness mostly focuses on the correlation study between morphological awareness and vocabulary mastery. For instance, there are some studies carried out by (Adam, 2018; Nurhemida, 2007; Rabadi, 2019; Sparks and Deacon, 2015; Yasin and Jawad, 2015). These researches reveal a positive correlation between morphological awareness and vocabulary mastery. A student who has morphological awareness tends to master vocabulary better. Overall, this study is unlike the previous studies because this research is conducted with a different methodology called action research. This study is a continuation of the previous studies.

METHOD

The method employed was classroom action research (CAR). This type of research was the most suitable since this study was intended to foster students' vocabulary proficiency. Another objective was investigating students' perception on the use of explicit morphological instructions as a teaching strategy chosen. This research used Model of Kemmis and McTaggart in Kusuma and

Dwitagama (2010). Generally, this model consists of four main phases called planning, action and observation, and reflection. This research was carried out in two cycles of which each cycle consisted of three different meetings.

The participants of this study were the students in Class A of Batch 2021. They were chosen because they frequently complained about their struggle in learning vocabulary. Furthermore, based on the results of pre-test 1, the average score of their vocabulary test was 63, and it was still in C level.

The instruments used in this study were a test, questionnaire, and observation sheet. The test was administered to find out the students' vocabulary development. The test is a way to obtain data related to ability, skill, comprehension, and competency (Suwartono, 2014). Arikunto (2014) also points out that a test is used to measure basic skill or achievement. In this research, the test was given at the beginning of cycles 1 and 2, and at the end of cycles 1 and 2. The test was adapted from some relevant books called McCarthy and O'Dell (1999), Redman (2003), and Redman and Gairns (2003).

The second instrument employed was a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a tool to gather the data in form of written questions or statements to be answer by the respondents (Sugiyono, 2019; Winarni, 2018). The type of questionnaire used was a closed questionnaire consisting of eleven questions. This instrument was constructed based on the theory of word-formation explained by (Brinton and Brinton, 2010; Jeffries, 2006). The third instrument used was the observation sheet. This instrument was the only secondary instrument employed to observe whether the lecturer taught based on the plans or not. According to Suwartono (2014), observation is very suitable to examine processes or behaviour. Using this method means using eyes and ears as windows to record the data. After gathering all the data, the data from the test and the questionnaire were analysed using simple statistical analysis such as average score, percentage, and the percentage enhancement. Then, the results from the observations were only used to check whether the lecturer had done the teaching and learning process based on the plans or not. The results from the observations were used by the observers to give suggestions to the lecturer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

cycles. There were three meetings in each cycle. In each cycle, the researchers did planning, action and observing, and reflecting phases. In this screen-to-screen learning, the platforms used in all of the meetings were *Google Meet* and *WhatsApp*. At the beginning of cycle 1, the researchers did a pre-test. The test employed was in form of short items test adapted from some relevant books. The

topics tested in pre-test 1 were affixes, roots, formal and informal words, and abstract nouns. The average score of students' vocabulary tests was 63, and it was still in level C.

After pre-test 1 was completed, the team continued to do the actions in three meetings. The materials taught were the same as the topics tested in pre-test 1. The platforms used in this action were *Google Meet* and *WhatsApp Group*. The researchers used *Google Meet* to explain the materials and *WhatsApp Group* to discuss the exercises. For each material, the lecturer tried to explain the morphological process or elements that were relevant. For instance, in the first action, the lecturer taught about affixes. She explained some frequently used affixes in English and how these affixes work in word building. After explaining the materials, the lecturer explained the exercises briefly and asked the students to do the exercises. The discussion of the exercises was done in *WhatsApp Group*.

After the implementation of explicit morphological instructions in Cycle 1, the team did post-test 1. The average score on this test was 68. The improvement was still 7.9%, and it did not surpass the success category of this research (15%). Therefore, the team concurred to continue the implementation of explicit morphological instructions to cycle 2.

At the beginning of cycle 2, the team did pre-test 2 since the materials were dissimilar from the materials taught in cycle 1. The result showed that the average score was 55. After pre-test 1, the researchers did the actions in cycle 2. The materials were compound adjectives, compound nouns, and time and condition. The platforms employed were similar to the previous cycle called *Google Meet* and *WhatsApps Group*. After the implementation of morphological instructions in cycle 2, the team did a second post-test, and the average score on the vocabulary test was 70. The enhancement was 27%, and this had already surpassed the success criteria (15%). Therefore, the team stopped the action research.

Based on the results of the observations, the lecturer taught based on the plans in both cycles. In cycle 1, the students looked quite confused and not that confident in answering the question. Some of them commented on the group that they were not sure about their answers. They have been familiar with the morphological process like affixes and roots. There was only one student who asked a question at that time. In cycle two, the students looked more comfortable discussing the material with the lecturer. They also answered the questions more confidently. There were even two students who asked questions in cycle 2. This progress was impressive because asking question was one of the indicators of students' participation that commonly disappeared in that class.

To sum up, the students' vocabulary knowledge improved after the implementation of explicit explanations about morphological elements. The last average score of students' vocabulary mastery surpassed the success criteria of this study. Furthermore, the students seemed enthusiastic during the teaching and learning process. They were quite active in answering the questions, and even asked questions to the lecturer. The students did these activities without being asked to.

After the implementation of explicit morphological instructions, the students were asked to complete a closed questionnaire. In general, the questions in the questionnaire can be divided into three parts. They are the use of online teaching platforms, the teaching activities, and the usage of explicit morphological instructions. Here are the results.

Table 1. The Use of Online Teaching Platforms

Item	Result
Learning English vocabularies through *Google Meet* and *WhatsApp Group* is effective.	80% of the students agreed that *Google Meet* and *WhatsApp Group* were effective teaching platforms.
Google Meet and *WhatsApp Group* are helpful platforms.	70% of the students agreed that *Google Meet* and *WhatsApp Group* were beneficial platforms.

Table 2. The Teaching Activities

Item	Result
The apperception parts are effective.	50% of the students strongly agreed that the apperception parts were effective, and 40% of the students agreed.
The materials are explained clearly.	50% of the students agreed that the materials were explained clearly, and 20% of the students strongly agreed.
The exercises are helpful.	60% of the students agreed that the exercise parts were helpful, and 40% of the students strongly agreed.

Table 3. The Students' Perception on the Usage of Explicit Morphological Instruction

Item	Result
Learning English vocabularies through discussion about derivation	60% of the students agreed that the discussion about affixes was interesting and
(affixes) is interesting and helpful.	beneficial, and 30% of the students strongly agreed.
Learning English vocabularies through discussion about root is interesting and helpful.	70% of the students agreed that the discussion about roots is interesting and helpful.
Learning English vocabularies through discussion about clipping is interesting and helpful.	50% of the students agreed the discussion of clipping was interesting and beneficial, and 30% of the students strongly agreed.
Learning English vocabularies through discussion about compounds is interesting and helpful.	50% of the students agreed the discussion of compounding process of English is interesting and helpful, and 40% of the students strongly agreed.
Learning morphological elements or process helps me to understand the meanings of words.	50% of the students strongly agreed learning morphological components assisted them to understand the meanings, and 30% of the students agreed.
The morphological elements or processes that are explained explicitly are helpful.	50% of the students strongly agreed the explicit explanation of morphological process was helpful, and 40% of the students agreed.

Overall, explicit morphological instructions employed got positive responses from the learners. The highest percentage of each question in the questionnaire was on agree (scale 4) and strongly agree (scale 5). This result revealed that the students had a positive voice on the implementation of explicit morphological instructions. They thought the explicit explanation of morphological elements or processes helped them to understand the meaning, and such activities were interesting and helpful.

Explaining morphology explicitly had already proven to be an effective way of enriching students' vocabulary. The average score of students' vocabulary tests increased quite significantly. The enhancement of students' vocabulary average score achieved 27%. This result is probably influenced by the clear or explicit explanations of the morphological process such as affixes, clipping, and compounding. After the explanation related to morphology, the students became aware of how English words are formed. They even could predict the meanings based on the morphological elements attached to words.

Based on the previous study, there is a positive relationship between morphological awareness and vocabulary mastery, and this kind of awareness can be enhanced by

explaining morphological components directly. According to Anwar & Rosa (2020), students may have low awareness of morphology because the teachers do not explain morphological process. One of the ways to increase students' morphological awareness is by giving explicit explanations. Wiley (2015) also points out that direct explanations give promising results in the EFL context.

Morphological awareness led the students to comprehend English words better. In this study, the students were taught to familiarize themselves with frequently used affixes in English. They also were taught some other morphological processes such as clipping and compounding. In this study, the students also learned about roots and English roots come from Latin. These roots normally bring certain meaning. Carlisle in Adam (2018) states that emphasizing the morpheme identification process is a strategy to comprehend many derivational words. Morphological awareness has a crucial role in constructing the language meaning in a larger structure (Carlisle, 2000; Deacon, Benere, and Pasquarella 2012). In short, morphological awareness that can be built through an explicit explanation of morphology may increase students' vocabulary mastery.

The result from the tests was also supported by the questionnaire result. There were some crucial findings from the closed questionnaire employed in this study. Firstly, the usage of *Google Meet* and *WhatsApps Group* as online learning platforms was effective and helpful. Second, all teaching stages in the teaching and learning process are effective. Thirdly, the explicit discussion of morphological elements or processes helps the students to learn English vocabulary. The last finding is in line with several theories. According to Oz (2014), English morphology includes the knowledge of inflectional and derivational morphemes. Students' awareness of inflectional morphemes develops the accuracy of grammar. Moreover, the awareness of derivational morphemes has an essential role in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery. A student who knows how English words are constructed through the combination of prefixes, suffixes, or roots tends to go a better chance to master vocabulary, comprehending texts, and write fluently. Yasin and Jawad (2015) argue that teaching morphological units explicitly is an effective way to encourage the learners to understand complex word meanings.

Overall, teaching morphology explicitly in vocabulary class could enrich student vocabulary awareness, and this awareness directly influenced student vocabulary proficiency. Comprehending English word formation assists the students to recognize how words are formed. Furthermore, many English affixes bring certain meanings, and this is beneficial for the students. The students may predict the meaning of a word by looking at the affixes notably derivational ones.

CONCLUSION

English Vocabulary frequently becomes problems for English learners in Indonesia. Problems in learning vocabulary also emerged in the English Language Teaching Department of Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Purwokerto. Most of the students frequently complained about the struggle in learning vocabulary. Therefore, the researchers agreed to conduct action research to overcome this problem. The researchers employed explicit morphological instructions to improve students' vocabulary proficiency. The instruments used were tests, questionnaire, and observation sheet. This action research was conducted in two cycles. The results revealed two essential findings. Firstly, in cycle 1, the enhancement of the average score from pre-test to post-test was 7.9%. Therefore, the team concurred to conduct cycle 2. In cycle 2, the improvement of students' vocabulary mastery achieved 27%. This percentage surpassed the success criteria of this action research (15%). Secondly, the students also responded to the usage of Explicit Morphological Instruction positively. Most of the students agreed or strongly agreed with each item in the questionnaire. These results indicate the positive responses. Overall, Explicit Morphological Instructions could promote students' vocabulary mastery, and this strategy received positive feedback from the students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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