
**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH
VOCABULARY SEVENTH GRADE AT MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH
MUJAHIDIN DESA PASIR ACADEMIC YEAR 2024/2025**

Fikri Haikal¹, Dofir², Nur Azizah²

Student¹ and Lecturer² Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Mempawah
Contributor Email: fikryhaikal2id@gmail.com,
dofirghoni@gmail.com, noerazizah.al2124@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to explore the process of learning English vocabulary among seventh-grade students of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Mujahidin Pasir Village in the 2025/2026 Academic Year and to understand the teacher's perception of students during the teaching process. By examining both the learning process and the teacher's views, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the applied teaching methods and student responses.

The study employed a descriptive qualitative method with class VII students as the subjects. Data were collected through classroom observations and interviews. The research also identified supporting and hindering factors in vocabulary learning, including internal aspects such as motivation, interest, and readiness to learn, as well as external aspects such as teaching methods, learning environment, and teacher support.

The findings highlight both strengths and weaknesses in the teaching and learning process. Recognizing these aspects can help teachers refine their approaches to better match student characteristics and needs. Overall, this study is expected to contribute to improving the quality of English learning, particularly in vocabulary mastery, which is a crucial component of language skills, and serve as a reference for teachers, schools, and future researchers in designing more effective strategies.

Keywords: *Teacher Perception, Students, Teaching English Vocabulary.*

A. Introduction

Language is an essential medium of communication that enables individuals to convey meaning, exchange ideas, and build social interaction. In the current era of globalization, English has become an international language that plays a vital role in education, career, and access to global information Linse (2020:45-46). For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), vocabulary mastery is particularly crucial, as it forms the foundation for developing the four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge,

students experience serious difficulties in expressing thoughts, understanding texts, or participating in meaningful communication Ur (1996:60-61).

Vocabulary encompasses more than just lists of words. Nation (2001:14-15) states that vocabulary involves mastery of form, meaning, and use, including collocations and contextual applications. In line with this, Harmer (2007:83-84) emphasizes that vocabulary provides learners with the linguistic resources to construct meaning and interpret others' ideas. Thus, vocabulary teaching should not rely merely on rote memorization but should be delivered through contextualized, interactive, and engaging approaches. Richards and Renandya (2002:34-36) further note that vocabulary knowledge strongly predicts students' overall language competence and their ability to succeed academically. Thornbury (2002:13-14) also highlights that vocabulary mastery requires both understanding and practice, which must be integrated into daily learning activities.

Despite its importance, vocabulary learning in secondary schools, especially in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), continues to face challenges. Students frequently find it difficult to memorize new words, apply them in context, or distinguish between similar terms. Teachers, in turn, often struggle to choose suitable methods, as traditional approaches such as memorization may reduce motivation and cause boredom Candrawati (2022:112-113). These conditions indicate that teachers' roles and perceptions are critical in shaping the success of vocabulary learning.

Perception itself is a cognitive process of interpreting experiences, stimuli, and information. Gibson (1979:134) defines perception as an active interpretation shaped by interaction with the environment. Myers (2010: 150-151) adds that attention, psychological state, and cultural background also influence perception. In the educational context, teachers' perceptions are central to how they view students' abilities, difficulties, and classroom dynamics Satriana, Musfah, & Kuswandono (2021:153-154). When teachers perceive students positively, they tend to apply more creative and interactive strategies. Conversely, negative perceptions may result in rigid and less effective teaching practices.

Several studies have demonstrated that teacher perceptions directly influence vocabulary instruction. Kristiani (2017:45-46) revealed that teachers considered songs effective in supporting vocabulary retention, pronunciation, and learner

motivation. Nguyen and Nguyen (2020:211-213) found that teachers in Vietnam emphasized contextual and interactive approaches, including visuals and repetition, as essential in vocabulary teaching. Pradini and Adnyayanti (2022:67-68) also highlighted that vocabulary mastery must be prioritized as the foundation of language skills. In addition, Setiawan and Wiedarti (2020:34-35) argued that contextualized teaching strategies were more effective than rote memorization. These studies show the crucial connection between teachers' attitudes, strategies, and student learning outcomes.

In the specific context of MTs Mujahidin Desa Pasir, students' low motivation and limited exposure to English outside the classroom have posed significant challenges for vocabulary learning. Many students perceive English as a difficult subject, particularly when they encounter new vocabulary. Teachers' responses and perceptions toward these challenges are vital for understanding both the obstacles and opportunities in improving students' vocabulary mastery.

This study is significant in two dimensions. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on teacher cognition and vocabulary instruction in EFL settings, particularly within pesantren-based schools. Practically, it provides insights for teachers to develop more effective strategies, motivates students to become more active in vocabulary learning, and serves as a reference for future research on improving English language learning in traditional educational contexts.

B. Research Method

This study applied a qualitative descriptive design to explore teachers' perceptions in teaching English vocabulary at the seventh grade of MTs Mujahidin Desa Pasir. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it focuses on describing phenomena in natural settings and emphasizes meanings rather than numerical data Creswell (2012:205-207).

The participants were English teachers who taught seventh-grade students in the academic year 2024/2025. They were selected purposively since they were directly involved in the teaching and learning process of vocabulary. The data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to examine classroom activities and teaching strategies, interviews were

conducted to gain deeper insights into teachers' perceptions, and documentation was applied to gather supporting data such as lesson plans and teaching materials.

The data were analyzed following Miles and Huberman's (1994:10-12) framework, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation of sources was employed by comparing the results from different data collection techniques Miles & Huberman (1994:278-280).

C. Discussion

1. Teachers' Perception

Teachers' perceptions strongly shaped their classroom practices. The findings indicated that teachers generally perceived students as having difficulties in memorizing and retaining vocabulary. One teacher explained, "When I give them new words, they can answer during the lesson. But after two or three days, they forget. That is why I keep repeating the same material". Another teacher added, "They are slow in recalling words. If I do not repeat, they will not remember at all". These statements suggest that teachers perceived weak memory retention as a serious barrier to vocabulary learning.

Observation confirmed this, as students were often unable to recall words from previous lessons. For instance, when the teacher asked about the meaning of "wake up" in the following week, only a few students responded, while most remained silent. This aligns with Ur (1996:60-61), who argues that vocabulary acquisition is complex because it requires mastery of form, meaning, and usage simultaneously.

Teachers also perceived low student confidence, particularly in speaking. One teacher stated, "When I ask them to speak in English, they keep silent. They are afraid of making mistakes, so I usually ask them to write or translate instead." This perception influenced teaching strategies, leading to a stronger focus on written tasks rather than communicative activities. Such practices reflect Satriana, Musfah, and Kuswando (2021:153-168), who found that teachers' perceptions of student motivation directly affect instructional decisions.

However, teachers did not entirely hold negative views. They also perceived students as capable of progress if given sufficient encouragement. During observation, when a teacher praised students by saying “good job” or “that’s correct,” more students became engaged and willing to try answering. A teacher reflected: “Some students want to try when I motivate them. If I keep supporting them, they slowly become braver”. This resonates with Myers (2010:150-151), who highlighted the role of psychological and emotional support in shaping positive learning behaviors.

The findings show that teachers’ perceptions were shaped not only by academic performance but also by affective factors such as students’ fear of mistakes, motivation, and classroom atmosphere. Compared to Kristiani (2017:45-56), where teachers used songs to increase motivation, the teachers in this study relied more on encouragement and repetition. This difference highlights the contextual constraints of pesantren schools, where media and resources are limited.

2. Vocabulary

The findings revealed that teachers considered vocabulary the foundation of English learning. As one teacher said, “Without vocabulary, students cannot understand reading or make sentences”. This view supports Thornbury (2002:13-14), who states that “without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”, and Nation (2001:14-15), who emphasized vocabulary knowledge as a prerequisite for language skills.

In practice, vocabulary teaching at MTs Mujahidin mostly relied on traditional methods such as translation, repetition, and drilling. Observation showed that teachers frequently began lessons by introducing word lists and asking students to repeat them several times. For example, in a lesson about daily activities, the teacher wrote words such as “wake up”, “eat”, “pray”, and “go to school” on the board. Students repeated them aloud, then translated them into Indonesian. While this method ensured recognition, it did not provide much opportunity for active communication.

Teachers acknowledged students’ difficulty in memorizing vocabulary. One teacher admitted: “They can write the word correctly now, but by next week,

they forget. So I repeat the same word several times”. Another explained: “Pronunciation is also a problem. They can read the word in Indonesian style, but not in English pronunciation”. These findings confirm Ur (1996:60-61), who noted that vocabulary mastery involves not only spelling but also pronunciation and usage.

Despite challenges, teachers sometimes applied contextual approaches. For example, one teacher said: “When I teach the word market, I ask students about the market near their house. They understand better if I connect it to their life.” During observation, students showed more enthusiasm when the teacher related words to their daily experiences, such as prayer times or school activities. This reflects Candrawati (2022:112-120), who found that contextual learning increases motivation and retention. Harmer (2007:83-84) also argues that meaningful contexts help students remember vocabulary better.

Teachers also used realia, such as pointing to objects in the classroom. When teaching the word “board”, the teacher pointed to the blackboard; for book, the teacher held up a student’s notebook. Students responded positively and repeated the words more confidently. This strategy supports Ur (1996 60-61), who emphasized the effectiveness of concrete examples in vocabulary teaching.

Nevertheless, teachers highlighted resource limitations. One said, “We do not have projectors or many pictures. I rely on the book and simple examples.” This situation contrasts with Kristiani (2017:45-56), who reported teachers using songs, and Setiawan & Wiedarti (2020:34-42), who encouraged multimedia-based contextual teaching. At MTs Mujahidin, vocabulary instruction remained traditional due to the pesantren setting and lack of facilities.

3. English Learning

Teachers expressed that English learning was perceived as both important and challenging. They believed English was essential for students’ future opportunities, but students often described it as difficult. One teacher said, “Students often say English is hard because there are so many new words. They feel afraid before trying”. Observation confirmed that many students were reluctant to respond orally, even to simple questions like “What is your hobby?”.

Students participated more actively in controlled tasks such as writing and translation. For example, when asked to translate “I go to school at seven” into Indonesian, nearly all students wrote the answer correctly. However, when asked to speak the sentence aloud, only two students volunteered. This indicates that students were more comfortable with written forms than with oral production, consistent with Nguyen and Nguyen (2020:211-229), who observed similar tendencies in EFL contexts.

Teachers nonetheless remained optimistic. One explained, “Although they struggle, when I motivate them, they try harder. Some even ask me to repeat the words slowly so they can write correctly”. Another added: “If they keep practicing, they will improve little by little”. These views echo Pradini and Adnyayanti (2022:67-78), who reported that teachers believe vocabulary mastery is achievable through persistence and consistent practice.

Observation also showed positive progress. In one class, students eagerly repeated vocabulary after the teacher, and some volunteered to write the words on the board. This enthusiasm suggests that encouragement and repetition gradually increased students’ confidence. Such findings support Linse (2020:45-46), who emphasized the importance of exposure and reinforcement in EFL learning.

The unique pesantren context also influenced English learning. Students had limited exposure to English outside the classroom, as the environment prioritized religious studies. Unlike urban schools with broader access to English media, MTs Mujahidin relied solely on classroom instruction. This contextual difference may explain why students were less confident in oral communication. Compared to Kristiani (2017:45-56) and Candrawati (2022:112-120), who studied schools with more facilities, the teachers in this study faced distinctive challenges.

4. Synthesis

The discussion highlights that teachers at MTs Mujahidin Desa Pasir viewed vocabulary as the foundation of English learning, but also recognized challenges such as weak retention, low motivation, and limited resources. Their perceptions shaped strategies that emphasized repetition, translation, and drilling, while occasional contextual approaches enhanced engagement. Overall, this study

confirms Satriana, Musfah, and Kuswandono's (2021, pp. 153-168) assertion that teachers' perceptions significantly shape classroom practices. In this context, teachers balanced their awareness of students' difficulties with efforts to build confidence through encouragement and repetitive practice. This balance illustrates how perception, pedagogy, and context are deeply interconnected in EFL classrooms within pesantren-based schools.

D. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of English vocabulary learning at MTs Mujahidin Desa Pasir. The findings indicate that teachers viewed vocabulary as the essential foundation of English learning. Without sufficient vocabulary, students found it difficult to develop other skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

However, the study also revealed several challenges. Teachers noted that students often forgot new words after only a few days, showed low confidence in speaking, and experienced difficulties with pronunciation and word usage. As a result, teachers relied heavily on strategies such as repetition, translation, and written exercises.

At the same time, teachers recognized that students had the potential to make progress when given encouragement and proper guidance. Contextual approaches, such as linking new vocabulary to daily experiences, helped improve engagement and retention. Positive reinforcement, including praise and motivation, also supported students in building confidence to try using new words.

The pesantren context and limited resources influenced instructional practices, as teachers depended more on simple and traditional methods rather than creative media. Nevertheless, teachers continued to adapt their strategies to meet students' needs and classroom realities.

Overall, the study concludes that teachers' perceptions play a decisive role in shaping vocabulary instruction. Effective vocabulary learning requires a balance between repetition and contextualization, as well as consistent encouragement to strengthen students' confidence and long-term mastery.

References

- Creswell, J. W. 2012. *“Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, And Evaluating Quantitative And Qualitative Research (4th ed.)”*. Boston: Pearson.
- Candrawati, D. 2022. *“The Effectiveness Of Contextual Teaching In Vocabulary Learning For Junior High School Students”*. Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics. 7(2). 112–120. (pp. 112–120)
- Gibson, J. J. 1979. *“The Ecological Approach To Visual Perception”*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Harmer, J. 2007. *“The Practice Of English Language Teaching (4th ed.)”*. London: Longman.
- Kristiani, Y. 2017. *“Teachers’ Perception On The Use Of Songs In Teaching English Vocabulary”*. Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. 5(1). 45-56. (pp. 45-56)
- Linse, C. T. 2020. *“Practical English Language Teaching: Young Learners”*. New York: Mcgraw-Hill.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. 1994. *“Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook”*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Myers, D. G. 2010. *“Psychology (9th ed.)”*. New York: Worth Publishers.
- Nation, I. S. P. 2001. *“Learning Vocabulary In Another Language”*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 14-15, 27-28, 129-131)
- Nguyen, T. M., & Nguyen, H. T. 2020. *“Teachers’ Perceptions Of Vocabulary Instruction In Primary Schools”*. Asian EFL Journal. 24(3). 211-229. (pp. 211-229)
- Pradini, N., & Adnyayanti, L. P. 2022. *“Teachers’ Beliefs On The Importance Of Vocabulary Mastery In EFL Learning”*. Lingua Scientia. 29(1). 67-78. (pp. 67-78)
- Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. 2002. *“Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice”*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 34-36, 120-121)
- Satriana, M., Musfah, J., & Kuswandono, P. 2021. *“Teachers’ Perceptions In EFL Classrooms: Challenges And Opportunities”*. Indonesian Journal of English Education. 8(2). 153-168. (pp. 153-168)
- Setiawan, A., & Wiedarti, P. 2020. *“Contextual Teaching And Learning In EFL Classrooms: A Study On Vocabulary Acquisition”*. Journal of English Education Studies. 3(1). 34-42. (pp. 34-42)

Thornbury, S. 2002. *“How To Teach Vocabulary”*. Harlow: Longman.

Ur, P. 1996. *“A Course In Language Teaching: Practice And Theory”*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.