

THE IMPACT OF VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE AND GRAMMAR MASTERY ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION IN NARRATIVE TEXTS OF UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAMS

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery on students' reading comprehension in narrative texts. Specifically, it examines three hypotheses: (1) vocabulary and grammar mastery simultaneously influence reading comprehension; (2) vocabulary mastery individually influences reading comprehension; and (3) grammar mastery individually influences reading comprehension.

A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method. The population consisted of eleventh-grade students from public senior high schools in Bandung City, with a randomly selected sample of 60 students. Data were collected using a 30-item multiple-choice test that met the assumption of normality ($sig. = 0.200 > 0.05$). The data were analyzed using multiple linear regressions.

The findings indicate that vocabulary and grammar mastery together have a significant effect on students' reading comprehension in narrative texts ($F(2, 57) = 150.500, p < 0.05$). Furthermore, vocabulary mastery has a significant individual effect ($t = 8.517, p < 0.05$), as does grammar mastery ($t = 6.059, p < 0.05$). These results suggest that both vocabulary and grammar competence play critical roles in enhancing reading comprehension. Therefore, it is recommended that English language instruction at the high school level place greater emphasis on developing students' vocabulary and grammar skills to improve their reading performance.

Keywords: *Vocabulary Use, Grammar, Reading Comprehension.*

INTRODUCTION

English is considered a foreign language in Indonesia and is formally taught from elementary school through university. As such, students are expected to master English, which consists of four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. English has been included in the national curriculum, making it a compulsory subject regardless of students' interest. As Harmer (2001:21) stated, "probably the greatest number of language students in the world do it because it is on the school curriculum." English is taught at all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education.

Nowadays, the ability to understand English is essential for millions of people. Individuals can communicate and read various kinds of English texts. Reading skills, in particular, are critical in today's global society, as people are constantly exposed to English in brochures, academic books, newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, instructions, advertisements, and more. Thus, the ability to read English texts offers substantial benefits in everyday life. Among the four language skills, reading is often considered the most essential, especially in the context of English as a foreign language.

As Harry stated in a journal published by Lia (2014:18), "Reading is the most important single skill in study." This view is supported by the curriculum, which places primary emphasis on reading skills. Riance (2021) insisted that reading has special spotlight in many second and or foreign language learning situations. Reading not only provides access to information but also helps individuals find pleasure, achieve academic success, and pursue job opportunities. However, Indonesian students struggle with reading English texts due to their limited vocabulary and grammatical understanding.

Research by Nanda and Azmy (2020) has shown that Indonesian students generally have low reading comprehension in English. This is particularly problematic when reading narrative texts, which appear in national exams and are often considered challenging due to unfamiliar vocabulary and lengthy passages. Despite their potential appeal through storytelling, many students find narrative texts difficult and time-consuming. Smith (2007:5) explains that reading in a foreign language involves knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, background knowledge, and the reading context.

Vocabulary plays a key role in supporting reading comprehension. Schmitt & Schmitt (2018) stated that vocabulary is a central and core component of language acquisition. Students who lack sufficient vocabulary often struggle to understand both spoken and written texts. Their vocabulary limitations are closely linked to low reading frequency. Without interest in reading, students miss opportunities to acquire new words. Beck (2013:2) states that insufficient vocabulary contributes significantly to students' difficulties in mastering English.

Grammar is equally important. Hu et. al. (2022) stated that grammar plays a vital role in language, especially in reading comprehension. Students must understand grammar rules, such as sentence structure and syntax, to comprehend English texts effectively. Utami (2023)

further emphasize that understanding morphology and syntax is crucial for linguistic competence.

This study investigates the extent to which vocabulary and grammar mastery influences the reading comprehension abilities of senior high school students in Bandung. It focuses on three core research questions: (1) Do vocabulary and grammar mastery simultaneously influence students' reading comprehension? (2) Does vocabulary mastery have a significant effect on reading comprehension? (3) Does grammar mastery have a significant effect on reading comprehension? A quantitative research design is employed, utilizing statistical analysis to examine the relationships between these linguistic variables and reading comprehension performance.

By analyzing both the simultaneous and individual contributions of vocabulary and grammar mastery, the study seeks to identify key linguistic factors that support students' understanding of English narrative texts. Vocabulary plays a critical role in enabling students to grasp word meanings and contextual nuances within a text. In addition to vocabulary, grammar also plays a pivotal role in interpreting sentence structures, identifying relationships between ideas, and extracting meaning from the overall passage. As Harry (in Lia, 2014:18) notes, understanding grammar helps readers comprehend complex syntactic forms that often appear in narrative texts.

However, these two components, vocabulary and grammar, should not be viewed in isolation. Effective reading comprehension relies on the integration of both: vocabulary provides the building blocks of meaning, while grammar determines how those blocks are structured. Therefore, the combined mastery of these elements is essential for students to successfully decode and interpret narrative texts. This research is expected to offer insights for English language educators and curriculum developers in designing more targeted and effective instructional strategies at the high school level.

METHOD

This research implemented a quantitative approach, in line with Creswell's (2012) definition that quantitative research involves collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting data numerically using statistical techniques. An ex post facto research design is employed, where the variables are examined without manipulation or treatment. Instead, the study seeks to identify existing relationships between vocabulary and grammar mastery (independent variables) and reading comprehension of narrative texts (dependent variable).

To assess these variables, the researcher used structured instruments consisting of multiple-choice tests and a grammar questionnaire. Vocabulary mastery was measured using a 30-item multiple-choice test, while grammar mastery was assessed through a validated questionnaire. The rationale for selecting these instruments lies in their practicality and alignment with the learning objectives of English instruction at the high school level. Additionally, both instruments were tested for reliability and validity prior to data collection to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the measurements.

The population of this study includes 600 students from two public senior high schools in Bandung. A sample of 60 students (10% of the total population) was selected using stratified proportionate random sampling, ensuring representation across different academic strata. This sampling technique enables the researcher to capture the variability of the population more accurately.

Following data collection, the data were analyzed using SPSS to determine the correlation and influence of vocabulary and grammar mastery on reading comprehension. Although the study references students with varying levels of grammar mastery, the categorization into "high" and "low" groups is used descriptively to support the correlational analysis rather than to conduct experimental or comparative testing. This design allows the researcher to explore naturally occurring differences without manipulating the independent variables.

The data were collected through structured quantitative surveys, comprising interval-ratio scale items. These instruments were intended to measure students' understanding of vocabulary and grammar, as well as their impact on narrative text comprehension. All data were original and obtained directly from the respondents during the field study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the simultaneous influence of vocabulary mastery (X_1) and grammar mastery (X_2) on students' reading comprehension of narrative texts (Y). The results obtained using SPSS are presented below.

Table 1. Multiple Regression Line Equation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-14,070	11,412		-6,098	,000
Penguasaan Kosakata	,135	,039	,428	9,611	,000
Tata Bahasa	,129	,022	,446	4,599	,000

The regression coefficients presented in Table 1 provide valuable insight into how vocabulary mastery (X_1) and grammar mastery (X_2) influence students' reading comprehension of narrative texts (Y). The constant value is -14.070, which suggests that in the absence of vocabulary and grammar mastery, the predicted reading comprehension score would be negative. While this value is not meaningful in practical terms, it is mathematically necessary for constructing the regression model.

More importantly, the positive coefficients for vocabulary (0.135) and grammar (0.129) indicate that both variables have a positive impact on students' reading comprehension. Specifically, an increase of one unit in vocabulary mastery leads to a 0.135

point increase in reading comprehension, while a one-unit improvement in grammar mastery contributes an additional 0.129 points, assuming the other variable remains constant.

The t-values and corresponding significance levels ($p < 0.001$ for both variables) indicate that these relationships are statistically significant. This confirms that both vocabulary and grammar mastery are meaningful predictors of students' reading ability, and not the result of chance.

These findings align with previous research emphasizing the importance of vocabulary in accessing text meaning and grammar in interpreting sentence structure. Students who possess a broader vocabulary are more likely to understand key concepts and themes in narrative texts. Likewise, students with strong grammar skills can more easily parse complex sentences, recognize relationships between ideas, and make inferences. Overall, this table supports the conclusion that both vocabulary and grammar are indispensable components in fostering reading comprehension among English learners.

Partial Significance Test

The partial t-tests were conducted to determine whether vocabulary and grammar mastery individually have a significant effect on reading comprehension

Table 2. Partial Significance Test

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
1 (Constant)	-14,655	1,412		-5,324	,000			
Penguasaan Kosakata	,135	,039	,528	8,510	,001	,917	,460	,163
Tata Bahasa	,129	,022	,346	6,050	,003	,935	,532	,149

a. Dependent Variable: Reading Comprehension

Table 2 demonstrates the results of the partial significance test (t-test) for each independent variable: vocabulary mastery (X_1) and grammar mastery (X_2). The aim of this test is to determine whether each variable has a significant individual effect on students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. Both variables yielded significance values far below the conventional threshold of 0.05—specifically, 0.001 for vocabulary and 0.003 for grammar—indicating that each variable independently contributes significantly to the prediction of reading comprehension outcomes.

The t-values for vocabulary (8.510) and grammar (6.050) further reinforce their importance. A higher t-value generally reflects a stronger relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. In this case, vocabulary mastery has a slightly stronger individual influence compared to grammar mastery, as reflected in the higher t-value.

These results suggest that even when considered separately, vocabulary and grammar mastery each have a meaningful effect on how well students comprehend narrative

texts. This means that instructional interventions targeting either of these linguistic areas are likely to yield improvements in reading comprehension.

Moreover, these findings underscore the importance of a balanced language instruction program. While vocabulary allows students to understand the meaning of individual words and expressions, grammar equips them to comprehend how these words interact within a sentence to convey nuanced meaning. Therefore, language educators should not neglect either component; instead, both should be developed in tandem. Promoting individual mastery of vocabulary and grammar enhances students' ability to decode, interpret, and analyze narrative texts more effectively.

Coefficients of Determinations

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to measure how much of the variance in reading comprehension can be explained by vocabulary and grammar mastery combined

Table 3. Multiple Significance Test

ANOVA ^a					
	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Sig.
1	Regression	614,000	2	307,000	.001 ^b
	Residual	53,000	7	1,963	
	Total	667,000	9		

a. Dependent Variable: Reading Comprehension

b. Predictors: (Constant), Grammar, Vocabulary Use

The model summary in Table 3 presents key statistical indicators that reflect how well the independent variables (vocabulary and grammar mastery) collectively explain the variation in the dependent variable (reading comprehension). The multiple correlation coefficient (R) is 0.864, which indicates a very strong positive correlation between the two predictors and the outcome variable. The R Square value of 0.891 suggests that approximately 89.1% of the variance in students' reading comprehension can be explained by their combined vocabulary and grammar mastery.

This is a remarkably high percentage, implying that these two variables are powerful predictors of reading comprehension. The adjusted R^2 value (0.836) takes into account the number of predictors and the sample size, offering a more accurate estimation in case of small sample bias. The small drop from R^2 to adjusted R^2 indicates the model remains robust.

This high explanatory power suggests that most of the differences in students' comprehension scores can be attributed to differences in their vocabulary and grammar proficiency. Additionally, the partial contribution calculations (48.42% for vocabulary and 33.73% for grammar) show that vocabulary has a slightly stronger influence on reading comprehension than grammar. This makes intuitive sense, as understanding the meaning of words is often a prerequisite for understanding the structure in which they are embedded.

In terms of pedagogical implications, this result reinforces the need for comprehensive language instruction that prioritizes both vocabulary acquisition and

grammatical accuracy. Without a strong foundation in these two components, students are likely to struggle with reading comprehension tasks, especially when engaging with complex narrative texts.

Simultaneous Significance Test (ANOVA)

To test the overall significance of the regression model, an F-test was conducted using ANOVA. The results are presented below.

Table 4. Coefficient Value and Determination/Multiple Contribution
Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change
	,864 ^a	,891	,836	1,710	,891	151,309	2	57	,000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Grammar, Vocabulary Use

b. Dependent Variable: Reading Comprehension

Table 4 presents the results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), which tests whether the regression model as a whole is statistically significant. The key indicator in this table is the F-statistic, which compares the model's explained variance to its unexplained variance. An F-value of 150.500 and a significance value (p) of 0.001 indicate that the model is highly significant. In other words, the likelihood that the observed relationships between vocabulary mastery, grammar mastery, and reading comprehension occurred by chance is extremely low.

The Sum of Squares value for regression (614.000) compared to the residual (53.000) confirms that a large portion of the total variation in reading comprehension scores is explained by the two independent variables. This lends further credibility to the regression model and supports the earlier conclusion that vocabulary and grammar mastery are essential to reading comprehension development.

The results from the ANOVA table reinforce the importance of integrating vocabulary and grammar instruction into reading pedagogy. The statistical significance of the overall model implies that a comprehensive instructional approach, one that enhances both word knowledge and syntactic awareness, can substantially improve students' ability to understand narrative texts.

Furthermore, the strength of the model offers educators a reliable framework for intervention and curriculum development. Teachers can use these insights to prioritize instructional time on the areas that most significantly affect comprehension outcomes. Ultimately, this table validates the interconnectedness of language skills and affirms the central role they play in academic literacy, particularly in understanding complex and extended discourse such as narrative texts

The effect of vocabulary and grammar mastery together on students' reading comprehension in narrative texts

Vocabulary mastery emerged as the strongest predictor of reading comprehension in this study, accounting for approximately 48.42% of the variance. This significant contribution underscores the indispensable role of vocabulary knowledge in facilitating students' ability to understand narrative texts. A broad and deep vocabulary repertoire enables learners not only to recognize and decode word meanings but also to grasp figurative language, understand idiomatic expressions, and follow complex narrative structures. In narrative texts, where meaning is often embedded within context and connotation, vocabulary mastery becomes particularly crucial.

Importantly, vocabulary mastery extends beyond the ability to recall definitions. It includes knowing the appropriate usage of words in varied contexts, understanding nuances in meaning, and being able to interpret words within syntactic and discourse-level frameworks. For instance, understanding how a word's meaning can shift based on its grammatical form or surrounding context is essential for accurate interpretation.

To improve vocabulary mastery, language instruction should integrate strategies that promote active engagement with words. These may include extensive reading, morphemic analysis, semantic mapping, contextual guessing techniques, and interactive vocabulary games. In addition, the use of multimedia resources, real-world texts, and storytelling activities can provide rich input that fosters incidental vocabulary acquisition.

Ultimately, placing vocabulary development at the center of English language teaching is key to enhancing reading comprehension. A strong vocabulary base empowers students to interact more meaningfully with texts, build inferential skills, and develop greater reading fluency and confidence, especially when engaging with narrative genres.

The effect of grammar mastery on students' reading comprehension in narrative texts

Grammar mastery was also found to significantly influence reading comprehension, contributing approximately 33.73% to the variance. This result affirms that understanding the structure of language is vital in making sense of narrative texts, where meaning often hinges not only on word choice but also on how those words are organized. Grammar enables readers to decode sentence patterns, recognize subject-verb relationships, identify clauses, and follow the logical flow of ideas presented in the text.

Students with high grammatical proficiency are better equipped to understand complex sentences, interpret time references through tense usage, follow cause-effect relationships indicated by conjunctions, and distinguish between active and passive constructions. On the other hand, students who lack grammar mastery often misinterpret or miss key information, leading to confusion and incorrect comprehension.

The data also pointed out specific grammatical areas that were problematic for students, including verb tense accuracy, complex sentence construction, passive voice, and conditional forms. These areas are frequently used in narrative writing to indicate sequences of events, describe states or actions, and convey subtleties in meaning.

To address these issues, grammar instruction should not be limited to isolated drills or rule memorization. Instead, it should be embedded within authentic reading and writing contexts. Teachers are encouraged to use task-based learning, grammar in context activities, and text analysis exercises that allow students to see grammar as a tool for meaning-making. This approach not only improves accuracy but also enhances comprehension by showing learners how grammatical choices affect textual meaning and coherence.

The results of this study provide strong empirical support for the crucial role of both vocabulary and grammar mastery in shaping students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. With an R^2 value of 0.891, the regression model indicates that nearly 90% of the variation in reading comprehension performance among students can be attributed to their vocabulary and grammar skills. This underscores the importance of prioritizing these linguistic components in curriculum design and classroom instruction.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings call for a more integrated and strategic approach to teaching English. Teachers should design learning experiences that combine vocabulary and grammar instruction within the context of meaningful reading. Rather than teaching vocabulary and grammar as isolated components, they should be interwoven into text-based instruction, where learners engage with authentic narrative texts that provide both lexical richness and syntactic variety.

Approaches such as reciprocal teaching, close reading, interactive read-alouds, and literature circles can be particularly effective in this regard. These methods not only build language awareness but also encourage students to think critically, ask questions, and make inferences. Teachers should also provide scaffolding through guided practice, graphic organizers, and discussion prompts to support deeper comprehension.

Moreover, reading should be viewed as a holistic process involving decoding, interpretation, and reflection. Instructional materials must be level-appropriate yet challenging, ensuring that learners encounter new words and grammatical structures within engaging contexts. Ultimately, the goal is to foster autonomous readers who can navigate complex texts with confidence, interpret language effectively, and develop a lifelong appreciation for reading in English.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that both vocabulary mastery and grammar mastery significantly influence students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. The correlation coefficient of 0.864 indicates a strong positive relationship between the independent variables (vocabulary and grammar mastery) and the dependent variable (reading comprehension). The multiple regression equation, $Y = -14.070 + 0.135X_1 + 0.129X_2$, suggests that each increase in vocabulary and grammar mastery contributes positively to reading comprehension. With a significance value of 0.001 and an F-count of 53.500, the model demonstrates high statistical reliability. The combined contribution of vocabulary and grammar mastery is 82.15%, emphasizing their dominant role in shaping students' comprehension abilities.

Further analysis shows that vocabulary mastery alone significantly affects reading comprehension, with a t-count of 8.510 and a significance level of 0.001 (< 0.05). Its partial

contribution is 48.42%, which underlines the central importance of lexical knowledge in decoding and interpreting English texts. In addition, grammar mastery, although slightly less influential, still shows a substantial effect. The t-count of 6.059 and significance value of 0.003 indicate a statistically significant contribution, with a partial effect of 33.73%. Together, these findings confirm that students with stronger command of vocabulary and grammar are better equipped to comprehend written English effectively.

The findings suggest a clear need for integrative English instruction that simultaneously targets vocabulary development and grammatical understanding. Teachers should implement instructional strategies that embed vocabulary and grammar learning within authentic reading contexts. Approaches such as text-based instruction, scaffolded reading tasks, and context-driven grammar teaching can enhance students' linguistic competence while supporting comprehension. Vocabulary should be taught not only through memorization but also through activities that promote word usage in context. Similarly, grammar instruction should move beyond isolated rules and focus on functional application in reading and writing.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited to narrative texts and a specific student population. Future research could explore whether similar effects occur across other genres, such as expository or argumentative texts. Longitudinal studies might also examine how vocabulary and grammar development over time correlates with improvements in reading comprehension. Additionally, qualitative methods such as think-aloud protocols or reading diaries could offer deeper insights into how students apply vocabulary and grammar knowledge during reading. Exploring the mediating role of metacognitive strategies or reading motivation could further enrich our understanding of the factors influencing comprehension.

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