

**Students' Perceptions on the Use of Vocabulary.com towards Their  
Vocabulary Mastery**

*A Skripsi*

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## **Abstract**

Vocabulary mastery is an important aspect for language learners. In order to make vocabulary learning become more advance and effective, a website called vocabulary.com is created. Vocabulary.com facilitates the users to learn vocabulary in more interesting ways through the website's features. This research aimed to find out the students' perceptions on the benefits and also the challenges of learning vocabulary through vocabulary.com.

The research applied qualitative research approach. The research took place in English Language Education Department of Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta. There were four participants in the research, consist of three females and one male. They are active ELED's students from batch 2015 who still use the website until this research was conducted. In order to collect the data, the researcher conducted interviews. The findings were taken from the interview result which had been coded and analyzed.

The findings show that there are four benefits and also five challenges of using vocabulary.com. The benefits are enriching new vocabularies, knowing how to construct daily life sentences, storing vocabularies in long-term memory, and establishing self-regulated learning. The challenges are lack of internet connection, lack of technology skill, cheating, distraction from other applications, and also no guidance from the teacher.

**Keywords:** vocabulary mastery, vocabulary.com, students' perceptions.

## **Background of the Research**

Vocabulary is important because it is the core element of language. Vocabulary mastery is an important aspect for language learners. According to Mukoroli (2011), vocabulary mastery has an important role for language learners since it can affect their language skills including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Moreover, vocabulary is more important than grammar. According to Krashen, students bring their dictionaries instead of grammar books when they are going abroad (as cited in Alqahtani, 2015). Further, Sedita (2005) argued that vocabulary knowledge is crucial since it covers every single word that we have to know to state our ideas, communicate properly, and also access our background knowledge.

Students are likely to be failed in language learning if they do not master an adequate amount of vocabulary learning. According to Nurweni and Read (1999), university students are expected to find difficulty in reading English text if they do not have enough vocabulary knowledge. Sedita (2005) also stated added that vocabulary is also related to the academic achievement. Students who have more vocabulary knowledge tend to be more successful than those who have limited vocabulary knowledge. Further, vocabulary is also the core element of language. It has a vital role in every language. If students only master the basic vocabulary knowledge like the root words, they would be confused by the more complex words. Thus, lacking of adequate vocabulary knowledge will bring negative effects for the students in learning language.

Inputs are very important in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery. Listening is one of some methods that can be done to get those inputs. In non-English speaking countries, it is hard to acquire English vocabulary through listening since it is rare to find somebody who speaks English in daily life. There are some other alternatives like songs and movies, however, listening to authentic media are quite challenging for them. Those media are not required to match the level of the listener. Besides, there is no limitation on what they hear from songs or movies. There are some inappropriate words that the students may accidentally acquire from them.

Further, reading is another receptive skill that can provide vocabulary inputs for students. Books and other written sources are commonly used to enhance their vocabulary knowledge. However, students nowadays are mostly digital natives surrounded by technologies and internet. Books are beaten by the gadgets. Students are glued to their smartphones all the time which make the printed sources are less favored. Learning vocabulary from books seems like an old-fashioned to them.

In order to solve the problems above, [vocabulary.com](http://vocabulary.com) website is created in order to help the students who are surrounded by technologies and gadgets to learn vocabulary. The website facilitates the users to improve their vocabulary by doing some exercises. Moreover, it is specially designed to help them learn vocabulary in an easier way. It combines dictionaries and adaptive learning game. One of the features in the website also requires them to monitor their progress in

learning vocabulary. In addition, the website can be accessed through smartphone so that the users can practice their vocabulary anytime and anywhere.

In addition, the researcher is experienced in joining a course called “Capita Selecta on Grammar 2” which required the students to use vocabulary.com to improve their vocabulary. The researcher attended the course in English Language Education Department (ELED) of a private university in Yogyakarta during the even semester of 2016. The students were required to practice their vocabulary by using the website during the semester. They were asked to collect scores from the website and submit them at the end of the semester by sending screenshots of the scores. The lecturer used the students’ vocabulary.com scores to measure how far and how frequent the students learning vocabulary.

Based on the above background, the researcher is interested to conduct a research entitled “Students' Perceptions on The Use of Vocabulary.com towards Their Vocabulary Mastery”. The importance of vocabulary becomes one of the reasons why the researcher wants to conduct this research. Further, students nowadays who are mostly digital natives need a tool in learning vocabulary that suits their character. Vocabulary.com is a website where students can practice their vocabulary in an interesting way. Since the researcher is also experienced in using the website in learning vocabulary, it strengthens the eagerness to conduct this study.

## **Literature Review**

### **Vocabulary**

There are various definitions of vocabulary as proposed by some experts. According to Linse (2005), vocabulary is a group of words which are known by a person. Another definition of vocabulary came from Kamil and Hebert (2005) who stated that vocabulary is knowledge of words and its meaning in both spoken and written language, whether in receptive and productive form. According to Alqahtani (2015), vocabulary is a knowledge field in language which has an important role for learners to acquire a language. Alqahtani (2015) emphasized that vocabulary plays a great role for someone in acquiring language. Similar to previous experts' definitions of vocabulary, based on Cambridge Dictionaries Online (2016), vocabulary is all the words known and used by a particular person.

### **Types of Vocabulary.**

*Receptive vocabulary.* According to Syarifudin (2016), receptive vocabulary is the vocabulary that the learners know and understand in some context, but they do not use it for speaking and writing. In addition, Zhou (2010) added that receptive vocabulary knowledge is the ability to recognize and understand a word when it is heard or seen. Further, Arifiani (2017) stated that receptive vocabulary is words which are known when someone is reading or listening.. It can be concluded that receptive vocabulary is the vocabulary that the learners use in receptive skills, which consists of listening and reading.

***Productive vocabulary.*** Productive vocabulary is the words that learners use in productive skills including speaking and writing. According to Arifiani (2017), productive vocabulary is the words that the learners use in speaking and writing. Another definition of productive vocabulary came from Alqahtani (2015) who stated that “productive vocabulary is the words that the learners understand and can pronounce correctly and use constructively in speaking and writing” (p.25). Learners understood and can correctly use productive vocabulary in speaking and writing. When learners can produce a word correctly, even if they do not really know the context, then the words they produce belong to productive vocabulary.

### **The Importance of Vocabulary Mastery**

Vocabulary is one of the language areas that is very important for language learners. Vocabulary is the core element of language which makes it become the most important aspect needs to be learned by language learners. This part of this chapter covers some experts statements related to the importance of vocabulary. Alqahtani (2015) stated that vocabulary is very crucial since the meanings of the new words are frequently emphasized whether it is in the classroom or in the books. Alqahtani (2015) also stated that vocabulary is very essential for language teaching and it is very important for language learners. Tozcu and Coady (2004) added that vocabulary is important for second language and foreign language acquisition, academic achievement and also for comprehension and proficiency level. If a learner has a lack of vocabulary mastery,

he will automatically find difficulties in reading comprehensions since there will be a lot of strange words.

Vocabulary mastery has an important role for language learners because it affects their language skills including reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Mukoroli, 2011). According to Mukoroli, vocabulary mastery influences students' language skills. Vocabulary learning is important because when a learner has good vocabulary mastery, it will also bring positive impacts for his/her language skills. Karshen stated that students carry their dictionary instead of grammar books while they are traveling (as cited in Alqahtani, 2015). This statement indicates that vocabulary is more important than grammar. It is more crucial for language learners to learn vocabulary rather than grammar. Since vocabulary is the core element of language, language learners can survive with a lot of grammatical errors, but they would not survive with a lack of vocabulary. vocabulary.

### **Online Vocabulary Learning**

In this modern era, internet plays an important role in every aspect of life. In education, the internet has been applied by most of the educational institutes to facilitate them in teaching their students. Some web developers and programmers take advantages from internet to create online language learning. Rambousek (2014) stated that programmers do not only help the learners to learn the whole language, but there are also some programmers who focus on particular aspects of language. There are some programmers who specifically focus on pronunciation, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and so on. In the vocabulary field, there are



some famous websites which developed to facilitate the learners, including Vocabulary.com, Visuwords.com, Online Etymology Dictionary, and many more.

### **Vocabulary.com**

In vocabulary learning, there is a website called vocabulary.com that specifically helps the language learners to improve their vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary.com is a website created by Marc Tinkler which combined smart dictionary and adaptive learning exercise that helps the users mastering new words in a short period of time.

**Features in vocabulary.com.** Ever since the website is aimed to provide interesting vocabulary learning, vocabulary.com has some features to support the users to learn vocabulary in various ways. The features can be seen by clicking the three lines symbol on the top right of the screen and see the “For Everyone” section. The features are “play the challenges”, “dictionary”, “vocabulary lists”, and “choose your words”. Those features are described in the paragraphs below.

### **Methodology**

This research was conducted by using qualitative research method to gain detailed information about students’ perceptions on the use of vocabulary.com in improving vocabulary mastery. Cresswell (2012) also stated that a qualitative research explores a phenomenon from the participants’ perspective. Thus, this research is best to use this method because the research aimed to find out the students’ perception about the benefits and challenges towards the use of

vocabulary.com website. The qualitative method supports this research to gather detailed and deep information from the participants.

The researcher used descriptive qualitative as the research design. According to Lambert and Lambert (2012), the descriptive qualitative purpose is a comprehensive summarization, on daily terms, of certain events experienced by people or groups.

This research was held in English Education Department (ELED) in one private university in Yogyakarta. There are some reasons why the researcher chose this place to conduct this research. The first reason is that the phenomenon being studied happened in there. A course called “Capita Selecta on Grammar 2” was using vocabulary.com during the even semester in 2016. In addition, there is no previous research on the use of vocabulary.com website on there, therefore this research will be useful for the department.

The research was starting from July 2018. The researcher took two months to finish the theoretical matters started from July 2018 until September 2018. The researcher started to gather the data in March 2019. It took about one month for the researcher to prepare the instrument and gather the data. It took another month for the data analysis, evaluation, and also the reporting.

There were four students who became the participants of this research. Those students belong to English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta. The researcher selected the participants from batch 2015, they were experienced in using vocabulary.com while they were taking a course called “Capita Selecta on Grammar 2” on their third semester in 2016.

In selecting the participants, the research used purposive sampling technique. The research used purposive sampling technique because the participants will be selected from particular characteristics. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) stated that “In purposive sampling, often (but by no means exclusively) a feature of qualitative research, researcher hand-pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought” (p.156). The researcher used purposive sampling in choosing particular participants because the participants are considered to be beneficial for this research. The participants’ name and gender are not revealed in this research. The researcher uses pseudonym for the participants’ name. The participants called Taylor, Ariana, Selena, and Justin.

The researcher maintained a criterion in choosing those four students from batch 2015. The criterion was the students who were still using vocabulary.com to improve their vocabulary by the time the research was conducted. The researcher aimed to find the participants who still have a fresh memory in using the website, thus the researcher maintained the criterion. After getting the list of batch 2015 students who are still actively using vocabulary.com, the researcher chose four students with the highest vocabulary scores. Those four students will be the participants of this research.

The data gathering technique used in this research was interview. Cohen et al. (2011) argued that one of the purposes of doing an interview is, “to sample respondents; opinions, as in door-step interviews” (p. 411). The researcher choose

interview as the data collection method because the researcher wants to find out the participants opinions or perceptions towards the benefits and challenges in using vocabulary.com website in improving vocabulary mastery. Thus, by using interview the researcher will get detailed information from the participants' answers and the interview is the most suitable instrument for the research.

The type of interview the researcher used was standardized open-ended interview. According to Kerlinger, there are some advantages of using open-ended items (as cited in Cohen et al., 2011). Open-ended items are flexible and allow the researcher to probe. Thus, the researcher used the open-ended interview.

The questions format of the interview used in this research is indirect question format. According to Tuckman, the example of indirect question format is asking the respondents' views toward education in common or how the school's function (as cited in Cohen et al., 2011). The response mode in the interview was unstructured response. According to Tuckman, unstructured response allows the respondents to answer the questions in the way that they want (as cited in Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher will chose this response mode because it encouraged the participants to answer the questions as they wish.

The data collection procedure of this research was done in a few steps. The first step the researcher was preparing the interview guideline. After the researcher gets the name of participants, the second step was to contact the participants personally via WhatsApp messenger. The researcher discussed the participants' availability. The interview took time in March and April 2019.

The language that was used in the interview is Bahasa Indonesia. There were some reasons why the researcher chose Bahasa Indonesia rather than English. The first reason was that the participants are native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia, so they felt more comfortable and fluent in giving their answers using their native language. The second reason was to avoid the misunderstanding during the interview. The researcher did not know the participants' English proficiency, so it will be better if the interview using Bahasa Indonesia.

The researcher recorded the interview by using a cellphone. The whole conversation was recorded in the researcher's cellphone. The length of each interview was different, depending on how deep and complete the answers the participants gave. When the researcher thought that the answer was complete the research question, the researcher ended the interview process. If the participant's answer was not complete, the researcher took more time to dig deeper for more information.

In the data analysis, the researcher had several steps to analyze the data. The first step was transcribing the recorded interview. The data transcribe was done by writing down the recorded audio of the interview into a conversation. This conversation is called Verbatim. According to Saldana (2009), verbatim is changing the result of the recorded audio into sentences. In verbatim, everything is written exactly the same with the recorded audio. There is no addition or decrement in verbatim, and it contains what the participants said during the interview.

In the process of data analyzing, the second step was member checking. This step does not belong to Saldana's but the researcher applied this step in order to recheck whether the data to be analyzed is valid enough or not. The next step after the data transcribing was compacting facts. In this part, the researcher reconstructed the sentences to be more structured then give the code to the important ones. The next step was actually probing. The researcher did not do this step because it is aimed to dig a deeper information from the respondent if there is something unclear. However, the researcher was already satisfied with the response. The next step in doing the coding is gathering similar facts. In this part, the researcher grouped the similar facts and made interpretations from them. After gathering the similar data, the following step was categorizing. In this part, the researcher made some categories based on similar facts and the interpretations. The last step in the coding was to build the concept and narrating. In this part, the researcher decided the categories that can be used to answer the research questions and made a narration for the findings.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **The Benefits of Using Vocabulary.com as Perceived by The Students**

**Storing vocabularies in long-term memory.** The first benefit of using vocabulary.com in learning vocabulary according to the participants is storing vocabularies in long-term memory. If a word is successfully transferred to long-term memory, it will be remembered for a long time or it has unlimited capacity. The exercises in vocabulary.com continually bring out the words that the participants have learnt. Those words are unconsciously stored in their long-term

memory. The finding also shows that the participant can remember the vocabularies better when he learnt in through the website rather than books.

**Enriching new vocabularies.** The second benefit of learning vocabulary by using the website is that it encourages the students to enrich their vocabulary. Moreover, there are also some participants that also got some new vocabulary specifically on synonyms. The website provides some challenging words in order to increase their vocabulary knowledge. The participant acquired some difficult words from the website that increase their vocabulary knowledge. The more the participants use the website, the harder the words will be. Thus, their vocabulary knowledge does not stop on certain level, but it keeps growing during the time.

*Learning synonyms.* Some participants perceived that they have learnt some new vocabulary specifically on synonyms. Some questions in the website sometimes ask about synonyms of words. There is no specific feature in the website that teaches about synonym, but it still slips exercise about synonym. Some of the participants believe that vocabulary.com encourages them to learn more about synonym.

**Knowing how to construct daily life sentences.** It becomes one of the benefits from the website to know how to use the vocabulary that the users have learnt from it. Vocabulary.com does not only facilitate the users to know the meaning of words, but also facilitate them to understand how to use them properly in their daily life. The participants perceived that they could understand how to actually use or apply the vocabulary after learning from the website.

**Establishing self-regulated learning.** Another benefit of learning vocabulary through vocabulary.com is that it facilitates the students to have self-regulated learning. According to Kizilcec, R. F., Manaldo, J. J. and Sanagustín, M. P. (2017) self-regulated learning is the learners ability to plan, manage and control their learning process. This thing is perceived as an benefit of using vocabulary.com by Taylor who stated that “I am able to control my own learning by checking the progress I have made (p1.5). Taylor’s argument is shown by a feature in vocabulary.com which is called “my progress” that enables the users to monitor their progress.

### **The Challenges of Using Vocabulary.com as Perceived by The Students**



**Lack of internet connection.** One of the barriers that can be the challenges of learning is lacking of internet connection. Internet connection is one of the most important aspect in vocabulary.com. Similar to other online learning media, vocabulary.com depends a lot of from the internet. It is undeniable that lack of internet connection becomes one of the major challenges. Taylor stated that “I found it annoying when I suddenly lost the internet connection when using the website, it disturbed the learning process (p1.6).

**Lack of digital technology skills.** In online learning, the skills in operating the website is also needed to support the learning process. However, some of the participants that they are lacking of that skill and sometimes it disturbed the learning process. Selena said that “another challenge that I faced while using the website was probably how to operate the website itself cause I am a little bit clueless about digital things ” (p2.9). She found that she needed to adapt with the website first since the website is very advance but her knowledge in technology is still minimum

**Cheating.** Learning vocabulary from the website does not require a teacher or an instructor. Ariely (2012) it is easy to do cheating in online learning where there is no supervision and the students have control in the internet. He also added that students tend to be cheating in online learning. According to Ariely’s statements, the students is very facilitated to do cheating in online learning since there is no teacher or anyone who pay attention to what they actually do. They just do the online stuff by themselves and they have control in everything.

**Distractions from other applications.** The last challenges that the students face while using the vocabulary.com is the distractions that they get from other applications. The notifications from other applications frequently distract their attentions. The access vocabulary.com from my phone, and sometimes they could not handle the distraction from other applications. The distraction from internet seemed so tempting and it can stopped their learning process.

**No guidance from the teachers.** Vocabulary.com is designed to encourage the students to be individual learners. However, it can also be a challenge for student who used to learn everything from her teacher. They perceived that it was quite challenging to learn everything by themselves and there is no teacher to guide them.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

### **Conclusion**

There are four findings that answer the first research question related to the students' perceptions about the benefits of using vocabulary.com towards their vocabulary mastery. The first benefit is enriching new vocabularies. The second benefit is knowing how to construct daily life sentences. The next benefit is storing vocabularies in long-term memory. Further, the last benefit of vocabulary.com is establishing self-regulated learning.

The next finding of the research is about the students' perceptions about the challenges of using vocabulary.com towards their vocabulary mastery. The

first challenge that students perceived is lack of internet connection. The second challenge that the students faced is lack of technology skill. The next challenge is learning vocabulary from vocabulary.com is cheating. Another challenge of using vocabulary.com is destructions from other applications. Finally, the last challenge of using vocabulary.com is that there is no guidance from the teachers.

### **Recommendation**

**For the teachers.** The teachers are recommended to use vocabulary.com as an online learning media for the students. The benefits of vocabulary.com can be used to assist the teacher to teach the students about vocabulary however, the teachers need to consider some challenges that the students face, and minimize them.

**For the students.** The students are suggested to use vocabulary.com to learn vocabulary considering there are some benefits that can be taken from the website. The students are recommended to use the website continuously since the website performs its best potential when it is being used continuously.

**For other researchers.** Other researchers are recommended to conduct a quantitative research about this topic. Since this research is aimed to explore the students' perceptions, other researchers are better to measure the effectiveness of the website for vocabulary learning.

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