Students' Difficulties with Vocabulary Mastery in English Language Education at the University Level

Harselina[1*,] Andi Idayani[2], Betty Sailun[3]
[1]Universitas Islam Riau: harselina@gmail.com
[2]Universitas Islam Riau: andiidayani@edu.uir.ac.id
[3]Universitas Islam Riau: bettysailun@edu.uir.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery is crucial for facilitating the acquisition of language skills. This research aims to identify students' difficulties with vocabulary mastery in English Language Education at the university level. A quantitative research approach was used, focusing on first-semester students in Class A as the research sample and Class B for test trials. The sample consisted of 33 students (13 males and 20 females) from the English Language Education program at FKIP Universitas Islam Riau. The study employed a vocabulary test in multiple-choice format, and simple purposive sampling was used to distribute the test. The test link was shared via the class chairman, and SPSS version 25 was used for data analysis. The research identified students' difficulties in vocabulary mastery through their test results. The results indicated an average student score of 69, categorized as "Good." Specifically, 3 students scored between 86 and 100 ("Excellent"), 16 students scored between 66 and 85 ("Good"), 11 students scored between 46 and 65 ("Fair"), and 3 students scored between 26 and 45 ("Poor"). Thus, most students performed in the "Good" range on the vocabulary test. The analysis revealed that students faced significant difficulties with prepositions, verbs, and pronouns. In contrast, nouns and conjunctions were less challenging for students. Among the vocabulary areas, prepositions were particularly difficult for students, indicating that questions involving prepositions were the most challenging.

KEYWORDS
Vocabulary Mastery, Vocabulary test, English Language.

ABSTRAK

Penguasaan kosakata sangat penting untuk mempermudah perolehan keterampilan bahasa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi kesulitan mahasiswa dalam penguasaan kosakata di Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di tingkat universitas. Pendekatan penelitian kuantitatif digunakan, dengan fokus pada mahasiswa semester pertama di Kelas A sebagai sampel penelitian dan Kelas B untuk uji coba tes. Sampel terdiri dari 33 mahasiswa (13 laki-laki dan 20 perempuan) dari Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di FKIP Universitas Islam Riau. Penelitian ini menggunakan tes kosakata dalam format pilihan ganda, dan sampling purposive sederhana digunakan untuk mendistribusikan tes. Tautan tes dibagikan melalui ketua kelas, dan SPSS versi 25 digunakan untuk analisis data. Penelitian mengidentifikasi kesulitan mahasiswa dalam penguasaan kosakata melalui hasil tes mereka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan rata-rata skor mahasiswa sebesar 69, yang dikategorikan sebagai "Baik." Secara spesifik, 3 mahasiswa mendapatkan skor antara 86 dan 100 ("Sangat Baik"), 16 mahasiswa mendapatkan skor antara 66 dan 85 ("Baik"), 11 mahasiswa mendapatkan skor antara 46 dan 65 ("Cukup"), dan 3 mahasiswa mendapatkan skor antara 26 dan 45 ("Kurang"). Dengan demikian, sebagian besar mahasiswa berada dalam rentang "Baik" pada

KATA KUNCI
Penguasaan Kosakata, Tes Kosakata, Bahasa Inggris

tes kosakata. Hasil analisis mengungkapkan bahwa mahasiswa menghadapi kesulitan signifikan dengan preposisi, kata kerja, kata ganti, kata keterangan, dan kata sifat. Sebaliknya, kata benda dan konjungsi relatif lebih mudah bagi mahasiswa. Di antara area kosakata, preposisi adalah yang paling sulit bagi mahasiswa, menunjukkan bahwa pertanyaan yang melibatkan preposisi adalah yang paling menantang.

*Corresponding Author :
Harselina
Universitas Islam Riau ; harselina@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary encompasses all the words that constitute a language and is a fundamental component in learning English. Before students can effectively develop English language skills, they must first build a solid vocabulary base. Vocabulary serves as a bridge linking the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Mastery of vocabulary is essential for proficiency in English as a foreign language, as it enables students to understand and use words and their meanings accurately. Without sufficient vocabulary, students may struggle to construct sentences, phrases, and coherent speech, which can hinder their ability to write, read, and communicate effectively in English. A lack of motivation to memorize and expand their vocabulary can further impede their progress, making it challenging for them to articulate and express themselves in English (Nation, I.S.P., 2001).

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of learning English as a foreign language, especially at the university level where academic proficiency is crucial. A robust vocabulary not only facilitates effective communication but also plays a significant role in understanding complex texts, participating in academic discussions, and producing well-structured written work. Despite its importance, many students face considerable challenges in mastering vocabulary, which can impact their overall language proficiency and academic performance.

Vocabulary knowledge is central to language learning and is vital for both comprehension and expression. Alqahtani, M. (2015) defines vocabulary as the total number of words needed to communicate ideas and express meaning. Alqahtani emphasizes that without a sufficient vocabulary, students struggle to convey their thoughts accurately and effectively. This definition underscores the foundational role vocabulary plays in language learning and communication.

According to Schmitt, N. (2000), vocabulary learning involves more than just recognizing and understanding words; it also includes the ability to use these words appropriately in different contexts. Schmitt highlights that vocabulary acquisition is a multi-dimensional process that requires attention to word meanings, forms, and usages. This comprehensive approach to vocabulary learning is crucial for academic success, as university-level education demands a higher level of linguistic proficiency.

Astuti, D. S. (2014) further elaborates on the significance of vocabulary, describing it as the sum of words that make up a language and are used in various contexts such as trade, technology, literature, and politics. Her's perspective reinforces the idea that vocabulary is not only a set of words but also a critical component of language used in diverse and specialized

fields. This broad application of vocabulary is particularly relevant for university students who are expected to engage with academic texts and professional discourse.

Despite the recognized importance of vocabulary, students often encounter difficulties in mastering it. These challenges can stem from various factors, including insufficient exposure to new words, ineffective learning strategies, and limited opportunities to use vocabulary in context. Nation, I. S. P. (2001), argues that vocabulary learning involves both the initial acquisition of words and the retention and application of these words over time. Nation's work highlights that mastering vocabulary is not a straightforward process and requires on going practice and reinforcement.

At the university level, students are expected to have a certain level of vocabulary proficiency to engage with academic texts and participate in advanced discussions. However, many students encounter difficulties in mastering vocabulary, which can manifest in various ways, including limited word recognition, poor retention, and challenges in applying vocabulary effectively in context. These difficulties are often compounded by factors such as inadequate exposure to new words, ineffective learning strategies, and a lack of motivation.

One significant challenge in vocabulary mastery is the effective retention and recall of new words. Research by Eysenck, M. W., & Keane, M. T. (2015) suggests that memory and cognitive processes play a crucial role in how well students remember and use vocabulary. Factors such as the frequency of exposure to new words and the use of mnemonic devices can impact vocabulary retention. Students who lack regular exposure to new vocabulary or do not engage in active learning strategies may struggle to remember and apply these words effectively.

Another challenge is the application of vocabulary in context. According to Hulstijn, J. H. (2001), understanding a word's meaning is not enough; students must also learn how to use it appropriately in various contexts. This includes knowing the nuances of word meanings, collocations, and connotations. Students who are unfamiliar with these contextual aspects of vocabulary may find it difficult to use new words accurately in their writing and speaking tasks.

Moreover, the motivation to learn and use new vocabulary can also influence mastery. Research by Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972), indicates that motivation plays a significant role in language learning. Students who are motivated to learn new vocabulary are more likely to engage with and retain these words. Conversely, a lack of motivation can result in minimal effort and poor vocabulary acquisition.

Effective instructional strategies are essential for addressing the difficulties students face in vocabulary mastery. According to Marzano et al. (2001), vocabulary instruction should include explicit teaching of word meanings, opportunities for practice, and strategies for independent learning. Marzano's research suggests that students benefit from direct instruction that includes clear definitions, example sentences, and activities that reinforce word usage. Incorporating various instructional methods can also enhance vocabulary learning. For instance, research by Read (2000) indicates that using context clues, morphological analysis, and word mapping can help students understand and retain new vocabulary. These techniques allow students to make connections between new words and their existing knowledge, facilitating deeper comprehension and application.

Additionally, integrating technology into vocabulary instruction can offer new opportunities for learning. Studies by Stockwell (2010) demonstrate that digital tools such as vocabulary apps, online games, and interactive exercises can engage students and provide additional practice outside the classroom. These tools can also offer personalized feedback and track students' progress, helping them address specific areas of difficulty.

Difficulties in vocabulary mastery can have significant implications for students' academic performance. According to Cunningham and Stanovich (1998), vocabulary knowledge is strongly correlated with reading comprehension and academic achievement. Students who struggle with vocabulary may find it challenging to understand complex texts, follow instructions, and participate in class discussions. This can affect their overall academic performance and confidence in their language abilities. Furthermore, limited vocabulary can impact students' ability to write effectively. Research by Graham and Perin (2007) highlights that vocabulary knowledge is essential for constructing coherent and well-structured written work. Students who lack a sufficient vocabulary may struggle to express their ideas clearly and persuasively, which can affect their grades and academic success.

The purpose of this study is to explore the difficulties that university students encounter with vocabulary mastery in English language education. By investigating these challenges, this research aims to identify common obstacles and provide insights into effective strategies for improving vocabulary acquisition. Understanding the nature of these difficulties will enable educators to develop targeted interventions that address the specific needs of students and enhance their vocabulary proficiency.

In conclusion, vocabulary mastery is a key element of language learning that significantly impacts students' academic and communicative abilities. Addressing the difficulties associated with vocabulary acquisition is essential for improving students' overall language skills and academic performance. This study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining the specific challenges faced by university students and offering practical recommendations for overcoming these obstacles.

METHOD

This research used a descriptive quantitative approach in order to answer the proposed question. According to Nassaji, H (2016) Descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. Descriptive study is describes current events and that the research questions or problems raised are based on the appreciation of present phenomena, events, or state of affairs. Quantitative research employs strategies of inquiry such as experimental and surveys, and collect data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data.

To conduct this study, the researcher employed a simple purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a technique where researchers select participants based on specific criteria or considerations relevant to the research objectives. The total student population consisted of 66 students, a number that necessitated the use of sampling to manage data collection efficiently. Therefore, the participants in this research were selected from one class of the English Language Education program at Universitas Islam Riau.

In this study, the researcher employed a vocabulary test in the form of multiple-choice questions. The test was sourced from a vocabulary test available online. This vocabulary test was designed to assess students' difficulties in mastering vocabulary. To ensure comprehensive

evaluation, the researcher used a total of 35 multiple-choice questions. The test items were crafted to measure and evaluate specific indicators related to vocabulary mastery as outlined in the operational concepts of the study. The vocabulary categories covered in the test included nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions. Students were allocated 45 minutes to complete the test, with approximately 2 minutes assigned for each question. The students' responses were analyzed using SPSS version 25 to determine patterns and levels of difficulty in vocabulary mastery. This analysis aimed to identify specific areas where students faced challenges and to provide insights into the effectiveness of their vocabulary acquisition.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data for this study was collected using Google Forms from May to June 2021. The test administered consisted of 35 multiple-choice questions, designed to assess students' knowledge across various vocabulary indicators, including nouns (N), verbs (V), adjectives (Adj), adverbs (Adv), pronouns (Pro), conjunctions (Con), and prepositions (Prep), with five questions dedicated to each indicator.

Table 1. Score of Students Test

No	Name	N	V	Adj	Adv	Pro	Con	Prep	Score	Category
1	Student 1	4	3	5	3	0	2	2	55	Fair
2	Student 2	4	5	5	4	2	5	4	80	Good
3	Student 3	4	4	4	4	3	1	3	63	Fair
4	Student 4	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	86	Excellent
5	Student 5	4	5	5	3	2	2	4	68	Good
6	Student 6	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	78	Good
7	Student 7	4	2	5	4	2	2	4	65	Fair
8	Student 8	5	5	5	5	2	2	4	77	Good
9	Student 9	5	5	5	4	4	3	4	83	Good
10	Student 10	4	2	4	4	2	2	3	60	Fair
11	Student 11	4	4	4	4	1	2	5	58	Fair
12	Student 12	5	5	5	3	3	4	4	80	Good
13	Student 13	3	4	5	2	3	2	4	68	Good
14	Student 14	2	4	5	3	3	2	3	66	Good
15	Student 15	3	4	5	2	3	2	4	68	Good
16	Student 16	4	4	5	4	4	3	3	75	Good
17	Student 17	3	4	5	2	3	2	4	68	Good
18	Student 18	5	4	4	3	5	4	4	80	Good
19	Student 19	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	88	Excellent
20	Student 20	2	4	2	1	2	0	1	32	Poor
21	Student 21	4	5	2	0	2	1	1	43	Poor
22	Student 22	3	4	5	3	2	2	2	64	Fair

23	Student 23	4	5	2	2	4	3	5	67	Good
24	Student 24	4	4	5	4	3	4	4	77	Good
25	Student 25	4	4	4	4	5	3	4	77	Good
26	Student 26	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	83	Good
27	Student 27	4	1	2	3	2	1	1	38	Poor
28	Student 28	3	4	3	5	5	4	5	79	Good
29	Student 29	2	3	3	4	3	3	3	63	Fair
30	Student 30	5	5	5	4	5	3	1	80	Good
31	Student 31	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	97	Excellent
32	Student 32	5	4	5	2	3	1	2	58	Fair
33	Student 33	4	2	5	2	3	1	1	53	Fair
	Totally	131	131	141	109	103	87	110	2277	
	Mean Score	3,96	3,96	4,27	3,30	3,12	2,63	3,33	69	Good

Based on the table above, it can be presented that 3 students got score 86-100 and categorized "excellent", 16 students score got score 66 until 85 and categorized "Good". At categorized "fair" there are 11 students got score 46 until 65, and 3 students got score 26 until 45 and categorized "Poor". As a final point, it can be concluded that most of the students categorized "good" in vocabulary test. The following is a diagram showing the result students difficulties in vocabulary test.

Students' Difficulties in Vocabulary Mastery

a. Students' difficulty in Answering Noun Questions

The researcher created and shared five questions are number 1 until number 5 to find the noun with total sample are 33 students. For the noun indicator researcher has given multiple choice test in order to make students easy to answer. Here is the table of students' scores as follow:
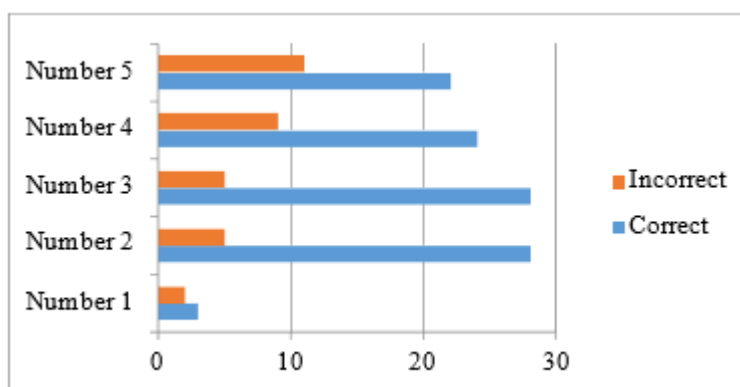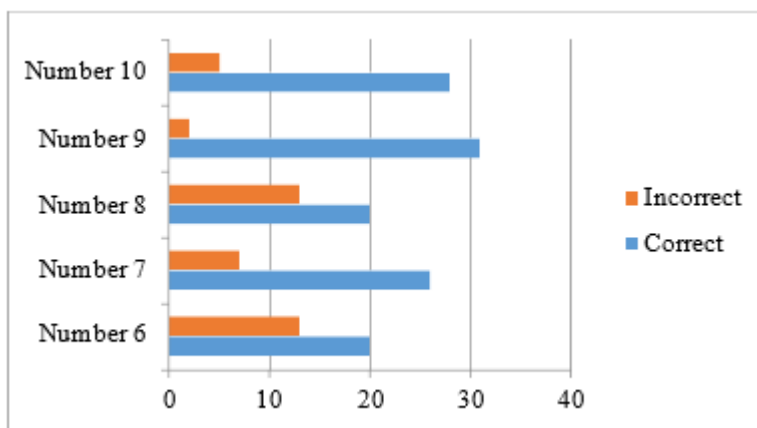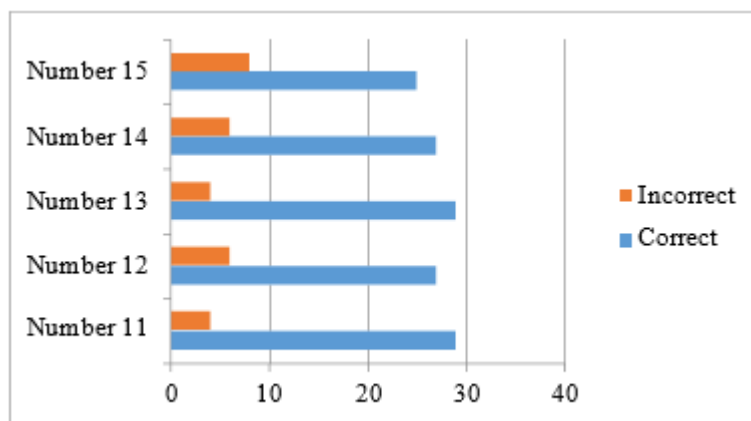

Figure 1. Students' Answers of Noun Questions

From the figure 1 shows that from 5 questions about determining Noun only 2 students who cannot answer questions number 1 correctly, its mean that questions number 1 is categorize easy question. There are 5 students who answer number 2 and number 3 questions incorrect,

its mean that questions number 2 and 3 categorize also easy questions. It also shows from 33 students there are 24 students who answer questions number 4 correctly, it can categorize easy questions. And there are 11 students can not answer questions number 5, it means that questions number 5 is categories medium questions.

b. Students' difficulty in Answering Verb Questions

The researcher created and shared five questions are number 6 until number 10 to find the verb indicators with total sample are 33 students. For the verb indicator researcher given multiple choice test in order to make students easy to answer. Here is the table of students 'scores as follow:

Figure 2. Students 'Answers of Verb Questions

From the figure 2 shows that from 5 questions about determining verb only 20 student who can answer questions number 6 and 8 correctly, its mean that categorize medium question. There are 7 students who answer number 7 correctly, its mean that categorize easy questions. It also shows from 33 students there are 31 students who answer questions number 9 correctly, it is categorize easy questions. And there are 5 students can not answer questions number 10, Its mean that categorize easy questions

c. Students' difficulty in Answering Adjective Questions

The researcher created and shared five questions are number 11 until number 15 to find the verb indicators with total sample are 33 students. For the adjective indicator researcher given multiple choice test in order to make students easy to answer. Here is the table of students 'scores as follow:
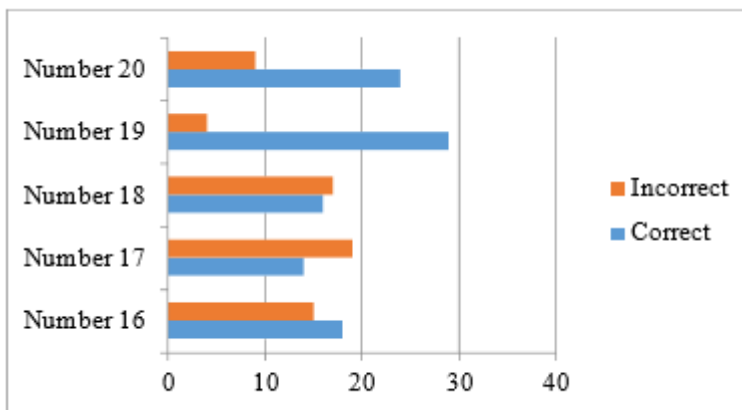
Figure 3. Students 'Answers of Adjective Questions

From the figure 3 above shows that from 5 questions about determining adjective all the questions students get under 10 answer questions incorrectly. And the researcher categorizes questions number 15 until 20 easy questions.

d. Students' difficulty in Answering Adverb Questions

The researcher created and shared five questions are number 16 until number 20 to find the verb indicators with total sample are 33 students. For the adverb indicator researcher given multiple choice test in order to make students easy to answer. Here is the table of students 'scores as follow:
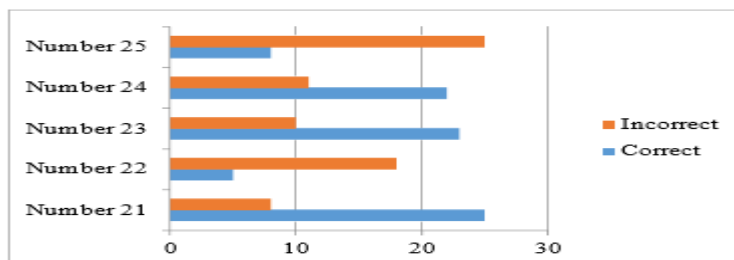

Figure 4 Students 'Answers of Adverb Questions

From the figure 4 shows that from 5 questions about determining adverb 15 students who can not answer questions number 16 correctly. There are 19 students who answer number 17 incorrectly, it and number 18 questions has 17 student who answer incorrect, and the researcher conclude is categorize medium questions. And then there are 29 students who answer questions number 19 correctly. And there are 9 students can not answer questions number 20. It is mean that questions number 19 and 20 is categorize questions.

e. Students' difficulty in Answering Pronoun Questions

The researcher created and shared five questions are number 21 until number 25 to find the Pronoun indicators with total sample are 33 students. For the pronoun indicator researcher given multiple choice test in order to make students easy to answer. Here is the table of students 'scores as follow:
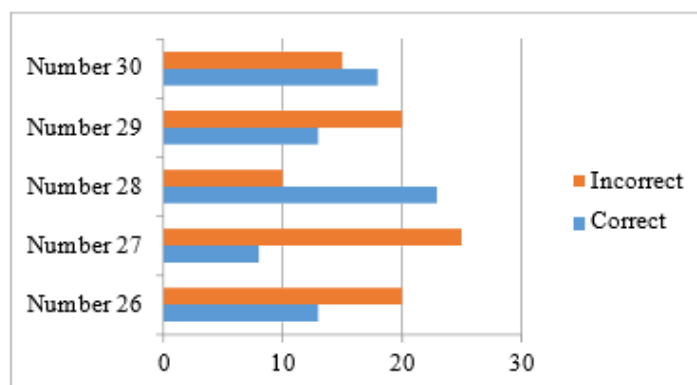

Figure 5. Students 'Answers of pronoun Questions

From the figure 5 shows that from 5 questions about determining pronoun 8 students who can not answer questions number 21 correctly, it conclude categorize easy questions. There are 18 students who answer number 22 incorrectly and at number 23 questions has 25 students who answer correct. And there are 11 students who answer questions number 24 incorrectly; the researchers categorize that questions number 22 until 24 medium questions. And there are 8 students can answer questions number 25. It is mean that questions number 25 is difficult questions.

f. Students' difficulty in Answering Conjunction Questions

The researcher created and shared five questions are number 26 until number 30 to find the conjunction indicators with total sample are 33 students. For the conjunction indicator researcher given multiple choice test in order to make students easy to answer. Here is the table of students 'scores as follow:
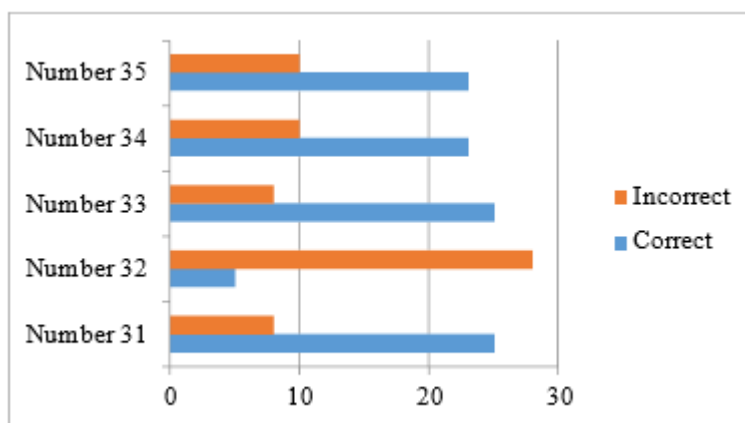

Figure 6. Students 'Answers of Conjunction Questions

From the figure 6 shows that from 5 questions about determining conjunction 13 students who can answer questions number 26 correctly. There are 8 students who answer number 27

correctly and at number 28 questions has 10 student who answer incorrect. And there are 20 students who answer questions number 29 incorrectly. And there are 15 students can not answer questions number 30. It is mean that questions number 26, 28, 29, 30 can categorize medium questions and questions number 29 is difficult questions.

g. *Students' difficulty in Answering Preposition Questions*

The researcher created and shared five questions are number 31 until number 35 to find the Preposition indicators with total sample are 33 students. For the preposition indicator researcher given multiple choice test in order to make students easy to answer. Here is the table of students 'scores as follow:

Figure 7. Students 'Answers of Preposition Questions

From the figure 7 shows that from 5 questions about determining preposition 8 students who can answer questions number 31 incorrectly. There are 5 students who answer number 32 correctly and at number 33 questions has 8 students who answer incorrect. And there are 10 students who answer questions number 34 incorrectly. And there are 10 students can not answer questions number 35. It is mean that questions number 31 and 33 categorize easy questions. And question number 34 and 35 is medium questions and questions number 32 is categorize difficult questions.

Table 2. Categorize of Students' Scores

Score	Grade	Categorized	Frequency	Percentage
86-100	A	Excellent	3 Students	09,09%
66-85	B	Good	16 Students	48,48%
46-65	C	Fair	11 Students	33,33%
26-45	D	Poor	3 Students	09,09%
Under 25	E	Fail	0 Student	0,00%
			33 Students	100,00%

Based on the table 2, it can be presented that 3 students got score 86- 100 and categorized "excellent", 16 students score got score 66-85 and categorized "Good". At categorized "fair" there are 11 students got score 46-65, and 3 students got score 26-45 and categorized "Poor". As a final point, it can be concluded that most of the students categorized "good" in vocabulary test. The following is a diagram showing the result students difficulties in vocabulary test.
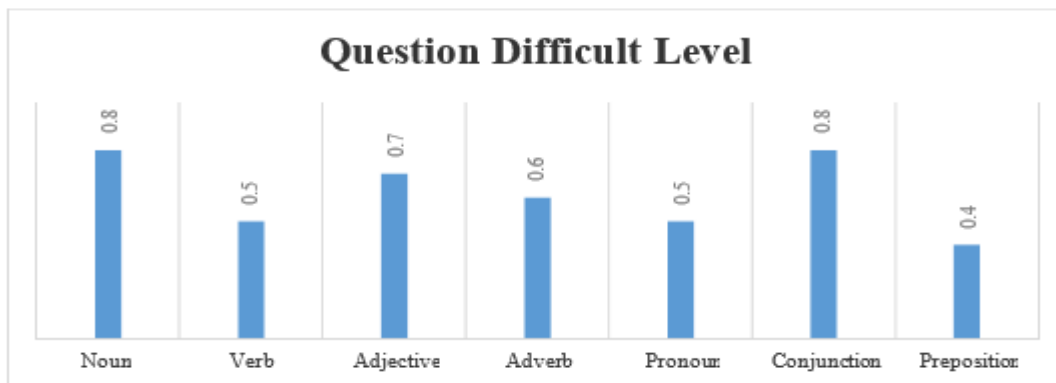

Figure 8. Question Difficult Level

Based on the figure 8, it can be seen that the questions of difficulty level about students' vocabulary mastery. The researcher presents the description for each indicators as follow: Noun question has 5 question and most of student can get answer the question number 1 until 4 but in question number 5 , 11 student cannot answer question (Do not play with the_____in the kitchen!), the students difficult to identify which one the singular or plural noun.

The researcher concludes that the level of difficulties of noun's questions is easy. From the diagram seen that noun question got (0,8) score in difficult level. It conclude that from 33 students who answer question number 1 until 5 about is 80% of students can answer noun's question correctly.

At the verb's questions 13 students got confused in answer question number 6 and number 8. In this case question number 6 tell about how to use verb if in the different subject. The students confused about when will use "I have been" and "I have". In question number 6 student got question when used platy if the subject is I (first person) and following have been (I have been ____since the morning). And in question number 8 is I have ___ this way. In verb question conclude that it is medium level (0,5). It concludes that from 33 students who answer question number 6 until 10 about is 56% of students can answer verb's question correctly.

Then in 5 questions of adjective's the students can be answer and only 6 until 10 students' answer adjective's question incorrectly. The question about analysis the situation and some students did not have analysis the question before. (Linda did not study hard, so she did not the exam). The correct answer is passing because if linda study hard so she can success at the exam. From the diagram seen that adverb question got 0,7 score in difficult level. It concludes

that from 33 students who answer question number 11 until 15 about is 75% of students can answer adjective's questions correctly.

At adverb's questions almost 20 peoples cannot answer question number 15 until 18 correctly. In question tell about how to use adverb in the middle and end of sentence. We can see at question number 17 (He doesn't care for anything and _____ looks happy every time). The students cannot know how to used adverb of time to connecting the 2 sentences. In adverb's question conclude that it is medium (0,6) level. It can clouded that from 33 students who answer question number 15 until 20 about is 61% of students can answer adverb's questions correctly.

Almost the students cannot answer correctly question number 25 at pronouns categorized. The question about (You must trust yourself) the students confused which one is reflexive pronoun in the sentence. And 25 of student cannot answer question number 21(Sherry's mother asked __not to open the door for strangers) the question tell about how to replace sherry in sentences and the students know that sherry replace to 'her'. In pronoun's question conclude that it is medium (0,5) level. It concludes that from 33 students who answer question number 20 until 25 about is 56% of students can answer pronoun's questions correctly.

At the diagram, it can see that in conjunction's questions the student cannot answer correctly question number 26. _____ being very clever, my cousin never boasting about it. The students confused when used and, or etc. The level of conjunction's question is medium (0,8) level. It concludes that from 33 students who answer question number 26 until 30 about is 80% of students can answer conjunction's questions correctly.

Lastly, preposition's got the lower score in difficult level, the score is 0,4 although is difficult level. 13 students who can answer questions number 31 correctly. There are 8 students who answer number 32 correctly and at number 33 questions has 10 students who answer incorrect. And there are 20 students who answer question number 34 incorrectly. And there are 15 students cannot answer question number 35. The students difficult which one preposition can be used in first and middle sentence. Question number 35 is (We arrived ____at six o'clock). It concludes that from 33 students who answer question number 31 until 35 about is 42% of students can answer preposition's questions correctly.

As the final point, the questions difficult level of the first year at FKIP Universitas Islam Riau in vocabulary test was categorized as "Good". Furthermore, from the result of these data, it can be concluded that the most difficult questions faced by students in vocabulary test is on preposition's questions. Based on the data analysis, the difficult questions were number 25, 32, and 35.

Discussion

The findings of this research reveal several key insights into students' difficulties with vocabulary mastery in English Language Education at the university level. These insights are closely related to the previous research in the field.

The results of this study, which indicated varying levels of difficulty across different vocabulary categories (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions), align with the theoretical framework proposed by Schmitt (2000). Schmitt's framework emphasizes the distinction between receptive vocabulary (words that learners recognize and understand when reading or listening) and productive vocabulary (words that learners can use effectively in speaking or writing). In our study, students demonstrated particular challenges with prepositions, pronouns and certain verbs, suggesting difficulties with both receptive and productive aspects of these vocabulary items. This finding supports Schmitt's assertion that mastering different types of vocabulary requires targeted instructional strategies.

The difficulty students experienced with prepositions and verbs underscores the importance of contextual understanding in vocabulary acquisition. Hulstijn (2001) highlights that understanding the meaning of a word is not enough; learners must also grasp its contextual usage and nuances. Our study found that students struggled more with prepositions, which often require precise contextual usage, corroborating Hulstijn's claim. This difficulty suggests that students may not fully understand how to apply these vocabulary items in various contexts, reflecting a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) argue that motivation significantly influences vocabulary learning outcomes. Our findings, which indicate those students' difficulties are associated with certain vocabulary categories, can be linked to motivational factors. Students who are less motivated may invest less effort in learning and practicing challenging vocabulary, which could explain their lower performance in specific areas. This aligns with Gardner and Lambert's assertion that motivation affects language learning success and suggests that increasing student engagement could improve vocabulary mastery.

Additionally, Nation (2001) highlights that effective vocabulary learning involves both acquisition and retention of words. The difficulties our students faced, particularly with complex vocabulary items like prepositions, pronouns and verbs, align with Nation's emphasis on the need for continuous practice and reinforcement. This suggests that incorporating frequent review and practice into vocabulary instruction could help address the challenges identified in our study.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the difficulties faced by university students in mastering English vocabulary. Based on the data analysis, several key conclusions can be drawn. Students

Harselina[1], Andi Idayani[2], Betty Sailun[3]
J-SHMIC : Journal of English for Academic
Vol 11, No 2, August 2024

frequently struggle with remembering and using new vocabulary in appropriate contexts. This issue is attributed to the lack of effective vocabulary learning methods and insufficient opportunities for ongoing practice. In this context, students' difficulties with vocabulary mastery primarily involve prepositions, verbs, and pronouns. In contrast, adverbs, and adjectives, nouns and conjunctions tend to be less challenging. Among these, questions related to prepositions are particularly difficult for students. Of the 35 questions presented, first-year students of English Language Education at Universitas Islam Riau found questions 25, 32, and 35 to be the most challenging.

Several factors contribute to these difficulties, including inadequate learning strategies, limited active engagement with English outside the classroom, and a lack of motivation and awareness regarding the importance of vocabulary mastery in English. Difficulties in vocabulary mastery negatively affect students' academic abilities, including reading comprehension, writing skills, and speaking proficiency in English. This leads to suboptimal learning outcomes and can influence their performance in class.

To address these challenges, it is recommended to adopt more interactive and contextual vocabulary teaching methods. Utilizing educational technology and language learning apps can enhance learning effectiveness. Additionally, encouraging self-practice and creating supportive learning environments can help students overcome the difficulties they face.

REFERENCES

Alizadeh,I, (2016) *Vocabulary teaching techniques: A review of common practices,* 23. Lahijan Branch, Islamic University, Lahijan, Iran. Vol 1, No, 1.

Alqahtani, M. (2015). *The Importance of Vocabulary in Language Learning and How to Be Taught*. International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 27(1), 67-76.

Astuti, D. S. (2014). *The Role of Vocabulary in Language Learning: A Review*. Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning, 12(1), 45-58.

Bai,Z, (2018)*An analysis of English vocabulary learning strategies,* 854. Shanxi Normal University,Linfen,China.

Bahri,S, & Sugeng,B, (2008) *Difficulties in writing in vocabulary and grammar.*

Cunningham, A. E., & Stanovich, K. E. (1998). *What Reading Does for the Mind*. American Educator, 22(1), 8-15.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research : Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* 143.New York: EdwardsBrothers, Pearson.

Eysenck, M. W., & Keane, M. T. (2015). *Cognitive Psychology: A Student's Handbook*. Psychology Press.

Edmons,E, & Candy,L, (2018) *Practice-based research in the creative arts*, 63.

Effendi,M,S, & Rokhyati,U, (2017) *A study on grammar teaching an English education department in an EFL context,* 43. Universitas Ahmad Dahlan.

Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitudes and Motivation in Second-Language Learning*. Newbury House Publishers.

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools*. Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Hulstijn, J. H. (2001). *Intentional and Incidental Second Language Vocabulary Learning: A Reappraisal of Elaboration, Rehearsal, and Automaticity*. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and Second Language Instruction* (pp. 258-286). Cambridge University Press.

Jacobs,T, & Gheyle.N. (2017) *Content Analysis: a short overvie. Ghent University.*

Maskor,Z,M & Baharudin,H, (2016) *Receptive vocabulary knowledge or productive vocabulary knowledge in writing skill,* 263. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Muchtar,N, (2017) *Nine part of speech in teaching English to electrical engineering students,* 541. Politeknik Negeri Ujung Pandang.

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. ASCD.

Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge University Press.

Nassaji,H, (2016) *Qualitative and descriptive research*, 129. University of Victoria.

Panggabean,S,B, (2016) *Students' problems in learning conjunction*, 2. FDK UINSU Lectures.

Popescu,F, (2001) *The verb and the phrase in contemporary English*, 14. Universitatea Dunarea de Jos Galati.

asim,S, (2012) *A study of adjective and adjectival phrase*,4. Al-Muntansiriya University.

Qvortrup,A, Wiberg,M, (2016) *On the definition of learning,* 22. University Presss of Southern Denmark.

Rahmatillah, (2015) *A study on students' difficulties in leraningvocabulary*, 72. Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Raden Intan Lampung.

Read, J. (2000). *Assessing Vocabulary*. Cambridge University Press.

Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Stockwell, G. (2010). *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Diversity in Research and Practice*. Palgrave Macmilla

Schafer,M, & Maienborn,C, (2011) *Adverb and adverbials*, 1392. University of Tuebingen.

Subhi,S,N, (2015) *Investigating study of an English spelling error,* 235. School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities.

Suharsimi, (2002) *Prosedur penelitian, suatu pendekatan praktek.* 203. Jakarta: PT Rineka Cipta.

Syarifudin,A, & Marbun,R, (2017) *An analysis on the students' vocabulary mastery a descriptive study*, 2. FKIP Untan.

Thiruvengadam,P, (2018) *A review of vocabulary teaching techniques for young learners,* 53. Sri Candrasekharendra Saraswati Viswa Mahavidyalaya University.

Wahyudi,D, (2016) *Vocabulary mastery by using flash card,* 6. Jurnal Ilmiah FKIP Universitas Subang.

Zulfahri,A, & Marhum,M (2016) *Improving vocabulary mastery through meaningful alphabet technique*, 48.Pascasarjana University