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THE USE OF VOCABULARY.COM TO INCREASE STUDENTS VOCABULARY MASTERY: A CASE STUDY OF THE FIRST GRADE STUDENTS OF SMAN 3 PATI

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Abstract

This study examines the use of Vocabulary.com to improve vocabulary mastery among first-grade students of SMA N 3 Pati. It uses a mixed-methods research approach, combining quantitative pre-experimental design and qualitative interviews. Thirty-five students from Class X-9 take part in the research, which includes pre-tests and post-tests, along with two weeks of lessons using Vocabulary.com. The platform provides adaptive learning, engaging quizzes, and immediate feedback, offering an interactive learning experience. The pre-test results show low vocabulary scores, with only 10% of students meeting the target. After using Vocabulary.com, post-test results indicate significant improvement, with 80% of students achieving or exceeding the target scores. The paired sample t-test gives a significance value of $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, showing a statistically significant difference in performance. The N-Gain score of 60% suggests moderate effectiveness in improving vocabulary mastery. Qualitative data reveal that the platform increases student engagement and motivation. The study concludes that Vocabulary.com is an effective tool for enhancing vocabulary learning in high school.

Keywords: vocabulary mastery, Vocabulary.com, digital learning tools.

Introduction

Vocabulary is essential for effective communication and academic achievement. It supports students in understanding texts, expressing ideas, and participating in discussions. However, conventional methods of teaching vocabulary, such as rote memorization and repetitive drills, often fail to engage students or address their individual learning needs. These methods lack the interactive and contextual elements needed for long-term retention and application.

Digital tools, such as Vocabulary.com, offer innovative solutions to these challenges. Vocabulary.com combines gamification, immediate feedback, and adaptive learning to provide a

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personalized and engaging experience. This study investigates whether Vocabulary.com helps students enhance their vocabulary skills and explores their experiences with the platform.

Literature Review

Vocabulary is a fundamental part of language learning. Research highlights its importance, explores traditional teaching challenges, and evaluates the role of digital tools in improving vocabulary acquisition.

1. The importance of vocabulary

Vocabulary is a key component of language skills, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It is essential for understanding complex texts, expressing ideas clearly, and succeeding academically. According to Nation and Newton (2020), vocabulary knowledge includes both breadth, the number of words a person knows, and depth, the understanding of meanings and uses of words. These dimensions are critical for academic and communicative success.

2. Challenges with traditional vocabulary methods

Traditional methods like word lists and drills often fail to make learning engaging or effective. Laufer and Nation (2019) explain that teaching vocabulary in isolation prevents students from understanding how words function in context, leading to poor retention. These approaches also lack personalization and immediate feedback, making it difficult for students to address specific weaknesses.

3. Learning vocabulary in context

Learning words in meaningful contexts helps students understand and retain vocabulary more effectively. Nguyen and Tran (2020) note that encountering words through reading, writing, or listening tasks allows students to grasp their meanings and applications. Contextual learning integrates vocabulary with other skills, such as reading comprehension and writing, offering a more holistic approach to language development.

4. Gamification in vocabulary learning

Gamification involves incorporating game-like elements, such as points, badges, and leaderboards, into learning activities. Mohammadi and Ghaemi (2021) find that gamification increases motivation and engagement, transforming vocabulary learning into a fun and competitive experience. This encourages students to practice regularly, which enhances retention and application of new words.

5. The importance of feedback

Immediate feedback plays a crucial role in effective learning. It helps students identify mistakes, reinforce correct answers, and understand concepts more clearly.

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Nguyen and Tran (2020) argue that platforms like Vocabulary.com, which provide real-time feedback, make learning more effective by addressing misunderstandings as they occur.

6. Adaptive learning for personalization

Adaptive learning tailors the learning experience to the individual needs of each student. Thompson and Nguyen (2023) emphasize that platforms like Vocabulary.com adjust word lists and difficulty levels based on student progress, ensuring a personalized approach. This helps students focus on areas where they need the most improvement.

7. Effectiveness of Vocabulary.com

Research shows that Vocabulary.com significantly enhances vocabulary learning. Ketola (2019) observes that students who use Vocabulary.com demonstrate notable improvements in their ability to retain and apply vocabulary. The platform's interactive and gamified approach makes it particularly effective for engaging students who struggle with traditional methods.

8. Challenges with digital tools

While digital platforms like Vocabulary.com offer many benefits, they also present challenges. Access to reliable internet and devices can be a barrier for some students. Additionally, technical issues such as glitches or slow response times can disrupt the learning process.

Method

This study uses a mixed-method approach to evaluate the effectiveness of Vocabulary.com. Quantitative data is collected through pre-tests and post-tests to measure changes in vocabulary mastery. Qualitative data is gathered through interviews to explore students' experiences with the platform. The study involves 35 first-grade students from Class X-9 at SMA N 3 Pati. Before the intervention, students take a pre-test to assess their initial vocabulary levels. They then use Vocabulary.com daily for two weeks. After the intervention, a post-test is administered to evaluate their progress. The researcher conducts semi-structured interviews with six students who achieve the highest post-test scores. These interviews focus on the students' perceptions of the platform, including its usability, effectiveness, and the challenges they face.

Finding and Discussion

The results show that Vocabulary.com significantly improves students' vocabulary mastery. The pre-test results indicate that only 10 percent of the students meet the target vocabulary level. This highlights the limited prior knowledge of the students before using the platform. After two weeks of using Vocabulary.com, the post-test results show that 80 percent of

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the students achieve or exceed the target vocabulary level. This improvement demonstrates the effectiveness of the platform in enhancing vocabulary skills within a relatively short period.

A paired sample t-test reveals a statistically significant difference in pre-test and post-test scores, with a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that the improvement is not due to chance but is directly related to the use of Vocabulary.com. The N-Gain score is 60 percent, which reflects a moderate level of effectiveness in improving vocabulary mastery.

Students report positive experiences with the platform. Many of them find the gamified elements, such as quizzes, points, and badges, motivating and enjoyable. These features make learning feel like a game rather than a traditional classroom activity, encouraging regular practice. Students also appreciate the immediate feedback provided by Vocabulary.com, which helps them identify and correct their mistakes quickly. This feedback allows them to understand word meanings more deeply and avoid repeating errors in the future.

The adaptive learning feature is another aspect that students find beneficial. The platform adjusts the difficulty level of tasks based on individual progress, ensuring that students are consistently challenged without feeling overwhelmed. This personalized approach supports students in focusing on areas where they need improvement, leading to more targeted and effective learning.

Despite these positive outcomes, some students face challenges while using Vocabulary.com. Internet connectivity issues are a common problem, particularly in rural areas where access to stable internet is limited. Additionally, occasional technical glitches, such as slow loading times, disrupt the learning process for some users. However, these challenges are not significant enough to undermine the overall effectiveness of the platform. Most students express a willingness to continue using Vocabulary.com and recommend it as a valuable tool for vocabulary learning.

The findings align with previous research on digital tools for vocabulary acquisition. Studies by Nguyen and Tran (2020) and Mohammadi and Ghaemi (2021) show that gamification, immediate feedback, and adaptive learning contribute to higher engagement and better retention. This study confirms that Vocabulary.com integrates these features effectively, making it a powerful tool for vocabulary instruction. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of contextual and interactive learning. By providing real-world examples and adaptive challenges, Vocabulary.com ensures that students not only learn new words but also understand how to use them appropriately. This approach supports the development of other language skills, such as reading comprehension and writing, which are closely linked to vocabulary mastery.

Conclusion

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This study concludes that Vocabulary.com is an effective tool for improving vocabulary mastery among first-grade students at SMA N 3 Pati. The platform significantly enhances students' vocabulary skills and motivates them to engage in regular practice. Its gamified elements, immediate feedback, and adaptive learning features create a personalized and enjoyable learning experience. While some challenges, such as internet connectivity issues, exist, they do not overshadow the platform's overall benefits. Teachers can integrate Vocabulary.com into their teaching strategies to support students in building a strong vocabulary foundation. Future research can explore the long-term impact of Vocabulary.com and its application in different educational settings, particularly in schools with limited resources.

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