

Chapter I Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

In learning English, there are several skills that should be mastered by students. These are the four essential language skills that benefit students in improving English skills, such as listening, writing, speaking, and reading. These help students improve their English proficiency. However, vocabulary plays a leading role in supporting all these skills. Without vocabulary, students may struggle to understand and express ideas effectively. Vocabulary helps students to understand and use the words appropriately.

English is categorized as a foreign language in Indonesia. Learning English at an early age is often considered more effective because young learners tend to be more active and adaptable than adults. Oktavia et al. (2022) stated that English is easier to learn when learners are young because children are active learners and thinkers. This condition makes vocabulary instruction more accessible for children compared to adult learners.

Nevertheless, teaching young learners is not as simple as it may seem. Teachers need to understand their students' developmental levels to provide effective instruction. They also need to adjust their teaching methods and learning activities based on the children's needs and characteristics. Linse and Nunan (2005) emphasized that effective instruction requires teachers to adapt educational experiences to each child's developmental stage.

Young learners tend to prefer playing with their friends rather than listening to the teacher's explanation. Therefore, teachers need effective strategies to keep students engaged in the classroom, and they should create a fun, interactive, and enjoyable environment so the students can remain interested in the classroom. As stated by Oktavia et. Al (2022), they need creative and innovative teachers. However, despite the engaging teaching methods, teachers in a formal school setting often face limitations in providing individual attention to each student. In most classrooms, teachers cannot focus on one student, as they must divide their

attention among many learners with different abilities and needs. This situation can make it difficult for some students to fully understand the material. As a result, many parents take the initiative to provide additional support for their children outside of school, such as by enrolling their children in English courses. These courses are believed to help students understand the material more effectively than in a regular classroom, as they offer more focused instruction. As stated by Ramadhan et al. (2021), non-formal education is very important and plays a significant role in increasing the quality of education.

In English courses, teachers are often able to give more individual attention to each student due to the smaller number of learners in each class. The class usually consists of only five to six students, allowing the teachers to monitor students' progress more closely and provide immediate feedback. In contrast, formal school classrooms usually contain a larger number of students, which can limit the effectiveness of instruction.

Many English courses in Surabaya provide additional opportunities for students to learn English outside formal education. One of them is an after-school English program that offers supplementary English learning for young learners. This course provides additional learning opportunities for students to improve their English skills. Unlike formal schools that teach various subjects, this program mainly focuses on teaching English. The classes are taught by senior students from the English Department. In this program, students focus on learning English with a strong emphasis on improving their language skills.

To support students in developing their English skills, vocabulary becomes one of the most important aspects taught in the learning process. Vocabulary plays a crucial role because it serves as the foundation for understanding and mastering English. It helps students understand what they hear and read. It also supports their speaking and writing skills. Therefore, vocabulary mastery becomes an essential aspect of learning English for young learners.

Many studies have shown that vocabulary is important in learning English, especially for young learners. Vocabulary helps students develop skills in speaking, reading, writing, and listening (Linse & Nunan, 2005; McKay, 2008). Without

enough vocabulary, it is hard for students to communicate or understand English well.

Although there are many studies about vocabulary in formal school settings, not many researches have been done on how vocabulary is taught in nonformal places like English courses. Each learning environment could be different. They all have their own way of teaching and their own students, which can affect how the vocabulary is taught to students and how students learn vocabulary. Therefore, it is important to investigate contexts like English courses, including an after-school English Program, to gain an understanding of vocabulary instruction.

Many researchers have studied vocabulary in formal classrooms. However, few studies have focused on English courses or learning centers outside formal schools, even though many parents enroll their children in English courses to improve their English knowledge and skills. This creates a significant research gap, especially considering that many parents turn to these courses to enhance their children's English skills. Despite their growing popularity, these informal learning settings remain underexplored in research, creating a clear gap in the literature.

This study aims to explore teachers' experience in teaching vocabulary to young learners at an after-school English Program. This study focuses on the teachers' strategies, the challenges they face, and their reflections on the effectiveness of their teaching methods. While many previous studies have been conducted in formal school settings, this study highlights vocabulary instruction in an informal educational setting, namely an English course.

This research is worth conducting because it provides insights into how vocabulary is taught in English courses, which may differ from formal school practices. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective vocabulary teaching strategies, especially for young learners in informal settings. In addition, the results of this study may serve as a useful insight for English teachers, course instructors, and educators who work in similar learning environments.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the title of the thesis and the background of the study, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How do teachers at the after-school English Program describe their experiences in teaching vocabulary to young learners?
2. What strategies do teachers use in teaching vocabulary at after-school English Program to young learners at the after-school English Program?
3. What challenges do teachers face when teaching vocabulary to young learners at the after-school English Program?
4. How do teachers reflect on the effectiveness of their vocabulary instruction based on their teaching experiences?

1.3 Research Objectives

In alignment with the research questions, this study aims to:

To explore teachers' experiences in teaching vocabulary to young learners at the after-school English Program.

1. Explore teachers' experiences in teaching vocabulary to young learners at the after-school English Program.
2. Identify the strategies used by teachers to enhance vocabulary learning among young learners.
3. Understand the challenges teachers faced when delivering vocabulary teaching.
4. Explore how teachers reflect on the effectiveness of their vocabulary instruction based on their teaching experiences.

1.4 Theoretical framework

This study is guided by three main theories: the Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) theory, Nation's Theory of Vocabulary Learning, and Narrative Inquiry Theory. These theories provide the conceptual foundation for understanding how vocabulary should be taught to young learners and how teachers' experiences can be explored through their personal narratives. The TEYL theory explains the characteristics and learning needs of young learners, Nation's

Theory of Vocabulary Learning provides the principles of effective vocabulary instruction, and Narrative Inquiry Theory offers a framework for understanding teachers' experiences, teaching strategies, challenges, and reflections. Together, these theories support the analysis of vocabulary instruction in an after-school English program.

The Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) theory explains that young learners (aged 2–13) are naturally curious and energetic, and they learn best through play and interaction. According to Linse and Nunan (2005), children enjoy stories, songs, and games that match their imagination and active behaviour. Young learners also tend to have short attention spans and learn more effectively when they actively participate in the learning process. Therefore, teachers need to create interactive and engaging classroom activities that match children's characteristics and developmental levels.

Nation's Theory of Vocabulary Learning explains that vocabulary should be taught through both direct and indirect instruction (Nation, 2001). Direct vocabulary instruction involves teaching word meanings, pronunciation, spelling, and usage explicitly, while indirect vocabulary instruction develops naturally through stories, songs, games, and classroom interaction. Nation (2001) also emphasizes the importance of repeated exposure, visual support, and meaningful communication to help learners understand and retain new vocabulary. These principles are particularly beneficial for young learners, who learn effectively through visual aids, repetition, and interactive learning experiences.

Narrative Inquiry Theory, developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), also informs the research approach used in this study. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach that explores individuals' experiences through their personal stories. It is relevant to the present study because it helps the researcher understand teachers' experiences in teaching vocabulary to young learners, including the strategies they use, the challenges they face, and their reflections on the effectiveness of their instruction.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant both in theory and practice, especially in the field of English language education for young learners; it provides valuable insights for various stakeholders, including teachers, educational institutions, and future research.

For Teachers, this study helps English teachers understand effective strategies for teaching vocabulary to young learners. By exploring real classroom experiences in an after-school English Program, teachers can reflect on and improve their teaching practices to better engage students and meet their learning needs.

For Educational institution, this can be used by institutions like after-school English programs and similar language learning centers to evaluate and strengthen their instructional approaches. Understanding common challenges and successful teaching techniques can help them provide better training and resources for their teaching staff.

For Future Research, this study contributes to the growing literature on vocabulary instruction for young learners in EFL (English as Foreign Language) contexts; it may serve as a reference or starting point for other researchers who wish to explore similar topics or conduct further studies in different settings.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1. Narrative

According to Barkhuizen (2013), narratives are stories or personal accounts that describe experiences, events, or reflections. In this study, Instructors' narratives describe experiences, events, or reflections shared by the instructors about their experiences in teaching vocabulary to young learners. These narratives are used to understand the teaching strategies they used, the challenges they face, and they reflection on the effectiveness of their vocabulary instruction.

2. Vocabulary Instructions

According to Thornbury (2002), vocabulary instruction refers to the methods, strategies, and activities used by teachers to help learners understand, remember, and use new words effectively. In this study, vocabulary instruction

refers to the process of teaching English vocabulary to young learners in an after-school English program through various teaching strategies and classroom activities.

3. Young Learners

According to Cameron (2001), young learners are children who are in the early stages of cognitive and language development and learn best through meaningful and interactive activities. In this study, young learners refer to the children who participate in the after-school English program and receive vocabulary instruction from the instructors.

4. Teaching Strategies

According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), teaching strategies refer to the methods and techniques used by teachers to facilitate students' learning. In this study, teaching strategies refer to the approaches and classroom activities used by instructors to teach vocabulary to young learners.

5. After-School English Program

An After-School English Program is a nonformal learning program conducted outside regular school hours that provides additional opportunities for students to learn English. In this study, it refers to the English course where the research was conducted and where the instructors teach vocabulary to young learners.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on exploring how teachers at the after-school English Program teach vocabulary to young learners. It also examines their methods, strategies, challenges, and reflection on the effectiveness of their vocabulary instruction. This study aims to gather insight directly from teachers through interviews. The participants of this study are limited to three teachers who are actively teaching at the after-school English Program.

This study is limited to a small number of teachers at the after-school English Program, consisting of only three teachers. So, the result might not apply to other schools or institutions. The study is conducted in a single setting, namely

Wimakids. The study only focuses on vocabulary instruction, not other language skills such as reading, speaking, writing, or grammar. The data are based on teachers' personal experience and opinions, which may be subjective.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This Study is organized into 5 main chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study, the current state of the topic, the rationale, research question, objectives, significance of the study, scope and limitations, and definition of key terms.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter discusses the relevant theories and previous studies related to vocabulary instruction, young learners, teaching strategies, and teacher narratives.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology that is used in the study. It presents the research design, the setting and participants, the data collection methods, and the data analysis procedures.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of the study and discusses them based on the research questions and theories.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Suggestions

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study and provides suggestions for teachers and future research