

The Relationship of Vocabulary Mastery to Reading Comprehension Ability

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Abstract: Reading comprehension is a crucial skill in primary education, supporting not only academic achievement but also critical and creative thinking. However, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results indicate that Indonesian students' reading skills, particularly at the elementary school level, remain relatively low. This study aimed to determine the relationship between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension skills of fourth-grade students at SD Negeri 19 Sungai Kunyit. The study employed an ex post facto method with a sample of 30 students. Data were collected through vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension tests. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and correlation tests using SPSS IBM 27. The results showed that most students had moderate vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension skills. The results showed a positive and significant relationship between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension skills, with a correlation coefficient of 0.475 ($p = 0.008$). This finding confirms that the broader a student's vocabulary, the higher their reading comprehension level. Therefore, a more varied approach to vocabulary development is needed to further develop students' literacy skills.

Keywords: reading comprehension, vocabulary mastery

Introduction

Reading is one of the important language skills, besides listening, writing, and speaking (Mustamiroh & Octaviani, 2022), which can be a benchmark for a person's intelligence (Ilmiah et al., 2022). In the era of globalization, the ability to read comprehension is essential so that people can easily acquire knowledge and absorb information quickly and accurately (Ahmad Wahyudi & Nanang Abdul Jamal, 2022; Isfihananti, 2016; Sakinah & Ibrahim, 2023). Mastering the right reading strategies and effective comprehension techniques not only improves reading comprehension but also trains critical and creative thinking skills in generating new ideas (Andriani, 2021; Romansyah, 2017) and expressing them again, both orally and in writing (Ayuningrum & Herzamzam, 2022).

In Indonesian language learning at the elementary school level, reading comprehension skills are a crucial competency that significantly supports the success of the learning process (Hartati et al., 2022; Jumriah & Fitriani, 2022; Lestari et al., 2022; Susilo & Garnisya, 2018). This ability not only increases knowledge (Taufik, 2020), broadens horizons, and enhances intelligence (Mustamiroh & Octaviani, 2022; Wisuda Lubis, 2020) but also plays a role in shaping students' character (Abidin, 2012).

Based on the results of the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the reading ability of Indonesian students is relatively low (Putri & Wicaksono, 2023), especially in the aspect of reading comprehension skills in the upper grades of Elementary School (Krismanto et al., 2015). Low reading comprehension skills make students experience difficulties in the aspects of literal comprehension (determining characters, time, and place), interpretative (finding main ideas and messages), critical (summarizing the content of the reading), and creative (restating the content of the reading in their own words) (Muhammad Alawi & Wahyu Hananingsih, 2023; Murfiana et al., 2022; Restiani et al., 2022; Tutin Suhartini & Samsudin, 2023). This condition also affects the mastery of other subjects, especially mathematics, because reading comprehension is very important for solving story-based problems (Anwar, 2022; Laily, 2014). The better the mastery of reading comprehension, the more effective the students will be in solving problems (Harlin, 2015).

Several studies have shown that low reading comprehension in Indonesia is influenced by internal factors, such as low reading interest (Setyawati et al., 2021), low intelligence, motivation, and socio-emotional maturity (Melinia, 2020), and reading anxiety (Simanihuruk et al., 2022), which includes difficulties conveying thoughts, understanding story content, and finding the main idea (Muhammad Alawi & Wahyu Hananingsih, 2023). Furthermore, external factors include suboptimal classroom management, the dominance of smart students (Nugraha & Rukmi, 2014), theoretical learning (Hafna Auliya & Zulikhatin Nuroh, 2023), and monotonous teaching methods. Other influential factors include environmental factors, including school conditions

such as limited learning media (Hadid et al., 2023), inadequate reading materials, inadequate school facilities and infrastructure (Alpian & Yatri, 2022), minimal parental support (Nurmala et al., 2022), and inappropriate parenting styles (Basit et al., 2023). Similar research explains that psychological factors such as emotions and self-confidence, as well as physiological factors related to physical conditions, such as speech, hearing, and vision disorders, also influence reading comprehension skills (Salamet & Sangaji, 2025).

Based on existing literature, several internal, external, and environmental factors are known to cause low reading comprehension skills. However, vocabulary mastery is often overlooked as an internal factor that also influences this ability. Students with limited vocabulary generally have difficulty comprehending reading material because they have difficulty interpreting the meaning of words and sentences correctly (Mardayanti et al., 2025). Conversely, students with high vocabulary mastery will find it easier to understand the content of reading material because they already have a sufficient stock of vocabulary and ideas from the reading material (Perfetti, 2007).

Several research studies have shown that vocabulary mastery is closely related to reading comprehension. However, studies specifically examining this relationship at the elementary school level are still very limited. This limitation results in a lack of a clear picture of how variations in vocabulary mastery influence reading comprehension skills in the context of Indonesian language learning in elementary schools. Therefore, more focused research is needed to empirically test the contribution of vocabulary mastery to reading comprehension skills at this level so that the results can form the basis for developing more effective learning strategies.

Methods

This study used the ex post facto method, a quantitative approach used to identify relationships between variables without drawing direct causal conclusions. In this study, the variables to be studied were vocabulary mastery as the independent variable (X) and reading comprehension ability as the dependent variable (Y). This study was conducted in 2025 at SD Negeri 19 Sungai Kuyit. The sample in this study was all 30 fourth-grade students, so the sampling technique used was a total sample.

Data collection methods include tests and documentation. The test used in this study was an objective multiple-choice test for vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension skills adapted from Anjarwati (2016). This research instrument was tested through content validity assessed by experts and reliability testing using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The test given to each student consisted of 25 vocabulary mastery items and 20 reading comprehension items, which were arranged at a moderate level of difficulty and covered several cognitive domains according to the learning objectives. Each item was given a score of 1 if the student answered correctly, and students who answered incorrectly or did not answer received a score

of 0. The preparation of this multiple-choice test was based on a grid that had been designed according to the indicators of vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension skills.

Table 1. Vocabulary Mastery Test Instrument Grid

No.	Indicator	Question Number	Number of Questions
1.	Show as ordered	13, 25	2
2.	Choosing a word that matches its meaning	8, 14, 16, 18, 20, 23, 24	7
3.	Choose a synonym	1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 17, 19, 21, 22	9
4.	Choosing an antonym	9, 11, 12, 4, 5, 1, 5, 3	7
Sum			25

¹Anjarwati (2016)

Table 2. Reading Comprehension Test Instrument Grid

No.	Indicator	Question Number	Number of Questions
1.	Comprehend word meanings based on their contextual use within the discourse	2, 3, 7, 8, 13, 16, 19	7
2.	Identify the structural organization of the discourse and the connections among its components	4, 10, 18	3
3.	Identify the main ideas or key points expressed in the discourse	1,5, 6, 11, 12	5
4.	Demonstrate the ability to respond to questions with answers that are explicitly stated in the text	9, 14, 15, 17, 20	5
Sum			20

¹Anjarwati (2016)

After obtaining data from the test results, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, normality tests, and correlation tests with the help of IBM SPSS software version 27. This analysis aims to describe the distribution of data and measure the relationship between vocabulary mastery and students' reading comprehension abilities.

Results And Discussion

Descriptive analysis aims to determine the number of data (N), minimum value, maximum value, average (mean), and standard deviation of each variable. The results of the analysis on the variables of Vocabulary Mastery and Reading Comprehension Ability are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Data Analysis Results

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Hours of deviation
Vocabulary_Mastery	30	44	96	71.60	14.794
Reading_Comprehension_Ability	30	40	95	68.50	15.600
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Based on Table 3, overall, students' vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension skills are in the fairly high category. However, there are significant differences in scores between individuals, as indicated by the standard deviation values for each variable.

Furthermore, to clarify the distribution of student abilities, vocabulary mastery scores were grouped into three categories: high, medium, and low. This grouping process was based on predetermined value intervals, providing a more structured picture of the proportion of respondents. Through this classification, the frequency distribution and percentage of respondents in each category can be determined. The distribution of vocabulary mastery categories is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Distribution of Vocabulary Mastery Variable Categories

Category	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Tall	≥ 87	6	20,00 %
Keep	58 – 86	18	60,00 %
Low	≤ 57	6	20,00 %
Total		30	100 %

¹Primary Data processed, 2025

Based on Table 4, it is known that 60% of students have a moderate vocabulary mastery level, while 20% each fall into the high and low categories. These results indicate that the majority of students have a moderate vocabulary mastery level. Furthermore, the distribution of reading comprehension ability categories is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution Results of Reading Comprehension Ability Variable Category

Category	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Tall	≥ 84	6	20,00 %
Keep	54 – 83	18	60,00 %
Low	≤ 53	6	20,00 %
Total		30	100 %

¹Primary Data processed, 2025

Based on Table 5, it is known that 60% of students have reading comprehension abilities in the moderate category, while 20% each fall into the high and low categories. These results indicate that the majority of students have reading comprehension abilities at a moderate level.

After describing the variable categories, a normality test was conducted as a prerequisite for using Pearson correlation analysis to ensure that the data were normally distributed. The results of the normality test are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Normality Test Results
Tests of Normality

	Shapiro-Wilk		Itself
	Statistic	df	
Vocabulary_Mastery	.960	30	.307
Reading_Comprehension_Ability	.957	30	.260

Based on Table 6, the significance value of the Shapiro-Wilk test for both variables is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the data for both vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension are normally distributed.

After the data were normally distributed, a Pearson correlation test was conducted to determine the relationship between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension. The results of the correlation test are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Correlation Test Results
Correlations

		Vocabulary_	
		Mastery	Reading_Comprehension_Ability
Vocabulary_	Pearson	1	.475**
Mastery	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008
	N	30	30

Reading_Co	Pearson	.475**	1
mprehension	Correlation		
_Ability	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	
	N	30	30

Based on the results of the correlation test in Table 7, a correlation value of 0.475 was obtained, which indicates a positive correlation with moderate strength between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension ability, with a significance value of 0.008.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between vocabulary mastery and students' reading comprehension skills. The correlation coefficient value of 0.475 with a significance level of 0.008 (<0.05) indicates that the higher the students' vocabulary mastery, the better their reading comprehension skills.

This finding aligns with several research studies that suggest vocabulary mastery is closely related to students' reading comprehension skills (Abdi et al., 2023; Armadi, 2018; Fahrani et al., 2023). A person's ability to understand and use vocabulary indicates their level of language mastery, both receptively and productively (Kuncoro, 2017). This is reinforced by Selviana et al. (2020), who state that vocabulary is a key component in mastering language skills. Vocabulary mastery begins with recognizing written symbols and progressing to understanding their meaning. This process enables students to comprehend text content through word interpretation. The greater the quantity and quality of vocabulary mastered, the greater their language skills (Aulina, 2012). Without sufficient vocabulary, a person cannot optimize language skills, particularly in reading comprehension (Munajah, 2017).

Reading comprehension is understood as the process of obtaining information contained in a reading text (Abidin et al., 2021; Afrianti & Marlina, 2021; Somadayo, 2011) by reconstructing the meaning of the reading by integrating existing knowledge so that readers are able to grasp the main idea, important details, and the complete content of the text (Taufik, 2020). Reading activities not only focus on speed (Setyawati et al., 2021) but also emphasize comprehension and critical thinking skills (Christian Dharu & Trisnantari, 2022). In this regard, vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in supporting reading comprehension skills. Students with a broad vocabulary more easily understand the meaning and context of reading (Rullu & Bikas, 2021). Furthermore, vocabulary mastery significantly influences the ability to comprehend ideas and information in text (Walansih et al., 2023). With good reading comprehension skills, students quickly acquire information actively and enabling them to gain knowledge in a more efficient time (Alpian & Yatri, 2022).

This research demonstrates that the more vocabulary a student possesses, the better they are at comprehending reading material, identifying main ideas, and drawing conclusions. This confirms that improving reading comprehension skills is inextricably

linked to vocabulary development. Therefore, teachers need to implement effective learning strategies to enrich students' vocabulary to optimally develop their literacy skills and support academic achievement.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate a positive and significant relationship between vocabulary mastery and students' reading comprehension skills in the moderate category. Therefore, it can be concluded that the higher a student's vocabulary mastery, the better their reading comprehension. Therefore, vocabulary mastery can be used as a primary indicator in efforts to improve reading comprehension skills in elementary schools.

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