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EFFECTIVE MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS INSTRUCTION FOR ENHANCING VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN EFL STUDENTS: A STUDY AT AKM ISLAMIC SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT
Effective vocabulary acquisition is essential for meaningful interaction and comprehension in language learning, yet traditional methods like rote memorization often fall short in preparing students to apply vocabulary in diverse contexts. Addressing this gap, this study explores the potential of morphological awareness instruction, which teaches students to recognize and manipulate word structures (roots, prefixes, and suffixes) to enhance vocabulary acquisition among Indonesian EFL learners. Using a true experimental design with 60 tenth-grade students from AKM Islamic Senior High School (pseudonym), the research involved an experimental group receiving targeted morphological awareness instruction and a control group adhering to standard vocabulary memorization methods. Over four sessions, the experimental group engaged in decoding and constructing words to improve both recognition and practical vocabulary use. Post-test results analyzed through independent t-tests revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group, underscoring the effectiveness of morphological awareness techniques in promoting vocabulary retention and functional proficiency. These findings suggest that integrating morphological awareness into the EFL curriculum offers promising benefits over rote memorization, providing learners with deeper comprehension and practical vocabulary skills. While the study's promising results are limited by a single educational level and sample size, further research could extend this approach to diverse age groups and settings, assessing its adaptability and long-term impact in varied EFL contexts.
Keywords: *Vocabulary Acquisition, Morphological Awareness, EFL Education, Quantitative Study, Experimental Design*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary, alongside speech and grammar, forms one of the three foundational elements of language use. As (Peng, 2022) emphasized, successful communication in a second language (L2) hinges on a broad vocabulary, regardless of a learner's mastery of grammar or pronunciation. This view underscores the essential role of vocabulary acquisition for language learners. A strong vocabulary base is indispensable for effective interaction and comprehension in a new language, as learners without it often struggle with expressing themselves clearly and understanding others (Alqahtani, 2015).

Furthermore, a rich vocabulary enhances learners' comprehension of both spoken and written texts, thereby enabling fuller participation in conversations, academic discussions, and

daily interactions (Duff, 2019) . Through this extensive vocabulary, learners gain an ability to infer the meanings of new words from context, accelerating their language acquisition process. Vocabulary knowledge is also closely tied to reading comprehension skills, which are vital for academic success. (Kılıç, 2019) highlighted that students with a broad vocabulary engage more effectively with complex texts, thus enhancing their overall learning experience. Consequently, vocabulary acquisition is about more than learning new words; it involves understanding appropriate word use across contexts to communicate effectively. This perspective is further supported by Style et al., (2024), who noted that improper vocabulary usage can significantly hinder students' language proficiency development, emphasizing the need for targeted vocabulary instruction.

The urgency of this study stems from the limitations of traditional vocabulary instruction methods, such as rote memorization, which often fail to equip learners with practical vocabulary skills. Despite years of English education, Indonesian EFL learners commonly make basic vocabulary errors, as seen in phrases like "She very like pizza" instead of "She really likes pizza" or "I am boring in this class" rather than "I am bored in this class." These frequent errors reflect a deeper issue within instructional methods that emphasize vocabulary memorization over meaningful comprehension and practical application in real-world communication. In light of this, the Merdeka Belajar curriculum introduced in Indonesia aims to promote learner autonomy and effective communication. This curriculum shift underscores a critical need for instructional techniques that go beyond rote learning and help students apply vocabulary within context (Sofiana et al., 2024)

However, traditional methods such as focusing solely on vocabulary memorization and grammar rules often fall short of preparing students for authentic communication. These methods overlook the importance of contextual learning, which is essential for understanding how words function in real conversations and texts. The Merdeka Belajar curriculum's emphasis on learner autonomy encourages students to take ownership of their language learning journey (Kore & Tauran, 2022). Yet, to fully realize its objectives, the curriculum requires more interactive, meaningful approaches to language instruction. Studies have demonstrated that fostering students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) through varied and engaging tasks is essential to developing

oral communication skills in English (Havwini, 2019). Furthermore, adequate teacher training and consistent support are necessary to implement differentiated learning and integrate technology effectively into classrooms (Sihombing et al., 2021).

To address gaps in vocabulary instruction, this study proposes morphological awareness as a promising approach to enhance vocabulary learning. Morphological awareness centers on understanding word formation, particularly how prefixes and suffixes influence word meanings and functions (Liu et al., 2022). As Nation & Bauer (2023) suggest, this approach fosters a deeper grasp of vocabulary, enabling learners to use words more precisely in both spoken and written contexts. Furthermore, this focus on meaningful learning aligns with the Quranic principle in Al-Alaq (96:1-5), which emphasizes the importance of reading and acquiring knowledge. The verse, "Read in the name of your Lord who created," highlights reading and comprehension as foundational to learning, reinforcing the connection between knowledge acquisition and language mastery. Likewise, the command in Taha (20:114), "And say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge,'" underscores the continuous pursuit of knowledge—a principle that directly supports vocabulary acquisition as a critical component of language proficiency.

Expanding upon this, vocabulary is fundamental for achieving fluency in any language. For EFL learners, a broad vocabulary is crucial for meaningful communication. Morphological awareness, which involves breaking down words into their smallest units of meaning (morphemes), has a pivotal role in expanding vocabulary (Jornlin, 2015; Ender, 2014; Ebbers, 2017). By understanding morphemes, learners not only expand their vocabulary but also improve their ability to decode and comprehend unfamiliar words (Apel et al., 2017). Thus, morphological awareness emerges as an effective strategy for fostering long-term language development and fluency.

Several studies support the effectiveness of Morphological Awareness (MA) instruction in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. Explicit MA instruction has been consistently shown to improve learners' abilities to understand and acquire new vocabulary. For instance, Thai EFL learners who received direct morphological training demonstrated improved performance in both receptive and productive MA, resulting in enhanced vocabulary knowledge (Sukying & Matwangsaeng, 2022). Similarly, Chinese college students displayed better word-

meaning inferencing abilities after explicit morphological instruction (Zhang & Zou, 2020). Various instructional methods, such as Textual Enhancement (TE), Metalinguistic Explanation (ME), and Morpheme Recognition Task (MRT), have proven effective, with Iranian EFL learners experiencing significant gains in both morphological awareness and reading comprehension(Alfin et al., 2019).

Building on these findings, further research highlights the extensive benefits of MA instruction, which extend beyond vocabulary acquisition alone. MA instruction supports the development of vocabulary knowledge in terms of grammar, inferencing, and collocation (Yuan X and Tang X, 2024). Importantly, the positive effects of MA-based interventions are sustainable, benefiting students with reading disabilities as well. Kim H and Kim J (2022), for instance, observed that elementary students with reading difficulties showed sustained vocabulary improvements following MA instruction. These studies underscore the importance of incorporating explicit and varied MA instruction within EFL curricula to support comprehensive language proficiency.

In terms of instructional design, several key components are essential for effective MA instruction. Explicit instruction in morphological structures, especially derivational morphology and affix knowledge, significantly improves learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Amirjalili F, Jabbari A (2018) found that explicit instruction in derivational morphology greatly enhanced morphological awareness and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners. A focus on teaching affix knowledge—enabling learners to identify, decompose, and apply word parts within context—has been highlighted as critical for effective MA instruction (Zhang & Zou, 2020).

Additionally, adopting a multidimensional approach that covers both morpheme-form and morpheme-meaning knowledge is crucial for developing higher-order literacy skills like reading comprehension and writing (Zhang, 2021). The benefits of focusing on both receptive and productive skills in MA instruction are well-documented, as demonstrated by Sukying & Matwangsaeng (2022), who found that these skills significantly contribute to vocabulary growth. Integrating vocabulary instruction with morphological awareness training has also been shown to enhance vocabulary knowledge (Wang & Zhang, 2023). Collectively, these findings suggest that

sustained, targeted, and interactive MA instruction promotes long-term improvements in EFL learners' literacy skills (Hamavandi et al., 2017; Wang & Zhang, 2023).

Moreover, by focusing on practical morphological instruction, this study aligns with the Quranic principle found in Al-Alaq (96:1-5), which emphasizes knowledge acquisition as foundational to human development. Through this perspective, vocabulary learning transcends rote memorization; it becomes an active engagement in language mastery. Therefore, this research not only contributes to existing literature but also presents a timely instructional model that aligns with Indonesia's educational reforms aimed at enhancing EFL learners' language proficiency through morphological awareness techniques. The research aims to address the central question: How effective is morphological awareness instruction in promoting vocabulary development among students at AKM Islamic Senior High School?

METHOD

This study used a quantitative method to analyze the data, which involves the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data to describe phenomena. A true experimental research design was employed, specifically a posttest-only design, which allowed for rigorous control of external variables to ensure high internal validity. Experimental research is considered one of the most reliable scientific methods due to its ability to control confounding variables.

The research involved two randomly chosen groups: an experimental group that received morphological awareness instruction and a control group that followed regular English lessons without a morphological focus. Both groups consisted of 30 students each, selected from tenth-grade students at AKM Islamic Senior High School. A total of four morphology treatment sessions were conducted for the experimental group on August 20th, August 27th, and September 3rd, 2022. The post-test was administered on September 10th, 2022. Mrs. R, the English teacher at the school, assisted as a co-investigator and provided the descriptive text materials used in both groups. The lessons in the experimental group were designed to enhance students' morphological awareness, focusing on how affixes and morphemes alter word meanings and structures.

The research instrument was a post-test comprising multiple-choice questions based on descriptive text material. Several measures ensured the instrument's validity and reliability. Content validity was achieved by aligning the test with the basic competencies of descriptive text

material for tenth-grade students. Construct validity was confirmed through consultation with Mrs. R and a lecturer specializing in morphology. Item validity was assessed using Point-Biserial correlation, and a try-out was conducted to test the validity of the questions, resulting in 36 out of 50 questions being valid. The instrument's reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with the 36 valid questions showing a very strong correlation level (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.899).

The data collection process included observing the school environment, randomly selecting participants, preparing materials, implementing the morphological treatment, administering a post-test, and conducting normality tests. Data analysis was performed using an independent t-test to identify any significant differences in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. The results showed a significant difference, confirming the effectiveness of morphological awareness instruction in improving vocabulary acquisition among senior high school students at AKM Islamic Senior High School. Pseudonyms were used for the school's name, the teacher's name, and the initials of the students to maintain confidentiality and protect privacy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive Data Analysis of Experimental Group's Post-test

The post-test, conducted on September 10th, aimed to assess the vocabulary knowledge of students in the experimental group after receiving morphological awareness instruction. The test comprised 30 vocabulary questions sourced from descriptive text materials. The students' scores ranged from a minimum of 40 to a maximum of 88. The highest score of 88 was achieved by AN, while the lowest score of 40 was obtained by RS. Other notable scores included DK and IR who both scored 64, DA, NR, UN, QS, LL, and another QS who all scored 76, VN and GA who scored 58, PW with 67, DS, PT, and DR who each scored 82, QI, PI, PD, WK, and LP who all scored 73, IH and IS with scores of 46 and 43 respectively, and DV who scored 85. Additionally, EN scored 61, MN 49, CG 64, and PA 82.

A more detailed analysis revealed that 7 students scored between 40 and 60: IH, RS, GA, IS, EN, MN, and QS. Seventeen students scored between 60 and 80: DK, DA, NR, UN, PW, QI, QS, PI, PD, WK, CG, LP, QS, DV, and IR. Six students scored above 80: AN, DS, PT, DR, DV, and PA. The mean score for the group was 68.4, indicating the average performance level. The median and mode scores were both 73, reflecting that the majority of students scored around this

value. The standard deviation was 12.77, signifying a relatively low spread of scores around the mean. This low variability suggests that the morphological awareness treatment had a uniform positive impact on the students' vocabulary skills, leading to consistent performance among the group.

Descriptive Data Analysis of Control Group's Post-test

The control group's posttest, conducted on the same day with the same vocabulary questions but without the morphological awareness treatment, revealed a different pattern of results. The scores in this group ranged from a low of 28 to a high of 85. The lowest score was achieved by RM, while the highest score was obtained by DN. Other notable scores included SA who scored 37, EN and another EN who scored 61, IN, OS, and CW who scored 49, UA who scored 76, PD, DV, QA who scored 40, DA and another DA who scored 40, DS who scored 58, GI who scored 58, QK who scored 55, AD and KD who scored 52, PR who scored 82, VD who scored 73, QA who scored 79, PS who scored 34, and another QK who scored 34.

A detailed analysis showed that 9 students scored between 20 and 40: SA, OS, ZL, RM, KW, QA, DA, another DA, and PS. Twelve students scored between 40 and 60: EN, IN, DV, another EN, PL, QK, DS, GI, AD, KD, CW, and another QK. Four students scored between 60 and 80: UA, VD, PL, and another VD. Five students scored above 80: DN, PD, PL, PR, and another DN. The mean score for the control group was 53.8, indicating lower average performance compared to the experimental group. The median score was 52, and the mode was 49, indicating a central tendency around these values. The higher standard deviation of 17.343 suggests a wider spread of scores around the mean, pointing to more variability in students' performance. This greater variability indicates that the standard descriptive material instruction was less effective in consistently improving the students' vocabulary skills compared to the morphological awareness treatment.

The experimental group demonstrated higher average performance and more consistent scores, highlighting the effectiveness of the morphological awareness instruction in enhancing students' vocabulary knowledge. Conversely, the control group showed lower average performance and greater score variability, suggesting the need for more effective instructional strategies to improve vocabulary skills consistently.

Normality Testing

To ensure the suitability of applying parametric statistical methods in this study, it was necessary to confirm whether the data exhibited a normal distribution. Parametric tests, such as the independent t-test used in this research, rely on the assumption that the data being analyzed is normally distributed. Without this confirmation, the results of these tests could be called into question, leading to inaccurate interpretations of the findings. Therefore, testing for normality was a critical step following the administration of the post-tests to both the experimental and control groups.

The Shapiro-Wilk test was chosen as the method for assessing normality. This test is particularly useful for sample sizes that are considered small to medium, which made it ideal for this study, involving fewer than 100 participants. The choice of the Shapiro-Wilk test is supported by its effectiveness in detecting departures from normality, even in relatively smaller datasets, ensuring that the results of this research are robust. The analysis was conducted using SPSS 25 software, a widely recognized statistical tool that provides reliable outputs for such tests. The Shapiro-Wilk test determines whether data are normally distributed based on the significance value (p-value). Specifically, a p-value greater than 0.05 suggests that the data follow a normal distribution, whereas a p-value less than 0.05 would indicate that the data deviate from normality.

For the experimental group, the Shapiro-Wilk test produced a p-value of 0.061, and for the control group, it returned a p-value of 0.065. Since both p-values are greater than the critical threshold of 0.05, the results indicate that the data from both the experimental and control groups conform to the assumption of normal distribution. This finding is crucial because it justifies the use of parametric statistical analyses, ensuring that the methods chosen for data comparison, such as the t-test, are appropriate and valid for this dataset.

Given that the data were found to be normally distributed, the next steps in the analysis can proceed with confidence that the comparisons between the groups will yield valid and reliable results. Without this verification, any further statistical tests might have been subject to bias, compromising the overall reliability of the study. The normal distribution of data allows for a more precise comparison of the post-test scores between the two groups and strengthens the conclusions drawn from this research.

The verification of normality not only confirms the appropriateness of the parametric tests used but also ensures the credibility of the subsequent analyses. By confirming that the data align with the normal distribution assumptions, the study provides a solid foundation for comparing the effects of morphological awareness instruction on vocabulary acquisition in the experimental group with the results from the control group. This critical step enhances the robustness of the research methodology and validates the statistical approach chosen for analyzing the data.

In light of these normality test results, the post-test data from both the experimental and control groups were deemed suitable for parametric testing. This validation plays a pivotal role in the study, as it assures that the research findings, particularly those concerning the impact of morphological awareness instruction on students' vocabulary development, are grounded in sound statistical principles. The accuracy and reliability of these results are thus significantly reinforced, allowing for meaningful conclusions to be drawn about the effectiveness of the instructional intervention.

Independent T-Test and Hypothesis Testing

We performed an independent t-test to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in mean scores between the experimental and control groups.

Table 1. Results of the independent t-test.

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Post-test result	Equal variances assumed	3.203	.079	3.713	58	.000	14.600	3.932	6.729	22.471
	Equal variances not assumed			3.713	53.302	.000	14.600	3.932	6.714	22.486

The test results are displayed in two scenarios: one assuming equal variances between the groups, and the other assuming unequal variances. The Levene's test for equality of variances produced a significance value of 0.079, which is higher than the threshold of 0.05. This indicates that the assumption of equal variances holds, allowing the subsequent analysis to proceed based on the row labeled "equal variances assumed."

The t-test analysis yielded a significance value of 0.000, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_a). This confirms that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups.

Thus, it is evident that the students who received morphological awareness instruction achieved notably higher scores on the vocabulary post-test than those who followed traditional instruction methods. The consistently higher performance in the experimental group reinforces the effectiveness of morphological awareness instruction in enhancing vocabulary acquisition. This conclusion is further corroborated by the significant difference in average scores, as demonstrated by the t-test (p-value < 0.05), underscoring the positive influence of morphological awareness on students' vocabulary development.

DISCUSSION

This study took place at AKM Islamic Senior High School, focusing on evaluating the effect of morphological awareness instruction on enhancing students' vocabulary acquisition. The participants included 60 tenth-grade students, selected randomly and divided into two groups: experimental and control. Mrs. R, an English teacher at the school, participated as a co-investigator and assigned the X.12 class as the experimental group, while X.1 served as the control group. The experimental group received instruction emphasizing morphological awareness techniques, whereas the control group continued with standard English lessons.

Following the instructional period, both groups were given a post-test to measure their vocabulary proficiency. The findings indicated a notable difference in performance between the two groups. The experimental group recorded a mean score of 68.40, whereas the control group averaged 53.80. An independent t-test further validated the statistical significance of this difference, yielding a p-value of 0.000. These results suggest that morphological awareness instruction significantly improved the vocabulary acquisition of the students in the experimental group.

The success of morphological awareness instruction is rooted in several critical aspects. First, it emphasizes a direct focus on teaching students about word structures, including elements like roots, prefixes, and suffixes. This approach equips learners with the ability to break down unfamiliar words, which not only enhances memory retention but also improves their ability to apply vocabulary effectively. Unlike the conventional method of rote memorization, this technique encourages students to deduce word meanings through an understanding of their morphological

components, fostering a more comprehensive and functional grasp of vocabulary, as emphasized by (Zhang & Zou, 2020).

Second, the focused and repetitive nature of morphological training is essential in solidifying students' understanding of word structures. Continuous exposure to these principles in various contexts helps learners internalize word patterns, allowing them to recall and use vocabulary more confidently and accurately in both written and spoken communication (good et al., 2014). As Karima & Hellalet (2022) points out, this process not only familiarizes students with how words are formed but also enhances their ability to retain vocabulary over time. Additionally, the structured design of morphological instruction enables learners to break down complex words into simpler parts, making it easier to acquire new vocabulary (Obeka, 2024). This method moves beyond simple memorization, providing students with a deeper understanding of language that they can apply effectively in diverse communication settings.

Moreover, the process of analyzing word structures actively engages students in critical thinking. As highlighted by Manyak et al., (2018), students are encouraged to explore how prefixes, suffixes, and roots interact to form meaning, fostering both their linguistic and cognitive skills. Ningsih & Masrizal (2016) emphasize that such analytical involvement not only enhances language abilities but also improves cognitive processes related to problem-solving and recognizing patterns. This deeper engagement leads to more robust learning outcomes, as it involves active manipulation of language elements rather than passive absorption. The experimental group's superior performance, compared to the control group, further validates the effectiveness of this approach. As pointed out by Jasim & Yahya (2024), fostering analytical thinking in language education promotes not only better vocabulary retention but also equips students with the skills to independently approach and decipher new words.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated the effectiveness of morphological awareness instruction in improving vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. For instance, Sukying & Matwangsaeng (2022) found that Thai EFL learners who received direct morphological training showed improvements in both receptive and productive vocabulary skills. Similarly, Zhang & Zou (2020) reported that Chinese EFL learners enhanced their word-meaning inferencing abilities after receiving explicit morphological instruction. Our

study's results align with these findings, confirming the positive impact of morphological awareness instruction.

Additionally, Alfin et al., (2019) emphasized the positive impact of instructional techniques like Textual Enhancement and Metalinguistic Explanation on improving students' understanding of morphology and their reading comprehension. The findings of this study align with these conclusions, as the experimental group, having undergone systematic instruction in morphological awareness, achieved notably better outcomes than the control group.

However, unlike some previous studies that have explored the impact of morphological awareness instruction on other aspects of language learning, such as grammar and reading comprehension (Yuan X and Tang X, 2024), our study focused solely on vocabulary acquisition. While the scope of this research was limited to vocabulary, it is worth considering whether similar positive impacts could be observed in other areas of language proficiency if the same instructional approach were applied. Future studies might explore these broader implications.

The theoretical framework of morphological awareness aligns with the findings of this study. Students who understand how morphemes, such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes, combine to form words are better equipped to decode and analyze unfamiliar vocabulary. For example, students in the experimental group were encouraged to break down words into their morphemic components during instruction, which allowed them to infer the meanings of new words and manipulate affixes to create new ones. This process proved to be more effective than the traditional rote memorization method used with the control group, as demonstrated by the higher average scores of the experimental group.

The outcomes of this research hold significant relevance for both theoretical and practical applications. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings affirm the importance of morphological awareness in vocabulary development, strengthening the argument for instructional approaches that emphasize understanding word structures. In terms of methodology, the study validates the impact of direct morphological instruction on vocabulary enhancement. Practically, the results encourage language educators to integrate morphological awareness techniques into their teaching methods, thereby fostering better vocabulary retention and improving overall language proficiency.

This study provides strong evidence that morphological awareness instruction significantly improves vocabulary acquisition among senior high school students. Teaching students to recognize and manipulate word structures equips them with the skills needed to decode and understand new vocabulary. To maximize the benefits of vocabulary learning, educators should consider integrating morphological awareness techniques into their language teaching strategies, thereby enhancing students' language development and overall academic success.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The long-held assumption that traditional methods like rote memorization are the most effective way to improve students' vocabulary skills has been called into question through this study. The findings demonstrate that morphological awareness instruction provides a far more impactful approach to vocabulary acquisition. Understanding word structures, such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes, enables students to interpret and retain new vocabulary with greater efficiency. Beyond memorization, morphological awareness allows students to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words through morphemic analysis, leading to deeper comprehension.

In addition to challenging traditional approaches, this research contributes significantly to the field of language education, particularly within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. It presents a fresh perspective on vocabulary instruction, showing that methods centered on morphological awareness yield better results compared to conventional memorization techniques. This opens the door for educators to adopt more structured, effective teaching strategies that equip students to grasp and apply vocabulary in more meaningful, real-world contexts.

However, it is important to acknowledge the study's limitations. Conducted in a single institution with a relatively small sample size, the results may not be fully generalizable to a wider population. Moreover, as the research focused exclusively on senior high school students, the findings may not translate easily to other educational levels, such as elementary or tertiary settings. Future research should aim to include more diverse samples across different age groups and educational stages to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of morphological awareness instruction.

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