

The Influence Of Using Short Stories on Students' Vocabulary Mastery At The Eighth Grade Students of SMPN 1 Bulukumba

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of using short stories on students' vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Bulukumba. Vocabulary is one of the most essential components of language learning, as it supports students' ability to understand, communicate, and develop other language skills. However, many students experience difficulties in acquiring and retaining vocabulary due to limited exposure to meaningful language contexts. Short stories are considered an effective instructional medium because they provide authentic language input, contextualized vocabulary, and engaging learning experiences that can enhance students' understanding and retention of new words.

This research employed a pre-experimental design using a one-group pre-test and post-test approach. The population of the study consisted of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Bulukumba. The sample was selected using a total sampling technique and involved 25 students. Data were collected through multiple-choice vocabulary tests administered before and after the implementation of short-story-based learning activities. The tests were designed to measure students' vocabulary mastery and determine the effectiveness of short stories as a teaching medium.

The results of the study revealed a significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the treatment. The mean score of the pre-test was 59.6, while the mean score of the post-test increased substantially to 90.4. Furthermore, the statistical analysis showed that the calculated t-test value was 10.14, which was higher than the t-table value of 2.06. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected

and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. These findings indicate that the use of short stories had a positive and significant effect on students' vocabulary mastery. Therefore, short stories can be considered an effective and engaging teaching medium for improving vocabulary learning among junior high school students.

Keywords: Short Story, Vocabulary Mastery, Vocabulary Learning

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of language learning, serving as the foundation for students' proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Ningsih et al., 2025; Suciati et al., 2024). A strong vocabulary enables learners to comprehend written texts, express ideas effectively, and engage in meaningful communication. Research has consistently demonstrated that vocabulary knowledge is one of the strongest predictors of overall language proficiency and academic achievement among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Webb & Nation, 2017; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). However, vocabulary acquisition remains one of the major challenges for junior high school students, particularly those learning English as a foreign language, due to limited exposure to authentic language input and opportunities for meaningful language use (Peters & Webb, 2018; Teng, 2023).

Traditional vocabulary instruction in Indonesian classrooms often relies heavily on memorization techniques, such as word lists or rote learning. Although these approaches may help students remember vocabulary temporarily, they often fail to promote long-term retention, contextual understanding, and meaningful language use (Webb, 2020). Consequently, language educators have increasingly advocated for contextualized and learner-centered approaches that allow students to encounter vocabulary in authentic communicative situations (Nation, 2022; Teng, 2023).

One promising approach is the use of short stories as instructional media. Short stories provide rich linguistic input through meaningful narratives that expose learners to vocabulary in authentic contexts. The presence of characters, settings, conflicts, and events enables students to infer word meanings, recognize vocabulary usage patterns, and strengthen lexical retention through repeated exposure (Mason & Krashen, 2017; Suk, 2017). Furthermore, narrative texts can increase students' motivation and engagement by presenting language in an interesting and relatable format. Studies have shown that learners acquire vocabulary more effectively when they are emotionally engaged with reading materials and actively involved in constructing meaning from texts (Cho & Kim, 2019; Teng, 2021).

Previous studies have reported positive effects of short stories on vocabulary learning outcomes. Aritonang et al. (2021) found that students who learned through

short stories demonstrated significant improvement in vocabulary mastery. Similarly, Nasria et al. (2022) concluded that short stories provide meaningful vocabulary exposure that enhances retention and comprehension. Korompot et al. (2022) and Hayati (2022) also reported that narrative-based instruction improved students' vocabulary achievement and reading engagement. International studies further support these findings, suggesting that extensive reading and story-based learning contribute significantly to vocabulary growth and language development among EFL learners (Suk, 2017; Teng, 2021).

Short stories encourage students to become active readers who engage with language in meaningful situations. As learners follow the storyline and interact with characters and events, they encounter vocabulary repeatedly in varied contexts, facilitating both incidental vocabulary acquisition and long-term retention (Webb & Nation, 2017). This contextual exposure helps students understand not only the meaning of words but also their grammatical functions, collocations, and pragmatic use in communication. Consequently, students are more likely to transfer newly acquired vocabulary into their speaking and writing activities.

Furthermore, short stories can create a more enjoyable and motivating learning environment than conventional vocabulary instruction. Engaging narratives stimulate students' curiosity, imagination, and emotional involvement, encouraging active participation in learning activities. Research has shown that motivation and reading engagement are important predictors of vocabulary acquisition because motivated learners tend to invest greater effort in processing and retaining new lexical items (Teng, 2023; Cho & Kim, 2019). Therefore, integrating short stories into English instruction may not only improve vocabulary mastery but also foster positive attitudes toward language learning and reading.

Despite these promising findings, most previous studies have been conducted in different educational settings and have focused primarily on general vocabulary improvement. Limited research has specifically examined the effectiveness of short stories in improving vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Bulukumba. Preliminary observations revealed that many students experienced difficulties in vocabulary comprehension, word retention, and reading comprehension. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the influence of short stories on students' vocabulary mastery within this specific educational context.

Considering the importance of vocabulary mastery for overall English proficiency and the need for engaging instructional strategies, it is essential to identify effective approaches that support meaningful vocabulary learning. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of short stories on the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Bulukumba and determine whether short-story-based instruction can significantly improve students' vocabulary learning outcomes.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental research design, specifically the one-group pretest-posttest

design. This design was selected to determine the effect of using short stories on students' vocabulary mastery by comparing students' achievement before and after the treatment. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research is appropriate for examining relationships and measuring the effectiveness of educational interventions through numerical data and statistical analysis. In this study, students were given a pre-test before the treatment and a post-test after the treatment to identify any significant improvement in their vocabulary mastery.

The research was conducted at SMPN 1 Bulukumba during the academic year 2024/2025. The population of the study consisted of all eighth-grade students. The sample was class VIII.4, comprising 25 students, and was selected using a total sampling technique. Total sampling was employed because the number of students in the selected class was manageable and represented the target population of the study. The participants included male and female students with varying levels of English proficiency.

The research instrument used in this study was a vocabulary test administered in the form of multiple-choice questions. The test was designed to measure students' vocabulary mastery, including their understanding of word meanings, synonyms, antonyms, and vocabulary usage in context. The same test format was administered as both the pre-test and post-test. Before being used, the test items were reviewed to ensure their suitability for the students' grade level and learning objectives.

The treatment consisted of four instructional meetings in which short stories were used as the primary learning material. During the treatment sessions, students read selected short stories, identified unfamiliar vocabulary, discussed word meanings, and completed vocabulary-related exercises based on the stories. The teacher guided students in understanding vocabulary through contextual clues, story discussions, and interactive learning activities. This approach allowed students to learn vocabulary in meaningful contexts rather than through isolated memorization.

Data collection was conducted in three stages: pre-testing, treatment, and post-testing. The pre-test was administered before the treatment to determine students' initial vocabulary mastery. After the completion of four treatment sessions, the post-test was administered to assess students' vocabulary achievement after learning through short stories.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were used to describe students' performance. To determine whether there was a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores, a paired-sample t-test was

employed. The hypothesis was tested at a significance level of 0.05. If the calculated t-test value exceeded the t-table value, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted, indicating that the use of short stories significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the effect of using short stories on students' vocabulary mastery. The data were obtained from the pre-test and post-test administered to 25 eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Bulukumba. The analysis aims to compare students' vocabulary achievement before and after the implementation of short-story-based instruction and to determine whether the treatment significantly improved their vocabulary mastery. The results are presented using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to previous studies and relevant theories of vocabulary learning.

Table 1. Students' Vocabulary Achievement in Pre-test and Post-test

Table 1 shows the students' vocabulary achievement before and after the implementation of short-story-based instruction

Test	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Classification
Pre-test	59.6	15.54	Fair
Post-test	90.4	11.44	Very Good

Table 1 shows the students' vocabulary achievement before and after the implementation of short-story-based instruction. The results indicate a substantial improvement in students' vocabulary mastery, as reflected in the increase in the mean score from 59.6 in the pre-test, which was categorized as *Fair*, to 90.4 in the post-test, which was categorized as *Very Good*. In addition, the standard deviation decreased from 15.54 in the pre-test to 11.44 in the post-test, suggesting that students' scores became more consistent after the treatment. These findings indicate that the use of short stories not only improved students' overall vocabulary achievement but also contributed to a more uniform level of vocabulary mastery among the participants.

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Vocabulary Scores

Classification	Score Range	Pre-test f (%)	Post-test f (%)
Very Good	86–100	1 (4%)	16 (64%)
Good	71–85	5 (20%)	8 (32%)
Fair	56–70	13 (52%)	1 (4%)
Poor	41–55	6 (24%)	0 (0%)

Very Poor	0–40	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total		25 (100%)	25 (100%)

Table 2 presents the comparison of students' vocabulary mastery before and after the implementation of short-story-based instruction. The findings reveal a notable improvement in students' performance, as evidenced by the increase in the mean score from 59.6 in the pre-test, categorized as *Fair*, to 90.4 in the post-test, categorized as *Very Good*. This substantial increase indicates that students acquired and understood vocabulary more effectively after being exposed to learning activities based on short stories. Furthermore, the standard deviation decreased from 15.54 to 11.44, indicating that the variation among students' scores became smaller after the treatment. This suggests that the improvement was experienced not only by high-achieving students but also by those who initially had lower levels of vocabulary mastery. Overall, the results demonstrate that short stories provided meaningful and contextualized vocabulary exposure, which contributed significantly to enhancing students' vocabulary achievement and promoting more consistent learning outcomes across the class

Table 3. Paired-Sample t-Test Result

Variable	t-test	t-table	Sig. Level	Decision
Pre-test vs Post-test	10.14	2.06	0.05	Ha Accepted

Table 3 presents the result of the paired-sample t-test conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test scores. The analysis revealed that the obtained t-test value was 10.14, which was considerably higher than the t-table value of 2.06 at the 0.05 significance level. Since the calculated t-test exceeded the critical value, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted, while the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. This result indicates that the use of short stories had a statistically significant positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery. Therefore, it can be concluded that short-story-based instruction was effective in improving the vocabulary achievement of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Bulukumba

Table 4. Improvement of Students' Vocabulary Mastery

Indicator	Score
Mean Pre-test	59.6
Mean Post-test	90.4
Gain Score	30.8
Percentage of Improvement	51.68%

Table 4 presents the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the implementation of short-story-based instruction. The results show that the mean score increased from 59.6 in the pre-test to 90.4 in the post-test, resulting in a gain score of 30.8 points. Furthermore, the percentage of improvement reached 51.68%, indicating a substantial increase in students' vocabulary achievement. This finding suggests that the use of short stories provided meaningful learning experiences that helped students acquire and retain new vocabulary more effectively. The considerable gain in scores demonstrates that short-story-based instruction contributed significantly to enhancing students' vocabulary mastery and overall English language learning outcomes.

The data indicate a substantial improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the implementation of short-story-based instruction. The mean score increased by 30.8 points, representing a 51.68% improvement. Furthermore, the distribution of scores shifted considerably, with the majority of students moving from the fair category in the pre-test to the very good category in the post-test. The t-test result (10.14) was significantly higher than the t-table value (2.06), confirming that the use of short stories had a statistically significant positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the use of short stories significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Bulukumba. This improvement can be seen from the increase in the mean score from 59.6 in the pre-test to 90.4 in the post-test, as well as the t-test result (10.14), which was higher than the t-table value (2.06). These results indicate that short-story-based instruction had a positive effect on students' vocabulary learning. The findings support the view that vocabulary acquisition becomes more effective when learners encounter words in meaningful and contextualized situations rather than through isolated memorization. Vocabulary learning requires repeated exposure to words within authentic contexts so that learners can understand meaning, usage, and relationships between words (Webb & Nation, 2017; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). Short stories provide these contextual opportunities through narrative structures that naturally expose students to new vocabulary in meaningful situations. One possible explanation for the improvement is that short stories present vocabulary in engaging contexts that help students infer meaning and retain new words more effectively. Through characters, settings, and plot development, students are exposed to vocabulary repeatedly, allowing them to understand words not only individually but also within communicative situations. This finding is consistent with Rohmani et al. (2023), who reported that short stories significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery because learners could connect vocabulary with story contexts and experiences. Similarly, Nasria et al. (2022) found that short-story-based instruction enhanced vocabulary retention and learning outcomes among EFL learners. Previous studies have also emphasized that contextualized reading activities contribute positively to vocabulary growth because learners acquire lexical knowledge incidentally while focusing on

meaning and comprehension rather than memorization alone.

Another important finding is that short stories appeared to increase students' motivation and engagement during the learning process. During the treatment sessions, students showed greater interest in reading activities and actively participated in vocabulary discussions related to the stories. This suggests that narrative texts create a more enjoyable learning environment compared to conventional vocabulary teaching methods. The narrative nature of short stories encourages curiosity, imagination, and emotional involvement, which can positively influence learning outcomes. This finding aligns with recent studies showing that story-based learning promotes student engagement and supports vocabulary acquisition by creating meaningful learning experiences (Khalid, 2023; Abdullah, 2024). Furthermore, research on vocabulary learning emphasizes that motivation plays a significant role in language acquisition because motivated learners tend to invest more effort in understanding and retaining new vocabulary items. Therefore, the positive results obtained in this study may be influenced not only by contextual vocabulary exposure but also by increased student interest and participation during instruction.

The findings also support constructivist perspectives on language learning, which emphasize that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction with meaningful learning materials. Short stories enable students to connect new vocabulary with prior knowledge, experiences, and contextual information. As students interpret events and understand story content, they simultaneously develop vocabulary knowledge in a natural and integrated manner. This process contributes to deeper lexical understanding and long-term retention. In addition, repeated encounters with vocabulary in reading activities help strengthen word recognition and comprehension, which are essential components of vocabulary mastery. Therefore, short stories can function not only as reading materials but also as effective pedagogical tools for facilitating vocabulary development among EFL learners.

Overall, the findings confirm that short stories are an effective instructional medium for improving vocabulary mastery among junior high school students. The significant improvement in students' test scores demonstrates that contextualized and engaging learning materials can enhance vocabulary acquisition more effectively than traditional memorization-based approaches. These results are consistent with previous studies that reported positive effects of short-story-based instruction on vocabulary learning outcomes in EFL contexts. Consequently, English teachers should consider integrating short stories into classroom instruction to provide meaningful vocabulary exposure, increase student motivation, and support the development of English language proficiency.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that the use of short stories has a positive and significant effect on students' vocabulary mastery. The improvement in students' post-test scores demonstrates that learning vocabulary through

meaningful and contextualized reading materials can enhance both vocabulary acquisition and retention. Short stories provide students with opportunities to encounter new words in authentic contexts, making the learning process more engaging and effective than traditional memorization-based approaches.

Based on these findings, English teachers are encouraged to integrate short stories into vocabulary instruction to promote student engagement and improve learning outcomes. Students are also recommended to develop regular reading habits by exploring short stories independently to expand their vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, future researchers may investigate the effectiveness of different literary genres or compare short-story-based instruction with other teaching methods to provide broader insights into vocabulary learning strategies and their impact on students' language development.

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