

# Research Horizon

ISSN: 2808-0696 (p), 2807-9531 (e)

## Research Horizon

Volume: 05

Issue: 03

Year: 2025

Page: 955-964

## Citation:

Fitriani, Abin, R.,  
Karimuddin, Zakaria,  
Astiantih, S., & Suryadi, R.,  
(2025). Improving  
Vocabulary Mastery  
through Direct Instruction:  
A CAR Study. *Research  
Horizon*, 5(3), 955-964.

## Article History:

Received: May 22, 2025

Revised: June 16, 2025

Accepted: June 25, 2025

Online since: June 30, 2025

## Improving Vocabulary Mastery through Direct Instruction

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## Abstract

The low mastery of students' skills in learning English and the limited application of explicit learning strategies such as DI in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in Indonesia. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of the Direct Teaching (DI) strategy in improving the mastery of understanding of grade VII students at State Junior High School 3 Tanggetada. The method used in this study is Classroom Action Research (CAR) which is carried out in two cycles. Each cycle consists of four stages, namely planning, implementing actions, observation, and reflection. The research subjects were 18 students who were selected purposively based on their low mastery of understanding. Data collection techniques include insight tests, student and teacher activity observation sheets, and field notes. Data analysis was carried out descriptively quantitatively and qualitatively to assess the development of student learning outcomes and behavior during the learning process. The results of the study indicate that the application of the Direct Teaching strategy can improve students' mastery of understanding and encourage active involvement in the learning process. Students become more confident, motivated, and able to understand understanding in a more structured way.

## Keywords

Action Research, Classroom, Direct Instruction, Secondary Education, Vocabulary.

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary mastery is essential for language proficiency, especially since children focus on the characteristics and features of early grade students' proficiency in English as a foreign language. However, learning vocabulary is still difficult for junior high school students in Indonesia which can also cause their difficulties in understanding texts and expressing their ideas in using English (All et al., 2021; Bang et al., 2023; Fauziningrum et al., 2023). These challenges require the use of a more rigorous and evidence-based teaching approach, which is delivered more directly and consistently by paying attention to the needs of learners. Direct instruction is one of the pedagogical approaches that is emphasized because of its effectiveness. A highly explicit and fully teacher-controlled learning approach (Teng, 2022). This strategy involves structured stages such as teacher modeling, guided practice, and providing appropriate and direct feedback. In addition, direct instruction emphasizes the importance of a systematic sequence of material delivery so that students can understand the concept gradually. With strict management and a focus on clear learning objectives, this approach aims to improve learning effectiveness, especially in students' mastery of basic skills and conceptual understanding (Bang et al 2023).

This study emphasizes the importance of clear, repetitive, and regular instruction to help children learn new vocabulary. Through an explicit teaching approach, students are given direct and focused understanding of the words being learned. This strategy is very effective in improving vocabulary skills, especially for English as a second language learner. Young-Davy (2014) showed that the use of explicit instruction in vocabulary learning was able to significantly improve students' vocabulary scores through targeted interventions. This proves that structured and consistent teaching methods are very helpful in language acquisition in children. In addition, Tahir et al. (2021) stated that targeting interventions did improve vocabulary scores among the target group. Likewise, Alhatmi (2022) also believes that explicit instruction of Tier-2 vocabulary is necessary to improve language comprehension and use in academic writing.

Previous studies such as Setiawan (2010) showed that students who learn with structured vocabulary instruction achieve significantly better results than those who are taught through traditional instruction, especially in terms of long-term retention and use in context. In addition, Tahir et al. (2021) found more success of early grade students when they were taught vocabulary by teachers than incidental or passive methods. McQuillan (2019) found that direct instruction not only improves vocabulary learning but also provides better learning motivation for students, especially for students with low English proficiency. Despite its empirical strength, direct instruction seems to be less applied in the EFL context in Indonesia, so that its practice is bound by conventional methodologies and is less interactive. Therefore, it is not surprising that students' vocabulary does not develop optimally.

quasi-experimental design to investigate whether direct instruction can produce statistically significant improvements in students' vocabulary learning compared to what is usually offered by teachers (Wardhani et al., 2024). By addressing this issue, this study is expected to add to the existing literature on the promotion of evidence-based teaching approaches in EFL environments, particularly at the elementary school level. The results are anticipated to have broader practical implications for educators and policymakers to advance students' language learning outcomes through structured and student-centered approaches. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the implementation of direct instruction strategies in the vocabulary mastery of first-grade students.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Effectiveness of Direct Instruction in Vocabulary Acquisition**

The effectiveness of direct instruction in teaching vocabulary has been widely studied across various educational settings. Research by Sinaga et al. (2018) found the direct method effective in improving vocabulary acquisition among seventh-grade students. Likewise, Munfa'ati et al. (2020) compared direct instruction with discovery learning and concluded that direct instruction suited certain EFL learning styles. Mason and Otero (2021) conducted a meta-analysis that confirmed direct instruction broad benefits across diverse learners and content areas. In a more recent study, Dakhalan and Tanucan (2024) highlighted the Direct Method's inductive and systematic nature in promoting language learning.

Direct instruction is a teacher-led pedagogical approach emphasizing structured, explicit instruction. Grounded in behavioral learning theory, direct instruction promotes clarity and efficiency in instructional delivery. Adams and Carnine (2003) noted that direct instruction systematically guides students toward mastery of learning. The approach ensures each instructional step is sequenced and clearly delivered, enabling gradual comprehension (Hastuti, 2011; Hikmah et al., 2021; Katemba, 2022). It builds new concepts upon previous understanding, improving learning efficiency while reducing student discomfort (Yuliani et al., 2023; Masrul & Wicaksono, 2023).

The Iptables School interprets Direct Teaching broadly but emphasizes essential elements like modeling, guided practice, and independent work. Liem and Martin (2013) describe direct instruction as a technique where the teacher is the main knowledge source, explicitly explaining and demonstrating learning content. Harmades (2024) notes that this clear structure helps students understand processes, receive feedback, and avoid forming incorrect habits. Consequently, DI fosters a focused and efficient learning environment conducive to achieving strong learning outcomes.

### **2.2. Core Principles and Instructional Strategies in Direct Instruction**

Direct instruction principles emphasize the use of clear learning objectives, structured lessons, teacher modeling, regular assessment of student performance, and high student engagement throughout the learning process. This approach is designed to provide systematic and consistent direction, so that students can follow the learning path more easily and effectively. McMullen and Madelaine (2014) stated that direct instruction increases learning efficiency by reducing students' cognitive load and ensuring that materials are consistently available. This helps students focus on core content without being distracted by irrelevant information. Additionally, Ewing (2011) highlighted the importance of scaffolding—gradual support from the teacher—and cumulative review as critical components of successful DI implementation. With the combination of these principles, DI creates a learning environment that supports deep understanding and continued mastery of the material.

Direct instruction plays an important role in building skills and knowledge systematically. Direct instruction is designed to ensure that core content can be learned accurately and in an efficient time. According to de Jong et al. (2023), although the inquiry-based approach encourages exploration, direct instruction ensures that the main material is truly mastered by students. Mason and Otero (2021) confirmed that direct instruction resulted in significant improvements in academic achievement, especially in vocabulary, reading, and mathematics, especially for students who are socially or economically disadvantaged. This shows that direct instruction is very effective in bridging the learning gap. In addition, Cobern et al. (2010) found that direct instruction was more effective than inquiry-based methods in teaching declarative knowledge, which is very relevant in vocabulary teaching.

### 2.3. The Procedure of Direct Instruction in the Classroom

Direct Instruction is organized in a series of components: specification of instructional objectives to be achieved in a lesson, presentation of a "model" to demonstrate the skill or strategy being taught, inclusion of student practice with feedback that allows the teacher to adjust instruction, and assignment to independent work to apply practice and feedback (Wiratmoko et al., 2023). As stated in Adams and Carnine (2003), all lessons are rigorously scripted for uniformity and clarity. Eppley and Dudley-Marling (2019) criticism of direct instruction is its lack of flexibility though they acquiesced that when implemented well, the direct instruction has been successful in achieving measurable learning goals. Vocabulary words are taught by the teacher using example sentences, a model of the word, pronunciation, and usage for both principles, students and teachers, a choral repetition by students, and individual repetition, and lastly a test. The findings from the present review of research provide convincing evidence for the implementation of Direct Instruction for teaching English vocabulary. Though some criticisms focus on the directiveness of the approach a general affirmation among those in the field is that it does improve language learning, particularly in the early years. This review of the literature provides the theoretical writing and empirical evidence to justify examining the use of direct instruction in State Junior High School 3 Tanggetada in order to verify its effectiveness in the classroom.

### 3. Methods

The method in this study uses the Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach research method which is carried out in two cycles. The sample in this study were grade VII students of State Junior High School 3 Tanggetada in the 2023/2024 academic year. All classes were selected purposively because of their low mastery of English vocabulary as seen from previous learning outcomes. The unit of analysis in this study is the results of vocabulary tests and student learning behavior during the implementation of the direct instruction strategy. Each cycle consists of four systematic stages, namely planning, implementing actions, observation, and reflection. This study was conducted at Junior High School 3 Tanggetada involving 18 grade VII students as participants, who were selected purposively because of their low level of English vocabulary mastery based on previous learning outcomes. Data were collected through three main instruments: vocabulary tests, observation sheets, and field notes.

The vocabulary test was used as a pre-test and post-test which was given after three learning meetings in each cycle. This test consists of 30 questions in the form of multiple choices, fill-in-the-blanks, and stating the meaning of words to measure the increase in students' vocabulary mastery. Observation sheets were used to record student and teacher activities during the learning process, while field notes were used to record classroom dynamics and student responses to learning strategies. The independent variable in this study was the direct instruction strategy, which included modeling, guided practice, and explicit feedback. Meanwhile, the dependent variable was vocabulary mastery, which was measured based on student test scores. The minimum completion criteria were set at 75, and students were declared successful if they reached or exceeded that value. The validity of the instrument was strengthened through data triangulation between sources and instruments. Data analysis was carried out descriptively quantitatively to see the increase in test scores, and qualitatively to describe changes in student learning behavior. With this design and procedure, the study is expected to provide a reliable picture of the effectiveness of the Direct Instruction strategy in improving student vocabulary mastery, while allowing for replication by other researchers in the future.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Evaluation of Student Outcomes and Behavior in the First Cycle

This classroom action research procedure is to improve the vocabulary mastery of first-year students of Junior High School 3 Tanggetada through Direct Instruction Strategy. 8 This research was conducted in two cycles, and each cycle consisted of four stages systematically: planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. Each cycle also consisted of four meetings, consisting of three meetings to provide learning materials and one meeting for a test as a continuous assessment of student learning. The results of the analysis of student vocabulary tests in Cycle One showed that out of 18 students who took the test, only 11 students (56%) were able to meet or exceed the Minimum Completion Criteria set at 75, while 7 other students had not reached that standard. This percentage of achievement is below the threshold of success that has been set in the study, namely a minimum of 80% of students must reach Minimum Completion Criteria (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal*/KKM) for the cycle to be declared successful. This finding indicates that although there are some students who have shown progress in vocabulary mastery, the overall results are not adequate. Therefore, Cycle One is declared unsuccessful and improvements need to be made in teaching strategies in the next cycle. This is also an important basis for reflecting and improving the learning process, so that the Direct Instruction approach can be more effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery as a whole.

**Table 1.** The completeness of students' vocabulary

Item	Note
Number of Students	18
KKM	75
Minimum Completeness	80%
Students Achieving Mastery	11
Students Scoring Below KKM	7
Students Completeness	56%
Conclusion	Failed

Table 1 shows that students were monitored by the researcher in the third to seventh sessions. The students' scores were initially quite low in the first session, but improved over the following sessions as they became more familiar with the learning resources and the way digital pen instructions were delivered. The findings from cycle one meeting one to three indicated a positive shift in student behavior. On the first test, the students on average had a poor score of 19. This low figure was mostly a result of the students' reluctance to be actively involved as it was their first meeting in a native speaker class and there was no one who was motivated to talk and who has much desired vocabulary to answer the questions. The average score in the second session went up to 24, with some improvement. Students started to respond more to questions even just a little hesitant. By the third meeting, the students had developed better conduct, and the average score was already 29. They were better-engaged and more involved, especially in naming vocabulary for nouns. Despite the improvement of some individual behaviour, group cooperation remained limited with some continuing to work by themselves and a number of group disputes evident.

##### 4.2. Improving Student Learning Outcomes and Behavior in the Second Cycle

In the comprehension test conducted in Cycle Two, 15 out of 18 students successfully achieved or exceeded KKM set, which was 75. Thus, the student pass rate in this cycle reached 83%, which means that more than 80% of students met the

success standards that had been determined in the research design. This achievement shows a significant increase compared to the results in the first cycle, which only achieved 56% completion. This success reflects the effectiveness of the Direct Teaching Strategy implementation in improving students' vocabulary mastery. The material delivered in a structured, explicit manner, and accompanied by appropriate feedback has helped students understand and remember new knowledge more effectively. Based on the results achieved, the researcher and collaborating teachers concluded that the learning objectives had been achieved and the second cycle did not need to be continued to the next stage. Thus, this study was closed at the end of Cycle Two because it had met the expected success criteria. These results met the previously determined success criteria that were considered successful in the second cycle. The significant increase in students' vocabulary mastery is a clear indication of the benefits of the Direct Instruction Strategy in vocabulary development.

**Table 2.** The completeness of students' vocabulary

No	Item	Note
1	Number of Students	18
2	KKM	75
3	Minimum Completeness	80%
4	Students Achieving Mastery	15
5	Students Scoring Below KKM	3
6	Students Completeness	83%
7	Conclusion	Successful

In Table 2, the researcher intentionally and systematically observed student behavior during the first three meetings. This observation aimed to assess the level of student involvement, participation, and response to the implementation of the Direct Instruction Strategy. In the first meeting, the average student score reached 25, which was categorized as "Good" and showed an increase compared to the first meeting in Cycle One. This reflects that students began to show greater interest and comfort in following the learning process. They appeared more active in answering questions and working together in groups, although there were still some students who had difficulty in the accuracy of vocabulary use or were not yet able to produce language effectively. In the second meeting, further development was seen with the average score increasing to 28, still in the "Good" category, but showing a positive direction in student ability and participation. Active involvement and more constructive interactions began to form among students, especially in the practice and direct practice sessions that are characteristic of the Direct Instruction approach. This development strengthens the indication that the learning strategy used has had a positive impact on students' attitudes and learning outcomes.

In addition, at this point almost all students were working hard and were cooperative, particularly when kitchen vocabulary was introduced, and they were much more motivated and better behaved. Students now developed an average score of 34 (Very Good) by the last session, therefore they were more involved and confident when remembering the vocabular items. The teacher helped the learners in this respect by providing extra visual aid and by allowing vocabulary lists and dictionaries, which in turn have helped the learners to internalize the material better.

## 5. Discussion

The findings from this study showed two distinct dimensions in students' learning: the product dimension – in terms of the students' vocabulary achievement

– and the process dimension – in terms of how students participated and interacted during the instruction. In terms of product, there was a substantial improvement in vocabulary using the direct instruction Strategy for grade I of Junior High School 3 Tanggetada kolaka. In the first cycle, participants in the vocabulary test showed that only 61.11% (11 from 18 students) obtained KKM 75 with completeness rate 56% that was lower percentage than the criterion of success that has been set. On the contrary, the second cycle showed significant development of 15 students (83%) meet the KKM, exceeding the success criterion set at 80%. Therefore, the second repetition cycle was considered to be successful in achieving the research goals.

The enhancement there over support Kuswiyanti (2023) who speified that learning well-organized factual knowledge, such as English vocabulary, requires direct instruction, which provides clear and proceduralized instruction steps. What makes this effective in a variety of subject areas is the concept that learning is best done by modeling and practicing. These results are in agreement with those of Munfa'ati et al. (2020), who provided evidence that teaching is effective rather than useless, especially for visual and auditory learners. Combined, these studies further support the validity of the effectiveness of Direct Instruction in developing language from both a cognitive and a behavioral perspective.

In terms of process aspect, students' classroom engagement and learning behavior was improved in both cycles. In the first cycle, there was a progressive improvement in students results, represented by the averages: 19 (regarded as poor) in the first exam; 24 (termed as good) in the second; and 29 (regarded as good) in the third. Based on these findings, an adaptation to the teaching methods seems to have begun. By Cycle 2, the benefit began to be more consistent and durable. In the initial meeting, students obtained an average of 26, computed as good; followed by 27 (good); and 31 (very good) in the last contact. This rising tendency is indicative of students' increasing motivation, activity, and more favorable attitude toward applying the Direct Instruction Strategy. The improvement is consistent with Harmades (2024) who claimed that Direct lessons significantly increase student participation and engagement in learning. Explicit instruction students were more active in participating and asking questions during learning activities, which translated into heightened motivation to learn. In general, the finding of this study supports that Direct Instruction Strategy is effective in enhancing the students' mastery in vocabulary at the junior high school level.

## **6. Conclusion**

This Classroom Action Research demonstrates the effectiveness of the direct instruction strategy in enhancing vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade students at Junior High School 3 Tanggetada. Conducted over two cycles, the study revealed significant improvement in students' vocabulary acquisition. In the first cycle, only 56% of the 18 students (11 students) KKM of 75, falling short of the 80% success threshold. However, after refining the teaching approach, the second cycle saw 83% of students (15 students) surpassing the KKM, indicating that direct instruction structured, explicit, and repetitive methods—encompassing modeling, guided practice, and immediate feedback—facilitated better vocabulary retention and understanding. Additionally, students exhibited increased engagement, confidence, and motivation, transforming the classroom into a more dynamic and interactive learning environment.

The findings carry important implications for EFL instruction, particularly in junior high school settings, highlighting direct instruction as a robust strategy for addressing vocabulary learning challenges. However, the study is limited by its small sample size of 18 students and its focus solely on vocabulary mastery, which may restrict generalizability to other contexts or language skills. Future research should explore DI's efficacy across diverse educational levels, such as elementary or high

schools, and incorporate additional language skills like speaking or writing to assess its broader impact. Furthermore, integrating technology or visual aids into DI could enhance student engagement and learning outcomes, warranting further investigation to optimize its application in varied EFL environments.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of individuals who supported the completion of this article.

### ***Funding Information***

This research did not receive any funding.

### ***Conflict of Interest Statement***

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

### ***Ethical Approval and Originality Statement***

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

### ***Data Disclosure Statement***

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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