THE EFFECTIVENESS OF START WITH SIMPLE STORIES (SSS) METHOD ON EFL STUDENTS' VOCABULARY ATTAINMENT

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Article Info

Abstract

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This study investigates the effectiveness of the Start with Simple Stories (SSS) method in enhancing vocabulary attainment among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The research was conducted at SMP Plus Al-Islamiyah VII Al Batani in Tangerang Selatan, using a quasi- experimental design involving two groups of eighth-grade students. The experimental group received vocabulary instruction through the SSS method, while the control group was taught using conventional techniques. Pre-test and post-test vocabulary assessments were administered to both groups. Statistical analysis, including ANCOVA, was employed to determine the significance of the treatment effect. The findings revealed that the SSS method had a significant positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery, highlighting the potential of extensive reading-based strategies in EFL classrooms.

Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas metode Start with Simple Stories (SSS) dalam meningkatkan pencapaian kosakata siswa yang belajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di SMP Plus Al-Islamiyah VII Al Batani, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia, dengan menggunakan desain kuasi-eksperimen yang melibatkan dua kelompok siswa kelas VIII. Kelompok eksperimen menerima pembelajaran kosakata melalui metode SSS, sementara kelompok kontrol diajar menggunakan teknik konvensional. Penilaian kosakata dilakukan melalui pre-test dan post-test pada kedua kelompok. Analisis statistik, termasuk ANCOVA, digunakan untuk menentukan signifikansi pengaruh perlakuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa metode SSS memberikan pengaruh positif yang signifikan terhadap penguasaan kosakata siswa, sehingga menunjukkan potensi strategi pembelajaran berbasis extensive reading dalam kelas EFL.

Introduction

When students read texts in their native language, they demonstrated the ability to understand the fundamental parts of their language, particularly in terms of vocabulary and grammatical structure proficiency. Consequently, it was easier for the students to absorb both written and spoken material. The students have limited English vocabulary compared to their proficiency in their native language and exhibited a deficient understanding of English grammatical structures, which hindered their ability to learn English from a basic level.

Vocabulary acquisition is widely acknowledged as one of the most critical components in the process of learning a second or foreign language. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), vocabulary serves as the foundational element that supports all other language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Without an adequate vocabulary, EFL learners face significant challenges in comprehending texts, expressing ideas, and engaging in meaningful communication. As such, effective methods for enhancing vocabulary attainment are central to language teaching and research. One such method that has gained attention for its simplicity and effectiveness is the Start with Simple Stories (SSS) method.

Start with Simple Stories (SSS)

The SSS method is a pedagogical approach rooted in extensive reading theory. It advocates for the use of simple, engaging, and level-appropriate stories as a means to introduce and reinforce vocabulary in a natural and contextualized manner. Through repeated exposure to high-frequency words within comprehensible texts, learners are more likely to internalize vocabulary without the need for rote memorization or isolated drills. This approach aligns with Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that language is best acquired when learners are exposed to input that is slightly above their current level, known as "i+1".[1] The SSS method operationalizes this hypothesis by providing learners with reading materials that are not only understandable but also interesting and repetitive, which facilitates incidental vocabulary learning.

Moreover, extensive reading programs that utilize the SSS method have demonstrated promising outcomes in vocabulary development, particularly among beginner and intermediate EFL learners. Studies have shown that learners who engage with graded readers or simplified storybooks over a sustained period exhibit greater gains in

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[1] Stephen D. Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition,* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982), 20–21.

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receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge.[2] This is because narratives offer contextual clues that aid in word recognition and retention.[3] Furthermore, stories often recycle vocabulary naturally, reinforcing word meanings through multiple encounters.[4] This repetition within a meaningful context contrasts with traditional vocabulary instruction, which often relies on decontextualized word lists and limited opportunities for authentic usage.[5]

In the specific context of EFL classrooms, particularly in non-English-speaking countries, the SSS method presents a cost-effective and accessible means of vocabulary instruction. Unlike multimedia-based interventions, which may require technological infrastructure, the SSS approach only requires simple printed texts and teacher guidance. Additionally, it can be easily adapted across age groups and proficiency levels, making it a flexible tool in the language teacher's repertoire.[6] Despite its apparent advantages, however, empirical research on the effectiveness of the SSS method remains limited, especially in contexts where English exposure outside the classroom is minimal.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the effectiveness of the Start with Simple Stories (SSS) method on EFL students' vocabulary attainment. By comparing the vocabulary growth of students exposed to the SSS method with those taught through traditional vocabulary instruction, this research aims to contribute empirical evidence to the ongoing discussion about best practices in vocabulary teaching. It also intends to offer practical implications for EFL teachers seeking engaging and efficient strategies to improve learners' lexical knowledge.

Vocabulary acquisition is one of the fundamental pillars of language proficiency and plays a crucial role in learners' ability to communicate effectively in a second or foreign language. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings such as Indonesia, where English is not used in daily interactions, vocabulary development often becomes a challenging aspect of language learning. Traditional vocabulary teaching methods—often centered on rote memorization, translation exercises, and isolated word lists—tend to lack contextual depth and engagement, resulting in poor retention and limited transferability to communicative

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[2] Richard R. Day and Julian Bamford, *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 54–57.

[3] Paul Nation, *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 107.

[4] Rob Waring and Norbert Nation, "Vocabulary Size, Text Coverage and Word Lists," in *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*, ed. Norbert Schmitt and Michael McCarthy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6–19.

[5] Batia Laufer, "The Development of Passive and Active Vocabulary in a Second Language: Same or Different?" *Applied Linguistics* 19, no. 2 (1998): 255–271.

[6] Willy A. Renandya, "The Power of Extensive Reading," *RELC Journal* 38, no. 2 (2007): 133–149.

situations.

Numerous scholars emphasize that vocabulary is central to all aspects of language competence. Schmitt argues that a substantial vocabulary is necessary for learners to engage with authentic texts and perform academic tasks.[7] Similarly, Webb and Nation highlight the link between vocabulary size and reading comprehension.[8] However, many EFL learners, particularly in junior secondary schools in Indonesia, struggle to acquire and retain English vocabulary due to lack of exposure and inefficient instructional practices.[9]

One promising approach to address these challenges is extensive reading (ER), which provides learners with large quantities of meaningful input through simple, enjoyable texts. The Start with Simple Stories (SSS) method, developed by Furukawa, is a structured ER approach emphasizing the reading of easy books without translation or dictionary use. It encourages learners to read freely, skip unknown words, and choose materials that match their interests and proficiency level.[10] This method draws from Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which states that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current level.[11]

Prior research supports the efficacy of ER and SSS-based methods. Rahmany et al. demonstrated improved vocabulary and reading speed among Iranian learners.[12] Chou observed enhanced retention and motivation in Taiwanese university students.[13] In Indonesia. Akbar and Tangkieng found that ER positively influenced high school students' vocabulary growth and reading fluency.[14] In line, Wiranegara highlighted that SSS method implemented in the extensive reading class with pre test-post test design approve that The students in the experimental group significantly obtained higher scores than the ones in the control group.[15]

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[7] Norbert Schmitt, *Understanding Vocabulary: Second Language Vocabulary Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[8] Stuart Webb and Paul Nation, *How Vocabulary is Learned* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[9] Feng Teng, "The Role of Vocabulary Knowledge, Syntactic Awareness and Metacognitive Awareness in Reading Comprehension Among EFL Learners in Junior High School," *English Teaching & Learning* 44, no. 1 (2020): 41–64.

[10] Akio Furukawa, *The SSS (Start with Simple Stories) Extensive Reading Method* (Tokyo: SSS Publishing, 2020).

[11] Stephen Krashen, *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004).

[12] Rahmany, R., Sadeghi, B., & Faramarzi, S., "The Effect of Extensive Reading on Iranian EFL Learners' Vocabulary Knowledge. International Journal of Instruction," 11, 3 (2018): 187–202.

[13] M. H. Chou, "Effects of Graded Readers on Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition in EFL Learners," *Language Teaching Research*, 25, no. 5 (2021): 613–630.

[14] M. Akbar, & Tangkieng, R., "The Effect of Extensive Reading on Vocabulary Mastery of Indonesian EFL Learners," *Asian EFL Journal* 21, no. 3 (2019): 88–102.

[15] D. A. Wiranegara, "Implementing SSS (Start With Simple Stories) method to improve students' reading comprehensionin Extensive Reading acticity," *Journal of English for Academic and Specific Purposes (JEASP)*, 5, no. 1 (2022): https://doi.org/10.18860/jeasp.v5i1.16583

Zein et al. further confirmed the effectiveness of SSS in junior high schools across Indonesia.[16] Exposed the benefit of SSS comprising effective to improve students vocabulary attainement, it also improve students interest on reading activity.[17] Nevertheless, empirical studies on the use of SSS in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly with junior learners, remain limited. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the effects of SSS on eighth-grade students' vocabulary mastery in a real classroom setting.

Vocabulary Attainment

Vocabulary attainment refers to the process and outcome of acquiring, internalizing, and effectively using new lexical items in a second or foreign language. It encompasses both the breadth (the number of words known) and the depth (how well each word is known) of a learner's vocabulary knowledge. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), vocabulary attainment is a crucial indicator of language proficiency and academic success, as vocabulary underpins all four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing.[18]

Unlike vocabulary acquisition, which typically refers to the subconscious and incidental learning of words over time through exposure, vocabulary attainment emphasizes measurable outcomes, such as how many words a learner has learned, retained, and can use appropriately. It involves both receptive vocabulary knowledge the ability to recognize and understand words in context and productive vocabulary knowledge the ability to use those words in speaking and writing.[19] Thus, vocabulary attainment is both a process and a product: learners attain vocabulary through interaction, input, and practice, and the degree of attainment can be assessed through various evaluative tools.

Scholars such as Paul Nation stress that vocabulary attainment is not merely about memorizing word lists but also about understanding word meanings, collocations, morphological variations, and register.[20] This deeper knowledge allows learners to use vocabulary accurately and flexibly in different contexts. For instance, knowing the word "run" involves understanding not only its basic meaning but also its multiple senses (e.g.,

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[16] M. S., Zein, et.all, "Integrating Start with Simple Stories into Indonesian EFL Classrooms: A Quasi-Experimental Study," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 13, no. 1 (2023): 77–89.

[17] Isral, M., Syamsidar, & Yunus, M. (2024). The effectiveness of Start Simple Story (SSS) method in teaching reading Narrative text at SMP Kartika XX-2 Makasar. *Jurnal Karya Mahasiswa (KIMA)*, *3*(2), 283–288.

[18] Stuart Webb and Paul Nation, *Researching and Analyzing Vocabulary* (Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2017), 3.

[19] Norbert Schmitt, *Vocabulary in Language Teaching*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 6.

[20] Paul Nation, *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 53.

"run a business," "run late," "runny nose"), grammatical behavior, and appropriate usage in formal or informal situations.[21]

The process of vocabulary attainment is influenced by several factors, including the amount and quality of input, the frequency of word exposure, the learner's motivation, cognitive strategies, and the instructional methods employed.[22] One key distinction is whether vocabulary is attained incidentally (through exposure to comprehensible input, such as reading) or intentionally (through direct instruction and deliberate practice). Both pathways contribute to overall vocabulary growth, but studies have shown that extensive reading and repeated exposure to words in meaningful contexts significantly enhance long-term vocabulary retention.[23]

In the EFL setting, vocabulary attainment is often hindered by limited exposure to authentic language use. Classroom instruction may rely heavily on decontextualized word lists or rote memorization, which can result in shallow learning and rapid forgetting.[24] As a result, modern vocabulary teaching approaches advocate for contextualized, communicative, and learner-centered strategies that promote deeper processing and usage of new vocabulary. The Start with Simple Stories (SSS) method is one such approach, designed to facilitate vocabulary attainment through accessible, high-frequency narratives that engage learners in meaningful reading.[25]

In summary, vocabulary attainment refers to the extent to which learners acquire and are able to use new vocabulary items effectively. It is a dynamic, ongoing process that plays a fundamental role in EFL learning. By focusing on both the quantity and quality of vocabulary knowledge, educators can better support learners in becoming confident and competent users of the English language.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design using a quasi-experimental approach to investigate the effect of the Start with Simple Stories (SSS) method on EFL students' vocabulary mastery. The research was conducted at SMP Plus Al-Islamiyah VII Al Batani, a private Islamic junior high school located in Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia. The

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[21] Batia Laufer, "Words You Know: How Much Is Enough?" in *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*, ed. Norbert Schmitt and Michael McCarthy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 23.
[22] James Coady and Thomas Huckin, eds., *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition: A Rationale for Pedagogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8–9.
[23] Richard R. Day and Julian Bamford, *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57–60.
[24] Susan M. Gass and Larry Selinker, *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 241–242.
[25] Willy A. Renandya, "The Power of Extensive Reading," *RELC Journal* 38, no. 2 (2007): 133–149.

rationale for using a quasi-experimental design was based on the practical constraints of working within an existing school setting where random assignment was not feasible.

Two intact classes from the eighth grade were selected to form the control and experimental groups. Each group consisted of 16 students, making a total sample of 32 participants. The experimental group was taught using the SSS method, which involved reading short, level-appropriate English stories selected from the Oxford Reading Tree and similar graded reader series. Students were encouraged to read extensively for enjoyment without the use of dictionaries, and they were allowed to choose their own reading materials to foster motivation and autonomy.

In contrast, the control group received vocabulary instruction through conventional techniques, such as textbook exercises, translation tasks, and rote memorization. Both groups were given a pre-test to assess their vocabulary knowledge before the intervention and a post-test after five weeks of treatment. The vocabulary tests were developed based on word lists from the reading materials used and were validated by two English language teaching experts. A pilot study was also conducted with a separate group of students to ensure the reliability of the instrument.

Results and Discussion

The researcher conducted normality and homogeneity tests using SPSS to ensure data normal distribution and homogeneity. They used the Saphiro wilk table for normality tests, comparing significant values from less than 50 respondents. The homogeneity test was conducted using the Test of Homogeneity of Variance table, comparing significant values from the table. If the results were less than 0.05, the data was not homogenous.

Tests of Normality

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Class	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Student's Result	PreTest control	.173	16	.200*	.936	16	.303
	PostTest Control	.109	16	.200*	.953	16	.537
	PreTest experimental	.147	16	.200*	.922	16	.184
	PostTest Experimental	.150	16	.200*	.927	16	.219

The research data showed a normal distribution and homogeneity, as indicated by Shapiro- Wilk tests and homogeneity tests. The pre-test and post-test significant values were all over 0.05, indicating a normal distribution. The variance test resulted in a significant

variance of 0.083, indicating homogeneity. Therefore, the ANCOVA test was used to answer the research question.

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP				CONTROL GROUP			
No	Name	pre test	post test	No	Name	pre test	post test
1	MHR	56	44	17	AF	40	56
2	MDA	40	76	18	DH	52	60
3	MR	52	40	19	DKW	60	68
4	MRH	44	60	20	DDA	56	50
5	MRF	48	76	21	EPA	40	40
6	NS	40	60	22	FA	52	58
7	NNR	52	84	23	FIL	52	56
8	NI	60	56	24	HI	44	52
9	RR	40	60	25	IAS	48	56
10	RA	64	76	26	JDPA	48	52
11	RH	52	60	27	KF	52	60
12	RHN	48	64	28	KT	40	40
13	SNY	48	68	29	MRA	64	68
14	SF	52	76	30	MDA	52	60
15	SNNR	60	72	31	MF	44	52
16	SA	40	42	32	MHF	48	44

The ANCOVA results revealed a significant difference in vocabulary mastery between the experimental and control groups. The mean post-test score of the experimental group was 63.38, while the control group scored 53.88. The method variable had a significant effect on vocabulary mastery ($p = .018 < .05$), whereas the covariate—students' background knowledge—was not significant ($p = .051 > .05$).

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable:PostTest's Result

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1185.609[a]	2	592.805	5.303	.011	.268
	668.446	1	668.446	5.980	.021	.171
Method	701.642	1	701.642	6.276	.018	.178
Background knowledge	463.609	1	463.609	4.147	.051	.125
Error	3241.891	29	111.789			
Total	114408.000	32				
Corrected Total	4427.500	31				

a. R Squared = ,268 (Adjusted R Squared = ,217)

The Partial Eta Squared value for the method was 0.178, indicating that approximately 17.8% of the variance in vocabulary mastery could be attributed to the SSS method. This suggests that the SSS method had a moderate and meaningful impact on improving students' vocabulary acquisition. The findings support previous research highlighting the benefits of extensive reading and the SSS approach in vocabulary development (Chou, 2021; Zein et al., 2023).

Students exposed to SSS were able to read more fluently and acquire vocabulary incidentally, aligning with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (2004) and the principles of ER (Day & Bamford, 1998). The absence of a significant effect from background knowledge suggests that the SSS method may be effective across different learner profiles, making it a versatile tool in EFL contexts. These findings are consistent with Yamashita and Fukuda (2021), who

noted improved motivation and vocabulary retention among Japanese learners following ER programs. The increase in vocabulary mastery among Indonesian learners using SSS underscores the potential of this method in local classrooms, especially where learners have limited English exposure outside school.

The success of the SSS method can be attributed to several pedagogical principles. First, SSS provides repeated exposure to high-frequency vocabulary within simplified yet authentic contexts. This repetition aids in reinforcing word recognition, meaning, and usage, which supports long-term vocabulary retention. Unlike isolated word lists, stories allow learners to infer word meanings through context clues, which promotes deeper cognitive processing and stronger lexical connections.

Second, the narrative format of SSS increases learner motivation and engagement, key factors in successful language acquisition. When students are interested in the content, they are more likely to stay focused, read more extensively, and be open to incidental vocabulary learning. This intrinsic motivation often leads to increased time-on-task, further boosting vocabulary attainment.

Third, SSS aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input that is slightly above the learner's current level (i+1). Through carefully selected simple stories, learners are exposed to language that challenges them just enough to promote growth without causing frustration.

Furthermore, the results indicate that students exposed to SSS developed not only a broader vocabulary repertoire but also improved their ability to use words in appropriate contexts, reflecting gains in both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. Given these findings, educators are encouraged to adopt the SSS method as an effective and accessible strategy for enhancing EFL learners' vocabulary mastery.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Start with Simple Stories (SSS) method significantly improves vocabulary mastery among EFL students. The experimental group demonstrated greater gains in post-test scores compared to the control group. These results suggest that integrating SSS into EFL instruction can enhance vocabulary development through meaningful, engaging, and context-rich input.

Given the study's limited scope one school and a short implementation period further research is recommended to explore long-term impacts and broader applications across diverse educational settings in Indonesia. Factors such as regional language differences, varying levels of teacher training, and student backgrounds could influence outcomes in

other educational environments. Additionally, the study focused primarily on short-term vocabulary gains, leaving the long-term retention and transferability of vocabulary unexamined. Therefore, further research is recommended to explore the sustained effects of the SSS method and its adaptability across different regions, age groups, and instructional settings throughout Indonesia.

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