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12 THEMATIC VOCABULARY BUILDING: A TOOL FOR ENHANCED ENGLISH SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

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Abstrak

Kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris adalah salah satu keterampilan esensial yang harus dikembangkan dalam pembelajaran *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL). Namun, banyak siswa masih mengalami kesulitan dalam berbicara karena keterbatasan penguasaan kosakata mereka. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penerapan *Thematic Vocabulary Building* (Pengembangan Kosakata Tematik) dalam kegiatan berbicara pada siswa kelas empat di MI NW Tenges-Enges tahun ajaran 2025/2026. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan dokumentasi selama empat pertemuan kelas yang melibatkan 41 siswa. Analisis data menggunakan prosedur analisis data kualitatif yang diusulkan oleh Sugiyono, meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Untuk memastikan keabsahan temuan, diterapkan triangulasi sumber, triangulasi teknik, dan triangulasi waktu. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa penerapan *Thematic Vocabulary Building* membantu siswa memahami kosakata dalam konteks yang tepat, meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata secara keseluruhan, dan secara signifikan mendukung perkembangan kemampuan berbicara mereka. Selain itu, siswa menunjukkan partisipasi yang lebih aktif, rasa percaya diri yang lebih besar, dan kemampuan yang lebih baik dalam menggunakan kosakata untuk komunikasi bahasa Inggris sederhana.

Kata Kunci: Pengembangan Kosakata Tematik, Penguasaan Kosakata, Kemampuan Berbicara, Penelitian Kualitatif Deskriptif, EFL

Abstract

English speaking ability is one of the essential skills that should be developed in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. However, many students still experience difficulties in speaking due to their limited vocabulary mastery. Therefore, this study aimed at describing the implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building in speaking activities among fourth-grade students at MI NW Tenges-Enges during the 2025/2026 academic year. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The data were collected through observation and documentation during four classroom meetings involving 41 fourth-grade students. The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis procedures proposed by Sugiyono, which include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation,

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technique triangulation, and time triangulation were applied. The findings revealed that the implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building helped students understand vocabulary within appropriate contexts, improved overall vocabulary mastery, and significantly supported the development of their speaking ability. In addition, the students demonstrated more active participation, greater selfconfidence, and a better ability to use vocabulary in simple English communication.

Keywords: Thematic Vocabulary Building, Vocabulary Mastery, Speaking Ability, Descriptive Qualitative Research, EFL

INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in Indonesia, speaking is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for students to master. This skill requires learners to produce language spontaneously, supported by sufficient vocabulary knowledge, appropriate grammatical structures, and a confident attitude. Previous research has demonstrated that vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in shaping students' speaking ability. When students lack adequate vocabulary, they often encounter difficulties in expressing their ideas orally, even if they have a theoretical understanding of grammar. This highlights the essential role of vocabulary as a foundation for developing speaking proficiency.

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Moreover, several studies conducted in Indonesia reveal that students' low speaking performance is frequently linked to their limited ability to actively use vocabulary in oral communication. Julaeha and Kurniawan (2023) reported that vocabulary mastery significantly contributes to improving students' speaking skills at the secondary level. In line with this, Fajriah and Syamsudin (2025) found that both vocabulary and grammar jointly influence students' speaking performance. However, in actual classroom practices, vocabulary instruction often emphasizes memorization of individual words rather than organizing them into meaningful thematic groups. Consequently, students find it difficult to apply what they have learned in real-life communication. Additionally, vocabulary learning is often not integrated with speaking activities, resulting in limited opportunities for students to practice using newly acquired vocabulary in speaking tasks.

Thematic vocabulary building is an approach to vocabulary learning that organizes words based on specific themes or topics, such as daily activities, health, education, and social interaction. Unlike traditional vocabulary learning methods that present words in isolation, this approach groups related vocabulary within meaningful contexts. This allows students not only to understand the meanings of words but also to use them appropriately in communicative situations. To overcome the challenges in speaking performance, Thematic Vocabulary Building may serve as an effective alternative for vocabulary instruction. Previous research indicates that systematic vocabulary instruction can improve students' understanding and retention of new words, and thematic learning has been reported to enhance students' engagement and comprehension in language learning.

However, previous research has largely emphasized quantitative outcomes, such as changes in test scores, while qualitative investigations into the actual implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building and its contribution to students' speaking development remain limited. In response to this research gap, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building in an actual classroom setting. This study aims to identify the implementation process of thematic vocabulary building in speaking classroom activities and to analyze how it supports improvements in students' speaking performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative design because it allowed the researcher to explore classroom phenomena in depth, particularly the implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building during English speaking activities in an EFL classroom. The research was conducted at MI NW Tenges-Enges, located in Tenges-Enges Hamlet, Borok Toyang Village, West Sakra District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants of this study consisted of one English teacher and 41 fourth-grade students.

The primary data were collected directly from classroom interactions and instructional procedures through non-participant observation. Secondary data consisted of supporting documents, including lesson materials, students' worksheets, and photographs of classroom activities. Data collection was conducted over four classroom meetings on May 9, 11, 16, and 18, 2026. The data analysis followed the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Sugiyono (2022), which comprises three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion

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drawing and verification. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researcher applied source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building in the Speaking Classroom

The implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building was carried out over four classroom meetings using the theme *I Want a Sunflower*, sourced from the textbook *Grow with English: A Thematic Course for Elementary Students*. The teacher introduced vocabulary related to plants and their growth processes (e.g., *sunflower, seed, soil, water, stem, leaf, root, flower, plant, and grow*). Instead of introducing vocabulary as isolated individual words, the teacher presented words that were closely related to the central topic, allowing students to learn vocabulary as part of a cohesive contextual lesson.

During the first and second meetings, the teacher utilized pictures and reading passages to introduce the target vocabulary. The teacher modeled accurate pronunciation, which the students repeated. The teacher then integrated these words into simple speaking tasks, encouraging students to construct short sentences, such as "This is a sunflower" or "The seed grows in the soil". During the third and fourth meetings, the teacher employed a specific classroom activity entitled *Look and Say Yes or No*, which required students to interpret simple English statements and relate them to visual information. Throughout these sessions, vocabulary learning was deeply integrated into various classroom activities—reading short texts, answering oral questions, and identifying visual cues. Since the same vocabulary appeared repeatedly across different tasks, students had multiple opportunities to practice and become familiar with the target words.

How Thematic Vocabulary Building Supported Students' Speaking Performance

The classroom observations documented significant changes in students' speaking performance during the implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building. At the beginning of the study, many students experienced difficulty expressing simple ideas because they were unfamiliar with the vocabulary. Their oral responses were brief, and some were reluctant to speak without direct teacher guidance. However, as the lessons progressed, students became increasingly familiar with the target vocabulary through repeated practice.

Improvement became evident by the second meeting, where several students began producing short English sentences related to the topic and responding to the teacher's questions with greater confidence. By the final observation, students showed greater involvement during classroom discussions, volunteered to read texts aloud, and answered questions more confidently. The repeated exposure to thematic vocabulary allowed students to recall words more easily when communicating. Furthermore, integrating vocabulary instruction directly with speaking practice created a more communicative learning experience. Students no longer memorized words in isolation but learned how to apply the target vocabulary in authentic classroom interactions, which directly reduced their hesitation and increased their willingness to speak.

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Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building provided students with repeated opportunities to learn, recall, and apply vocabulary while communicating in English. The use of thematic vocabulary allowed students to encounter the same words repeatedly in different classroom activities. This finding supports Nation (2008), who explains that vocabulary learning becomes more effective when words are presented repeatedly in meaningful contexts. Similarly, Agya and Meisuri (2023) argue that thematic instruction helps learners understand the relationships among vocabulary items because the words are learned within the same context.

The improvement observed during the learning process indicates that vocabulary mastery played a crucial role in supporting students' oral communication. These findings are consistent with Bangun and Simanjuntak (2022), who state that vocabulary mastery provides the foundation for speaking because learners need adequate vocabulary to express their ideas effectively. Likewise, Julaeha and Kurniawan (2023) explain that students with better vocabulary knowledge tend to participate more confidently in speaking activities. Fajriah and Syamsudin (2025) also emphasize that vocabulary learning is more effective when students actively use newly learned words in communicative situations.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Thematic Vocabulary Building supported students' speaking performance by improving vocabulary mastery, increasing self-confidence, encouraging active participation, and providing opportunities to use English more naturally during classroom interactions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, the implementation of Thematic Vocabulary Building in the fourth-grade English classroom at MI NW Tenges-Enges was carried out successfully and contributed positively to the teaching and learning process. Presenting vocabulary through the theme *I Want a Sunflower* enabled students to learn new words in meaningful contexts, making them easier to understand, remember, and apply during classroom activities. The repeated exposure through varied activities—such as pronunciation practice, sentence construction, and the *Look and Say Yes or No* task—strengthened students' vocabulary knowledge.

The implementation also supported the improvement of students' speaking performance. Students showed noticeable progress in answering questions, reading texts aloud, and producing simple English expressions. Better vocabulary mastery enabled students to communicate more effectively and with greater self-confidence. Integrating vocabulary instruction with speaking practice created a communicative learning experience, allowing students to understand not only the meaning of the words but also their practical use. Therefore, this strategy can be considered an appropriate alternative for teaching English in elementary EFL classrooms.

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