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The Use of Semantic Mapping Strategy to Enhance EFL Students' Vocabulary Mastery at The Seventh Grade of SMP Negeri 1 Tapa

(Penggunaan Strategi Pemetaan Semantik untuk Meningkatkan Penguasaan Kosakata Siswa EFL di Kelas VII SMP Negeri 1 Tapa)

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of the Semantic Mapping strategy in enhancing vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa. The research employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test to assess students' vocabulary improvement. The participants were selected through purposive sampling from class 7-3, identified as having lower vocabulary proficiency. The intervention involved the implementation of Semantic Mapping in vocabulary lessons over a set period. The results showed a substantial improvement in students' vocabulary scores, with the pre-test average at 46.36 and the post-test average increasing to 70.68. Statistical analysis using a paired sample t-test revealed a p-value of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores. This confirms the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1), which states that the Semantic Mapping strategy positively affects vocabulary acquisition. The findings suggest that this strategy aids learners in organizing and retaining vocabulary more effectively. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers incorporate Semantic Mapping into their instructional practices to enhance vocabulary development and support overall language learning success.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas strategi Pemetaan Semantik dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata siswa EFL kelas VII di SMP Negeri 1 Tapa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuasi-eksperimental dengan pendekatan pre-test dan post-test untuk menilai peningkatan penguasaan kosakata siswa. Sampel dipilih secara purposive dari kelas 7-3 yang diketahui memiliki kemampuan kosakata rendah. Intervensi dilakukan melalui penerapan strategi Pemetaan Semantik dalam pembelajaran kosakata selama beberapa pertemuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan dalam skor kosakata siswa, dengan nilai rata-rata pre-test sebesar 46,36 dan meningkat menjadi 70,68 pada post-test. Analisis statistik menggunakan uji t sampel berpasangan menunjukkan nilai p sebesar 0,000, yang menunjukkan perbedaan signifikan secara statistik antara skor pre-test dan post-test. Hal ini mengkonfirmasi penolakan hipotesis nol (H_0) dan penerimaan hipotesis alternatif (H_1), yang menyatakan bahwa strategi Pemetaan Semantik berpengaruh positif terhadap penguasaan kosakata. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi ini membantu siswa dalam mengorganisasi dan mengingat kosakata dengan lebih efektif. Oleh karena itu, disarankan kepada guru Bahasa Inggris untuk mengintegrasikan strategi

Pemetaan Semantik dalam pengajaran kosakata guna meningkatkan hasil belajar siswa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dionar and Adnan (2018) stated language plays a crucial role in human life for communicating, expressing ideas, feelings, and opinions both personally and collectively. The goal of language learning is to acquire the ability to communicate verbally and in writing (Khashimova et al., 2021). One of the aims of language teaching is to improve students' language skills. Being proficient in a language means having the ability to read, listen, speak, and master a wide range of vocabulary. One important component of language learning is students' vocabulary skills. Vocabulary consists of words in a particular language that label things, actions, or ideas that convey information. Because learners cannot convey specific concepts in communication in a particular language, such as English, learning a language requires mastering vocabulary (Machfudi & Afidah, 2022).

Vocabulary is among the most critical language-learning skills. This is the fundamental strength for all other talents. Vocabulary is the students' fundamental way of using English efficiently (Rashid et al., 2022). Vocabulary is one of the language aspects to learn when people are learning a language, so to achieve the success in language teaching-learning process especially in English, vocabulary is one of the important factors in all language teaching (Susanto, 2017). Vocabulary is a very important language aspect to master. It is undeniable that vocabulary plays an important role in learning English (Aji et al., 2023). So that in this case, the students need to broaden their knowledge of vocabulary to recognize and understand items with meaning (Yudha & Mandasari, 2021).

Based on the results of interviews there is a pre observation, at the SMP Negeri 1 Tapa school that students' vocabulary skills are still below standard because there is no English subject so that it makes it difficult for students to understand vocabulary in English. Many English learners find it difficult to comprehend English texts. They get troubled when they encounter unfamiliar words. In this state, readers begin to panic and stop reading to look them up in dictionaries and it interrupts the normal reading process. It actually destroys their chances to comprehend much of the text. The relationship between knowledge of word meanings and comprehension has been well documented by researchers and admitted by students. Many of them admit that sometimes they do not understand the vocabularies because the words are too hard for them. When they are unable to deal with the problem, it will make them likely to be reluctant to read the whole text. In the end they are stuck with their inability in comprehending texts.

From this pre-observation it is found that students still do not understand about the words or the vocabulary, they do not understand the text meaning as explicit or implicit, and they do not know what the text telling about or the topic of the text. It proves that students face difficulties in the indicator of reading comprehension in particular the vocabulary itself.

There are many strategies that can be used to increase students' vocabulary mastery in English lesson, one among others is Semantic Mapping (Udaya, 2022), the researcher chose a semantic mapping strategy because this is very good for those who lack motivation in learning English. This strategy can make them more interested in learning, not that other strategies are not suitable, but semantic mapping has interesting characteristics such as using interesting shapes or shapes to put the text indicators they read and give colors to be more attractive and can help they recall what they had learned.

Alqahtani (2015) stated semantic mapping is a visual strategy for vocabulary expansion and extension of knowledge by displaying in categories related to another words. They also revealed semantic mapping have two aspects in teaching and learning language, they are visual and conceptual. In teaching vocabulary, it can be used as a tool for students to discover the relationships between vocabulary words.

The researcher tried to apply an alternative strategy to solve these problems so that students become easier to comprehend text especially descriptive text which based on the material being taught at the recent semester. The strategy is semantic mapping. Supramaniam and Zainal (2017) describe semantic mapping as “a graphic arrangement showing the major ideas and relationship between items, and they are an extremely

practical framework for storage of terms. Semantic mapping is a useful technique to facilitate the students in comprehending texts properly.

The semantic mapping is expected to increase the students' vocabulary mastery through some colored graphic (Emor et al., 2012). The researcher asked the students to read first the descriptive text first, then mapping their comprehension into a form of graphic that colored by the students. The students wrote the main word about the text, then make some circles and lines them with the main word. Then the students write some words that related to the main word and colored them by their specification based on the students' comprehension. Therefore, based on the explanation above, the researcher conducted research entitled "*Using Semantic Mapping Strategy to Enhance EFL Student Vocabulary Mastery at the seventh grade of SMP Negeri 1 Tapa."*

2. METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study employs a quantitative research method with a quasi-experimental approach to examine the impact of Semantic Mapping on students' vocabulary mastery. The population of the study comprises all seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa, with purposive sampling used to select class 7-3 due to their low level of vocabulary proficiency. The research design follows a pre-experimental format, involving a pre-test, a treatment phase consisting of eight sessions using the Semantic Mapping strategy, and a post-test to assess changes in vocabulary mastery.

2.1 Data Collection

The data collection process involved administering a vocabulary test in the form of multiple-choice questions, given both before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the treatment. A tryout was conducted to validate the test items, resulting in the selection of 20 valid questions. The validity of the test items was assessed using the Product-Moment formula, which confirmed that all selected items met the criteria for content validity. To determine the consistency of the test, reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient value of 0.872. This indicates that the instrument has a high level of internal consistency and is therefore reliable for measuring vocabulary mastery.

2.2 Data Analysis

The collected data were first subjected to a normality test using the Lilliefors method to examine whether the distribution of students' scores followed a normal pattern. This step was essential to ensure the appropriateness of subsequent statistical procedures. Following the normality assessment, the pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed statistically using paired sample t-tests to determine the significance of the difference in students' vocabulary mastery before and after the treatment. The statistical analysis aimed to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the Semantic Mapping strategy as an instructional tool in improving vocabulary acquisition among EFL students.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Normality Test

Before doing the t-test as the hypothesis verification, the researcher decided to conduct a normality test. This was an important step to check if the distribution of the scores followed a normal pattern, which is necessary for applying specific statistical analyses.

Table 1. Tests of Normality

Tests of Normality						
Kolmogorov-Smirnova				Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
V1	.128	22	.200*	.913	22	.056
V2	.177	22	.073	.925	22	.095
* This is a lower bound of the true significance.						
a Lilliefors Significance Correction						

The normality tests conducted on the pre-test and post-test scores for the seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa indicate that the data are normally distributed. The results from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed a statistic of 0.128 for the pre-test (V1) with a significance level of 0.200, and a statistic of 0.177 for the post-test (V2) with a significance level of 0.073. Both significance values "higher" than the common alpha level of 0.05, suggesting that data are normal and there is no significant deviation from normality in either dataset. Similarly, the Shapiro-Wilk test yielded a statistic of 0.913 for the pre-test with a significance of 0.056, and a statistic of 0.925 for the post-test with a significance of 0.095. Again, both results were above the 0.05 threshold, reinforcing the conclusion that the scores are normally distributed. This finding

is crucial as it supports the use of parametric statistical tests for further analysis. Hence, the researcher did t-test because the data are normal in order to calculate either the improving was significance or not statistically.

3.2 Hypothesis Testing Using Paired Samples t-Test

Table 2. Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples Test									
Paired Differences							t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	V1 - V2	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
		-2.431.818	1.965.751	419.100	-3.303.383	-1.560.253	-5.802	21	.000

The results of the paired samples t-test provide a clear indication of the impact of the semantic mapping strategy on students' vocabulary mastery among the seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa. This large value suggests that the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is not due to random chance.

To verify the hypothesis regarding the effectiveness of the Semantic Mapping strategy on students' vocabulary mastery, the following steps were be taken based on the provided significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) and the criteria established for hypothesis testing. if the significant value greater than 0.05 it means the H0 was accepted, if the significant value is lower that 0.05 it means the H1 was accepted.

In this study, the significant value was 0.000. it means that the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected based on the statistical analysis, indicating that there was sufficient evidence to conclude that the implementation of the Semantic Mapping strategy significantly improved the vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa.

Overall, the results from the post-test indicate significant progress in students' vocabulary mastery, particularly in nouns, verbs, and adjectives. While they have demonstrated considerable improvement, especially in their use of descriptive language, the lower performance in adverbs highlights an opportunity for further development. By addressing these challenges, educators can continue to support students in enhancing their vocabulary skills and overall language proficiency.

3.3 Descriptive Statistics and Score Improvement

To effectively assess the impact of the semantic mapping strategy on vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa, it was also essential to compare the scores from the pre-test and post-test. The pre-test served as a baseline measurement of the students' vocabulary knowledge prior to the implementation of the strategy, revealing an average score of 46.36 and a total score of 1,020. In contrast, the post-test results demonstrated a marked improvement, with an average score of 70.68 and a total score of 1,555.

The comparison of students' pre-test and post-test could be seen on the following figure:

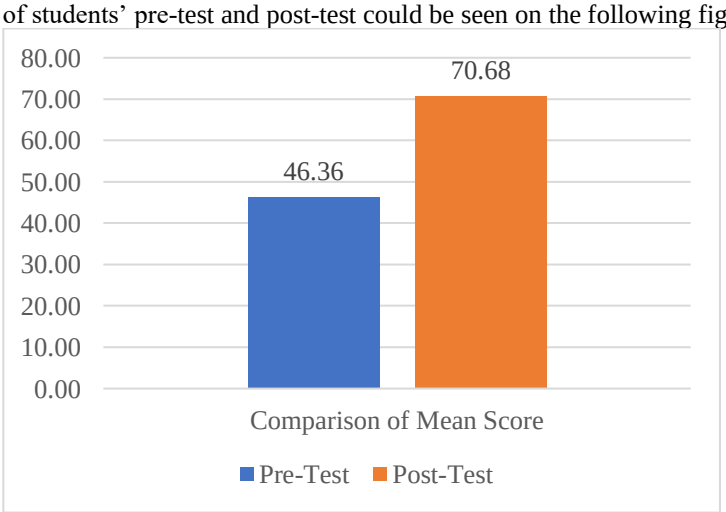

Figure 1. Comparison of Students' Mean Score in Pre-Test and Post-Test

This comparison allows the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of the semantic mapping strategy in enhancing the students' vocabulary proficiency and provide insights into the overall learning outcomes achieved during the instructional period. The comparison of the pre-test and post-test scores reveals a significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery following the implementation of the semantic mapping strategy. The average score in the pre-test was 46.36, while the post-test average rose to 70.68. This represents an increase of 24.32 points, demonstrating a notable enhancement in their vocabulary skills. When calculated as a percentage, this increase amounts to approximately 52.48%. Such substantial progress indicates that the semantic mapping strategy effectively fostered vocabulary acquisition among the students, significantly improving their understanding and use of English vocabulary. Overall, these results highlight the positive impact of targeted instructional methods on language proficiency in an EFL context.

This notable progress demonstrates the effectiveness of using visual tools and concept maps to help students better organize and connect their vocabulary knowledge, leading to improved comprehension and usage of words in various contexts. By comparing the pre-test and post-test results, the researcher can confidently conclude that the semantic mapping strategy contributed positively to the students' vocabulary mastery.

These data of students' comparison in pre-test and post-test were also distributed in each word class, hence it could be seen on the following figure:

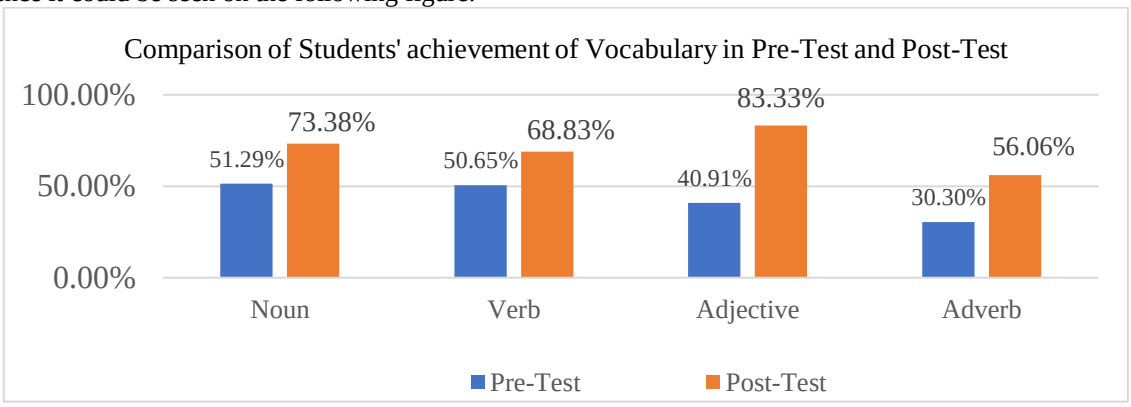

Figure 2. Comparison of Students' achievement of Vocabulary in Pre-Test and Post-Test

The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores across the four words classes which were nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, revealed significant improvements in students' vocabulary mastery after the implementation of the semantic mapping strategy. The most notable progress was observed in the adjectives category, where the score increased dramatically from 40.91% in the pre-test to 83.33% in the post-test. This remarkable improvement demonstrates that students significantly enhanced their ability to use descriptive language effectively, likely benefiting from the focused instructional approach.

Similarly, the nouns category showed substantial growth, with scores rising from 51.29% in the pre-test to 73.38% in the post-test. This increase reflects the students' improved ability to identify and use nouns, a foundational aspect of vocabulary. The verbs category also demonstrated notable progress, with scores improving from 50.65% in the pre-test to 68.83% in the post-test. This advancement indicates that students developed a stronger grasp of action words, which are critical for sentence construction.

Although the adverbs category showed the lowest improvement among the word classes, there was still a considerable increase, with scores rising from 30.30% in the pre-test to 56.06% in the post-test. This improvement highlights that students began to develop a better understanding of adverbs, although this area remains the weakest overall. The relatively lower performance in adverbs suggests that more targeted instruction and practice are needed to ensure students can effectively use these words to add nuance and detail to their language.

In conclusion, the results reveal that the semantic mapping strategy significantly enhanced students' vocabulary proficiency across all word classes, with the most dramatic improvements in adjectives and nouns. However, the adverbs category still requires additional attention to achieve balanced progress and mastery in vocabulary. These findings underscore the effectiveness of semantic mapping as an instructional strategy while highlighting the importance of addressing specific areas where students continue to face challenges.

The primary objective of this research was to investigate how the semantic mapping strategy could enhance vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa. Semantic mapping is a visual strategy for vocabulary expansion and extension of knowledge by displaying in categories related to another words (Palma, 2023). By focusing on the effectiveness of this instructional approach, the study aimed to provide insights into improving vocabulary acquisition, thereby aiding students in their overall English language proficiency. The pre-test acted as a starting point for understanding the students' vocabulary skills,

with a total score of 1,020 and an average score of 46.36. This average is below the passing mark, indicating that many students had difficulties with vocabulary.

The pre-test findings highlight a clear need for improvement in vocabulary skills among seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa. Since most students started with low vocabulary knowledge, introducing the semantic mapping strategy could be a great way to enhance their learning. This teaching method can help students visually organize and connect words, making it easier for them to understand meanings and how to use words in sentences. This was supported by previous research who stated semantic mapping strategy uses as like a visual representation which has pattern and role to make the teaching learning process more conceptual and pleasurable (Zahro & Rachmawati, 2021).

The repeated use of semantic maps as a tool for vocabulary organization aids students in visualizing relationships among words. By categorizing vocabulary into groups based on similarities and contexts, students likely enhance their ability to recall and apply these words in future contexts. Each treatment session focuses on refining this skill, and the collaborative aspect allows students to learn from each other, further solidifying their understanding. According to Antonacci and O'Callaghan (2011) semantic mapping strategy most effective when (a) they are used with teacher guided discussion before, during, and after reading a text; (b) teachers select a few critical key words to be taught; and (c) students are actively engaged in constructing their word maps through participating in lively discussions on the conceptual nature of words.

Over the treatment promotes critical thinking as students reflect on their learning during group discussions. By synthesizing their individual semantic maps into a master map, students practice articulating their thoughts and refining their understanding collectively. This collaborative process also fosters discussion skills, as students learn to communicate their ideas effectively and consider diverse perspectives. Overall, the structured treatment using Semantic Mapping appears to positively influence students' vocabulary mastery.

The findings from the post-test indicate a remarkable improvement in students' vocabulary skills following the implementation of the semantic mapping strategy. Students' scores increased from an average of 46.36 in the pre-test to 70.68 in the post-test, with a notable improvement of 24.32 points. This progression highlights the significant impact of semantic mapping as a teaching tool that not only aids in vocabulary acquisition but also enhances students' ability to organize and retain new words effectively. By encouraging students to visualize relationships between words and concepts, this method fosters deeper cognitive engagement and supports long-term retention of vocabulary.

The strategy was particularly effective in addressing the challenges faced by seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa, providing them with a structured yet flexible approach to expand their vocabulary. Moreover, the observed improvement reflects the alignment of semantic mapping with student-centered learning principles, where learners actively participate in their learning process by connecting new vocabulary to their existing knowledge. Overall, the results underscore the value of integrating semantic mapping into instructional practices to support vocabulary development and language mastery.

After applying the semantic mapping strategy, students demonstrated significant progress in their vocabulary skills. The results suggest a marked increase in their ability to understand and use various words. This improvement highlights how the strategy effectively facilitated vocabulary development, allowing students to engage more meaningfully with the language. Sadeghi and Taghavi (2014) acknowledges that semantic mapping has emerged as a teaching strategy to increase vocabulary mastery. The major advantage of this technique is that it integrates new information with previous knowledge. Other advantages of semantic mapping are: motivating students of all grades, integrating thinking with reading, integrating assessment with teaching, and making judgments concerning the appropriate instruction needed.

When examining performance across different categories of vocabulary, students exhibited particular strengths and areas for growth. Their proficiency in using descriptive language significantly improved, which enhances their ability to communicate effectively and vividly. Similarly, students demonstrated a solid grasp of essential word classes, such as nouns and verbs, further indicating their progress in vocabulary acquisition.

Nouns were also taught before verbs because they are the words students most frequently use in their daily lives. Nouns like "book," "table," "mother," or "school" are already familiar to students as they often encounter them in their conversations. Mastering nouns provides an essential foundation for understanding the concepts in a sentence. Although verbs are critical elements in forming a complete sentence, their usage often requires a broader understanding of context. While a sentence cannot be complete without a verb, nouns form the basis for recognizing the objects or subjects before moving on to understanding actions (verbs).

However, the limitation of this research also found bt the researcher where there remains a challenge in their understanding and use of adverbs, an essential category for adding nuance to language. This lower performance in adverb mastery suggests that targeted instruction may be needed to help students fully grasp this aspect of vocabulary. Addressing this gap would be crucial for their continued development and overall language proficiency.

Semantic mapping has proven to be an effective strategy for enhancing vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa. One of its primary advantages is that it helps students retain and recall vocabulary more effectively by visually organizing words into meaningful categories. In this research, students who initially struggled with vocabulary, as shown by the pre-test average score of 46.36, benefited from the structured approach of semantic mapping. This aligns with Antonacci & O'Callaghan's (2011) assertion that semantic mapping is most effective when integrated with guided discussions before, during, and after reading. The visual representation of words allowed students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa to establish clearer connections between words, enhancing their comprehension and recall (Sadeghi & Taghavi, 2014). Furthermore, the interactive nature of semantic mapping made vocabulary learning more engaging, enabling students to actively participate in their learning process rather than relying on rote memorization.

In addition to improving vocabulary retention, semantic mapping fostered a more student-centered learning environment in the classroom. Unlike traditional methods, which often require students to memorize word lists, this strategy encouraged them to construct knowledge by categorizing words based on similarities and contexts. During the treatment sessions, students collaborated in groups to create word maps, reinforcing their understanding through peer discussions. El-Koumy (1999) highlights that semantic mapping integrates thinking, reading, and assessment, motivating students at all grade levels. This was evident at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa, where students actively engaged in discussions, refining their ideas and strengthening their vocabulary comprehension. Moreover, the process of synthesizing individual maps into a collective master map further enhanced students' communication skills, as they learned to articulate their thoughts effectively.

Despite its numerous advantages, the implementation of semantic mapping in this research also revealed certain challenges. One notable limitation was students' difficulty in mastering abstract vocabulary, particularly adverbs. While concrete words like nouns and verbs were easier for students to categorize, adverbs required deeper contextual understanding, which semantic mapping alone could not fully address (Sadeghi & Taghavi, 2014). This challenge was evident in the post-test analysis, where students showed significant improvement in their use of nouns and verbs but continued to struggle with adverbs. Additionally, conducting semantic mapping in a large classroom setting required considerable time and teacher guidance. At SMP Negeri 1 Tapa, managing group discussions and providing feedback to all students proved to be time-consuming, aligning with Antonacci and O'Callaghan's (2011) observation that the success of semantic mapping depends heavily on structured teacher involvement.

Another challenge encountered was that some students struggled with the conceptual aspect of semantic mapping. While many students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa benefited from visually organizing words, a few found it difficult to establish meaningful connections between vocabulary items without additional guidance. According to El-Koumy (1999), semantic mapping is not equally effective for all learners, as some students require more structured support to recognize word relationships. Without proper teacher intervention, students might misinterpret word connections or focus solely on memorizing the word maps rather than applying vocabulary in context (Zahro & Rachmawati, 2021). These findings suggest that while semantic mapping is a powerful tool, it should be supplemented with additional instructional strategies to maximize its effectiveness.

Despite the positive findings, this research has several limitations that should be addressed in future studies. Firstly, the study's population was limited to a single group of seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa, which restricts the generalizability of the results to other contexts or student populations. Secondly, the methodology was confined to a quantitative approach, focusing solely on test results as the primary instrument for data collection. Future studies are encouraged to adopt a mixed-method approach by incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews to gain deeper insights into students' experiences and learning processes. Additionally, this research focused exclusively on vocabulary mastery, specifically on nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. Subsequent studies could expand their scope to include other language skills, such as writing and speaking, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the semantic mapping strategy.

4. CONCLUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

The research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the semantic mapping strategy in enhancing vocabulary mastery among seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa. The findings from the pre-test and post-test comparisons demonstrate a significant improvement in students' vocabulary skills, indicating that this instructional approach effectively fosters vocabulary acquisition.

There was an increasing of students' vocabulary improved from the pre-test was 46.36 to the post-test was 70.68. Moreover, since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis (H0) and accepted the alternative hypothesis (H1). This means there was sufficient evidence to conclude that

the Semantic Mapping strategy significantly improved the vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Tapa.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

1. Teachers are encouraged to integrate the Semantic Mapping strategy regularly as it helps students visually organize vocabulary, aiding retention and comprehension. This approach can be particularly beneficial when teaching new vocabulary related to specific themes or topics.
2. Students should actively participate in creating and discussing semantic maps to deepen their understanding of vocabulary. By visually organizing words and exploring their relationships, students can enhance their recall and usage of new terms.

It would be beneficial to replicate this study with different age groups or in different educational settings to assess the generalizability of the findings. Comparing the effectiveness of semantic mapping across various levels of language proficiency could provide valuable insights. Considering the increased use of technology in education, future researchers might explore the use of digital tools or apps for semantic mapping.

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